

***Strangers Next Door? Indonesia and Australia in the Asian Century.***  
Edited by Tim Lindsey and Dave McRae. Oxford and Portland,  
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In recent years, the first overseas visit undertaken by a new Australian prime minister has been to Indonesia. Thus it was unsurprising that Scott Morrison flew to Indonesia about a week after he was sworn in as Australia's thirtieth prime minister on 24 August 2018. During the visit, the two countries upgraded their relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP), elevating Australia to the same level as the United States and China in Jakarta's foreign policy priorities. Both leaders also announced the conclusion of negotiations on a long-awaited bilateral free trade deal, the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The CSP and CEPA follow an upswing in bilateral ties over the past year. However, seasoned observers of Indonesia–Australia relations know that warming bilateral ties should not be taken for granted. After all, it was not that long ago that both Jakarta and Canberra recalled their ambassadors: the former in 2013 over allegations that Australia was spying on President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's inner circle; and the latter in 2015 over the execution of two Australians convicted of drug smuggling. Indeed, crises and ruptures have become as much a part of Australia–Indonesia relations as declarations and agreements of partnership. What explains this roller-coaster pattern?

*Strangers Next Door? Indonesia and Australia in the Asian Century* follows an established tradition in the literature on Indonesia–Australia relations in that it seeks to answer this question by unpacking the different elements of the relationship. Like most studies in this tradition, the book starts out with the premise that Indonesia and Australia are proximate neighbours but otherwise worlds apart: politically, culturally, economically and socially. These differences, however, are not insurmountable, though they occasionally turn into flashpoints. While efforts have been made to bridge the gaps, more needs to be done — from government policies to people-to-people ties — if both countries are to enhance security and prosperity in the “Asian century”. These arguments are not novel, of course; analysts and policymakers have made them for decades. But *Strangers Next Door?* takes them to new heights.

Tim Lindsey and Dave McRae have compiled an impressive collection of insiders, scholars, journalists and practitioners covering a wide-range of issues in Indonesia–Australia relations, including economics, security, politics, language, media and the arts. With 29 authors writing 25 chapters, the book provides an unmatched breadth and depth in a single volume covering the key challenges facing Indonesia–Australia relations.

The chapters move back and forth between historical and contemporary contexts as they weave together insights from individual stories and policy debates in Jakarta and Canberra. They provide new insights, and call into question assumptions and narratives that many analysts of Indonesia–Australia relations have either ignored or taken for granted. For instance, in chapter five, Dave McRae and Diane Zhang examine public attitudes between Indonesia and Australia by taking a deep dive into the various polling data compiled over the years. They demonstrate, among other things, that Australian public views of Indonesia have been volatile — when compared over time and with other countries — and that there is little basis to infer that more knowledge of Indonesia necessarily leads to more positive attitudes. Such efforts to question pre-existing perceptions and conceptions over a wide range of issues sets *Strangers Next Door?* apart from previous books which have examined Indonesia–Australia ties.

The book also balances the challenges confronting the relationship between the two governments as much as between their societies. For example, in chapter nine, Greg Fealy shows how the spectre of terrorism distorted Australian views of its Islamic educational aid strategy to Indonesia, and is a reminder that bilateral policies should account for the broader dynamics beyond the state. In chapter nineteen, Virginia Hooker's examination of the role of women in the bilateral relationship and in chapter twenty-five Rachelle Cole and Arjuna Dibley's assessment of youth programmes are also particularly illuminating in this respect. An institutionalized relationship between key government agencies could also go a long way in boosting bilateral ties, as Michael McKenzie shows in chapter twelve on cooperation between the two countries' police forces. However, as discussed by other authors in this book, challenging issues like Papua, human rights and under-developed business ties provide sober reminders of the importance of managing expectations as well as the structural difficulties of transforming the relationship.

Despite the breadth and depth of the book, the absence of an analytical or theoretical framework that might have brought together the different insights provided by the chapters is unfortunate. Like any edited volume, coherence is often a challenge, especially given the multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the authors. The individual chapters are well-written and are based on in-depth insights and research that they could be stand-alone references for the specific issues in question. But when chapters stand alone too well, readers sometimes cannot see the forest for the trees. An overarching framework is necessary to help readers make sense of how one chapter connects to the other. Moreover, a systematic integration of the different insights, policies or actions the different authors have suggested to move the bilateral relationship forward would have been useful for policymakers and practitioners. Unpacking the nuances and layers of a particular issue does not automatically lead to enlightened policies or practical suggestions. Such an academic-policy gap in the study of Indonesian–Australian relations is perhaps the next big issue which needs to be addressed.

Finally, for a large edited volume that could afford to examine similar issues from different angles, it is rather glaring that less than a quarter of the book's 29 authors were Indonesians from Indonesian institutions. While the challenges of finding the best author for a chapter in an edited volume is often considerable, surely having more Indonesian voices articulating Indonesian views of the relationship would have been worth the extra effort. After all, as the book notes, there are thousands of Australian-trained Indonesian practitioners, policymakers and scholars. We need more studies on Australia–Indonesia relations written by Indonesians rather than the other way around — an existing imbalance many have lamented. Limitations aside, however, *Strangers Next Door?* is an indispensable contribution to the study of Indonesia–Australia relations and Asian studies in general.

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EVAN LAKSMANA is a Senior Researcher at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Jakarta, Indonesia and a political science PhD candidate at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. Postal address: Pakarti Centre Building, Jl. Tanah Abang 3 No. 23-7, Jakarta, Indonesia, 10160; email: evan.laksmiana@csis.or.id.