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# **Jokowi's Indonesia**

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*Joko Widodo's 2014 election as Indonesia's President left him as a weak president indebted to Megawati Sukarnoputri. He has been unable to resolve the Papua issue or meet the electorate's high expectations of 'clean government', economic improvement, or TNI reform. Islamic extremism remains and now has links to Islamic State. Indonesia remains a leader in ASEAN, but reactivation of the death penalty, popular at home, has alienated other foreign governments, including Australia, with whom relations are cool.*

**Key words:** Indonesia; Australia; Joko Widodo; death penalty; economy; external relations; Papua; political popularity; TNI reform.

## **The Political Context in Indonesia**

Indonesia is a vast, sprawling, introspective and sometimes challenging country that, after decades of authoritarian rule, appears to be increasingly established as one of the world's democracies. Yet, as with some of its neighbours, it might be an error to assume that the significant political transition it has made is permanent or that Indonesia can only continue to head in the direction of liberalism. Even from its own recent democratic past, any assumption about the inevitability of democratic progress would be quickly qualified.

Perhaps the principle defining feature of Indonesia is that, as a classic post-colonial state made up of formerly disparate polities and comprising some 17,000 inhabited islands, it has less territorial contiguity than any other state in the world. This physical fragmentation has meant that some of the country's distinct cultural groups have, from time to time, sought to separate themselves from the central government.

In turn, this lack of commitment to the idea of the state in some areas has produced an underlying sense of insecurity about the idea and viability of the state, or of a common bonded political identity (nationhood). States that come together with a sense of confidence in their viability and correspondence with their peoples generally do so voluntarily. Where there is reluctance, either about inclusion in the state or the orientation of the state, the state tends to rely more on compulsion. Compulsion implies force and, sometimes, resistance to such force. This quality of compulsion and resistance has helped inform how political relations within Indonesia are understood. Despite a move towards decentralization in 2001, a legacy of this form of understanding has continued to be reflected well into the post-New Order democratic era.

As with most societies, and in particular those that have undergone or are still undergoing a political transition, Indonesia reflects a range of competing ideological and vested interests, broadly manifested as more reformist and less reformist groups. Translated as electoral outcomes, this has produced a type of reform and reaction two-step. First, Presidents Habibie and Abdurrahman Wahid pursued a reform agenda. Then President Megawati Sukarnoputri, who replaced Wahid, ran a more conservative and militarily reactionary agenda. Megawati, in turn, was replaced by the reformist Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono for two terms, although his second term was limited by both legislative reaction against continuing reform and his own natural caution about pushing too hard in the face of such resistance. In 2014, Yudhoyono was replaced by the reformist Joko Widodo ('Jokowi'), who promised much but got off to a mixed start.

## **Jokowi's Election as President**

Jokowi campaigned in the 2014 presidential elections on a platform of 'new hope'. It drew comparisons with United States President Barack Obama's 'Change we can believe in' for being positive, but lacking in substance. At the outset of the election campaign, Jokowi enjoyed a massive, 40 per cent lead in public opinion polls over his rival, Prabowo Subianto, reflecting what could be seen to be unrealistically high expectations around his call for a 'mental revolution', and promises to introduce clean government and to address the continuing issue of West Papua. Jokowi's nominal party, the Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (Paratai Demokrat Indonesia – Perjuangan, or PDI-P), reluctantly endorsed his candidature. It saw him as the person most likely to win the presidency, but it was unenthusiastic about actively supporting him. Instead, Jokowi relied on a loose collection of pro-reform, non-government organisations and activists who were relatively disorganised during the campaign and who dissolved as a body soon after it.

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Prabowo and his team, on the other hand, ran a tight, professional campaign and clawed back Jokowi's lead, while Jokowi and his band of often non-party supporters appeared to drift towards the elections, here and there making small mistakes. In the end, Jokowi won well, with just over a 6 per cent margin, if a long way from his early massive lead. But his popularity surged again, ahead of his 'new hope' dealing with the harsh reality of Indonesian politics.

While many hailed the success of Indonesia's 2014 elections as a mark of the country's democratic consolidation, with the transition from Yudhoyono to Jokowi being as seamless as could be hoped for, 47 per cent of the Indonesian population still voted for Prabowo, who ran a reactionary, arguably neo-fascist, agenda. Prabowo's campaign imagery, for example, was highlighted by him, backed by two horse-mounted guards, parading on a horse in a white, quasi-military uniform reminiscent of Italian dictator Benito Mussolini.

The first problem that Jokowi encountered, before even taking office, was the Prabowo-led *Koalisi Merah-Putih* (Red and White Coalition) majority of 353 of 560 seats in the legislature, which immediately voted to introduce indirect elections for mayors, regents and governors. This was widely seen as a move away from direct democracy, potentially delivering more executive power to the Red and White Coalition. Had the logic of this process been extended, it could have meant the legislature, rather than the people, electing the president.

The second problem Jokowi encountered on assuming the presidency was in his appointment of his new Cabinet of 34 ministers. The Cabinet appointments needed to satisfy the often competing requirements of placating his own party; finding ministries to shore up support from other parties for his minority legislative coalition; provide some degree of technocratic competence; and, not least, ministers willing to represent his reform platform. With so many competing and somewhat mutually exclusive requirements, it was not surprising that the announcement of Jokowi's Cabinet was greeted with disappointment and, in some cases, dismay.

In particular, critics noted that close Megawati aide, Rini Soemarno (head of Jokowi's transition team), had been appointed Minister of State Enterprises, a potential source of corrupt funds. This was disturbing, given that Soemarno had been questioned by the *Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi* (Corruption Eradication Commission, or KPK) over involvement in the dispersal of almost US\$13 billion to support failed banks in the Bank Indonesia Liquidity Assistance scandal.

Further, the new Home Affairs minister, PDI-P secretary-general and all-round fixer, Tjahjo Kumolo, also was one who had been questioned by the KPK; and Megawati's unpopular daughter, Puan Maharani, was appointed to a senior role as Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture (overseeing eight ministries).

Perhaps most disturbingly, after an era of civilian defence ministers, Jokowi appointed former hard-line general, Ryamizard Ryacudu, as Defence Minister, effectively overturning civilian oversight of the Indonesian military (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, or TNI). The rest of the Cabinet comprised the usual mix of technocrats, party functionaries and a couple of reformers.

## **Jokowi's Early Performance as President**

### ***Jokowi's Political Entrapment***

With such a Cabinet, with Megawati attempting to control him via the PDI-P, and wary of an uneasy, potentially hostile, legislature, Jokowi quickly found his choices for reform limited. He was able to push through a cut to subsidies for fuel, which was widely viewed as an overdue economic necessity, and support for health care and education for the poorest Indonesians. More importantly, however, on his signature anti-corruption policy, there was little meaningful movement, with Jokowi appearing largely trapped in the complex web of Indonesia's political context.

Jokowi's political entrapment was best illustrated by his nomination of corruption suspect, Megawati-backed, Budi Gunawan, as police chief. Following his nomination and amid a storm of criticism, Jokowi stuck with Gunawan for several weeks, eventually relenting and dropping him. This created a sense that his anti-corruption stance had been compromised, but it still angered Gunawan's backers in the PDI-P. In-fighting between the national police (Polri) and the KPK continued apace, with the KPK investigations of corrupt police being answered by police charges against KPK officials.

### ***Death Penalty***

More positively within Indonesia, but rankling many other countries, has been Jokowi's end of the unofficial moratorium on the death penalty. Restarting executions for drug offences was in line with Jokowi's hard anti-drugs stance during his election campaign and it did prove that he had distanced himself from the judicial process. This was consistent with the principle of non-interference in judicial affairs and hence good governance. But the increasing tempo of executions earned Jokowi considerable international condemnation, marked by the withdrawal of ambassadors from the Netherlands, Brazil and Australia.

A major factor in Jokowi's decisions on allowing the death penalty to stand was that not only did a majority of Indonesians support the death penalty but that, had he backed down in the face of international pressure, he would have been seen to be a weak president. He would have been vulnerable to criticism from his opponents, potentially including being impeached by the legislature.

One element of the international criticism of Jokowi's handling of the death sentences was that he did not read in detail the appeals for clemency that were sent to him. While this is a prerogative of the president, it did show a lack of attention to detail that contradicted the

previous close attention that had marked his tenure as governor of Jakarta and of Surakarta. This, in turn, was compounded when he signed off on a regulation that entitled state officials, many of whom were already provided with work cars, to a 211 million rupiah (\$21,000) down payment on a car. In response to criticism over this move, he said: "I don't read what I sign", which earned him both domestic and international ridicule.

### **Papua**

More positively, though, following his election campaign promise to end the troubles in Papua province and having spent Christmas in the largely Christian region, in May 2015 he granted a pardon for Papuan political prisoners (among a small group of others) and promised foreign journalists free access to the restricted province. However, indicating the restrictions within which he works, he was immediately contradicted by the Co-ordinating Minister for Political, Legal and Security Affairs, Tedjo Edhy Purdijatno, who said that journalists would still require permits to enter the troubled territory and that they would be 'screened' for suitability. Purdijatno added that there remained 'forbidden areas' in West Papua; and that journalists should not report 'untrue data' provided by separatists and should not 'defame' Indonesia. Hence, Jokowi's intentions to resolve Papua's continuing problems appeared to be limited by ideological and economic interests intent on not allowing any change to Papua's *status quo*.

### **Declining Economic Activity**

Jokowi came into government pledging to fast-track transport projects, lift tax revenue and cut red tape to attract investment. Instead, he faced the more sobering reality of an economy grappling with years of under-investment in infrastructure and a public sector slow to implement change, much less efficiency. Indonesia's economy had been growing under President Yudhoyono, at just under 6.5 per cent a year but, despite a target of 5.7 per cent for 2015, the economy slumped by a further 0.5 per cent on the back of declining trade with China, declining commodity prices, and the ending of United States monetary stimulus. Beyond the business and investment cycle, inflation also increased, mostly among basic foodstuffs, which hit ordinary Indonesian hard.

### **TNI Reform**

One area of reform that Jokowi has steered well away from is that of the TNI. This is not to say that the TNI has not reformed; the TNI underwent a series of important reforms early in the post-New Order period, with the 2004 law on military business being a reform benchmark. But, beyond appointing a former hard-line general as Defence Minister, and two other former generals to senior posts, Jokowi has also presided over the TNI reinstating a deputy-commander position, which had been abolished as part of the reform process.

Moreover, Jokowi has allowed the TNI to engage directly with ministries and state-owned enterprises over regional security, as well as continuing to allow limited military budget oversight. This has implications, not just for accountability and corruption, but also for civilian oversight of military functions, necessary to any functioning democracy.

It appeared that, in an environment in which he had many enemies and few real political friends, Jokowi was hesitant to tackle the still influential TNI over further reform issues. As a result, the TNI remained under the authority of the president, rather than the defence ministry, and the TNI's 'territorial' command structure, in which the TNI locates itself throughout the archipelago, remained in place, despite an earlier plan to end this arrangement. Having the territorial structure still in place meant that the TNI continued to be able to wield considerable political and business influence outside Jakarta.

That influence was felt during Jokowi's election. Outgoing President Yudhoyono expressed concern that officers (usually village supervisory non-commissioned officers (Bintara Pembina Desa, or babinsa) were involved in the 2014 election process supporting Prabowo. Jokowi's campaign team also asked that babinsa and their police equivalent, village-assigned police officers (Badan Pembinaan Keamanan Dan Ketertiban Masyarakat, or Babinkamtibmas), be frozen after they alleged they had been going door-to-door telling villagers to vote for Prabowo.

The TNI also remained involved in 'off-line' sources of funding, including legal, 'grey' and illegal businesses, through more than 1000 'co-operatives' and 23 'foundations'. This off-line source of income meant there was a lack of transparency in TNI finances, that the TNI was prone to being involved in corrupt or illegal activities, and that it was less accountable to civilian oversight. In October 2009, an inter-ministerial group was appointed to oversee the takeover of TNI enterprises by other government departments, but it had little impact on the military's shedding of its still lucrative business activities. In 2009, the TNI's legal businesses were estimated to be worth around US\$365 million, and previous estimates suggested that its illegal business activities – including running drugs and guns, smuggling, extortion, prostitution and gambling – were worth double that, or more. More positively, in 2014 the legislature put forward a bill for the external oversight of the notoriously lax military judicial processes, although this was yet to be implemented at the time of writing. Jokowi, however, did not appear eager to pursue this legislation, or other aspects of required TNI reform. In practice, it would have been difficult for him to do so, but it did run counter to his pre-election promises to reform the TNI, and it continued to show him up as he was increasingly perceived – as a weak president.

### **Electoral Impact**

All of this meant that, while there were very high and

perhaps unrealistic expectations of Jokowi when he came to office, the reality was very much less than that hoped for. A major survey across five broad sectors – the economy, justice and corruption eradication, security, education, and health – showed that only the last two received a public satisfaction rating above 50 per cent, with health scoring 52.7 per cent and education 51.4 per cent. Unsurprisingly, Jokowi's popularity as president slumped, from 74.6 per cent in October 2014 to 60 per cent in April 2015, but as low as 44 per cent in some polls.

### **Indonesian Terrorists**

Indonesia continues to be beset by its seemingly perennial problem with Islamist extremism and related terrorism, the history of which dates back to World War II, the Hizbullah and Sabilillah of the revolution, and the Darul Islam Rebellion of the 1950s. The perennial nature of Islamist violence needs to be seen in that context. It is not a new phenomenon and not necessarily the product of a more global tendency towards jihadism as manifested by Al Qaeda, Islamic State and so on. However, such violence does undermine the security of the state. In the 1950s, it briefly challenged state control and remains of concern to the international community. This latter aspect has been highlighted by anti-Western terrorism, including the bombing of the Jakarta stock exchange, the Bali bombings, and the bombing of the Marriott Hotel and the Australian embassy, each of which have been linked to the radical Islamist group, Jema'ah Islamiyah.

Like many other states, Indonesia also faces the challenge of its nationals leaving home to fight for other Islamist causes. The involvement of Indonesian jihadis in the Afghanistan wars led to an upsurge of skills and commitment among returning jihadis. Similar consequences are expected should some of the more than 600 Indonesian jihadis currently serving with Islamic State, Al Nusra Front and other organisations in the Middle-East – in particular in Syria and Iraq – become returnees.

Meanwhile, there has developed in Indonesia a new cohort of Islamist extremists, including Jamaah Ansharut Tauhid (a Jema'ah Islamiyah break-away group) and the further splinter group Jamaah Ansharusy Syariah (over allegiance to Islamic State), as well as the Mujahidin Indonesian Timur (Poso). These groups have reflected a long tradition within Indonesian Islamist extremism towards coalescing as organisations based on discreet cells, building up, splintering, coalescing again, and then splintering again. For its part, the Indonesian state continues to maintain an active counter-terrorism stance, with its police-based Densus 88 being the principle counter-terrorism organisation, supported by the TNI's Kopassus Grup 5/Gultor Sat 81.

### **Indonesia's External Relations**

As the largest country and largest economy in Southeast Asia, it is unsurprising that Indonesia has had

an influential role in regional affairs, in particular through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and as a lynch-pin for ASEAN's wider strategic manifestation, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Notably, Indonesia has encouraged the greater economic integration of the ASEAN states, which, while appearing to be uneven in its implementation, does seem to be gathering momentum as an idea.

All countries have some relations which, for various reasons, may remain testy, and Indonesia's relationship with its southern neighbour, Australia, fell into that category. At the time of writing, relations with Australia could be described as lukewarm to cool, as they had been since before the departure of President Joko Widodo's predecessor, President Yudhoyono. While Yudhoyono had gone out of his way to have a constructive relationship with Australia, Australia's unilateral policy on asylum seekers which usually transit through Indonesia, its failure to engage in a regional response to the issue, and revelations about Australian spying on Yudhoyono and his close circle, all tested the relationship. A dispute over the use of the death penalty, and the execution of two Australian drug smugglers in 2015, further illustrated the distance between the two countries. That these issues came on the back of a history of often troubled relations only confirmed that, despite the best efforts of many on both sides, the bilateral relationship was one that would continue to require great effort and a delicate touch, from both sides, for the indefinite future.

### **Conclusion**

Australia and Indonesia seem incapable of managing their relationship without regular set-backs. From Indonesia's perspective, the question has always been whether sustaining the relationship with Australia is worth the grief it causes. For Australia, in contrast, Indonesia is increasingly important as a trading partner, and more so as a diplomatic, and potentially strategic, ally.

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