

BOOK REVIEW

The Jokowi Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Authoritarian Revival

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Joko Widodo was Indonesia's president from 2014 to 2024, a tumultuous decade that included the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, ongoing conflict and instability in the Middle East, and rapid changes in technology and the global media environment. It was also a decade of political ferment in electoral democracies around the world, including in Indonesia. *The Jokowi Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Authoritarian Revival* is a collection of essays that evaluate Jokowi's decade-long presidency, focusing primarily on domestic political matters but with an eye towards their regional and global context. The most recent addition to the influential and highly respected Indonesia Update series (published yearly by ISEAS Press since 1989), *The Jokowi Presidency* is essential reading for anyone who wants a sober, empirically grounded evaluation of Indonesian politics and society under Jokowi's presidency.

Editors Sana Jaffrey and Eve Warburton have assembled an excellent roster of contributors, and they cover the most important issues in Indonesian politics, from international relations and presidential politics to local politics, the political economy of land and infrastructure policy, the legal system and civil society. The contributors are a mix of Indonesian and non-Indonesian scholars, which is a welcome indication of the state of Indonesian political studies. Chapters are written in an accessible style that explains the topics at hand with enough empirical background for non-specialists to be able to understand them. But they are also empirically rich, full of details that will be of use for scholars looking to expand their comparative research to include the Indonesian case. Many of the chapters are likely to become standard references for scholars working on topics like the political economy of development (Arianto Patunru and Faisal Basri), the evolution of civil society in the democratic era (Edward Aspinall

and Fauziah Mayangsari), dynastic politics (Yoes Kenawas) and others. The entire fourth section of the book—with chapters by Simon Butt and Tim Lindsey on the Constitutional Court, Sidney Jones on the security sector and Laode M. Syarif on corruption—is a concise primer on the Jokowi administration's anti-democratic record. This combination of accessibility and expert analysis is the main strength of this volume.

In terms of the overall argument or analytical approach, the chapters—taken together—tell a consistent story. The subtitle *Indonesia's Decade of Authoritarian Revival* captures some of that story, but not all of it. The editors and contributors agree that the quality of Indonesian democracy declined under Jokowi. But that democratic decline represents more than just a decay of democratic processes and institutions; it also signals their replacement with more openly authoritarian forms of political and social control, many of which draw on the legacies and practices of Indonesia's New Order regime under former president Soeharto (see especially the editors' introductory chapter). The contributors do not draw a straight line from the New Order to Jokowi's choices; instead, the New Order period provides examples, scripts, practices, and ideas that Jokowi and others found useful to employ to deal with contemporary political challenges. Hipolitus Wangge's chapter on the ongoing conflict in Papua, for example, details how recentralization has constrained and reduced many of the hard-won special autonomy provisions that Papuans have enjoyed since the fall of the New Order regime. And in most of the chapters, Jokowi's rehabilitation of Prabowo Subianto from disgraced former New Order general to two-time losing presidential finalist to Minister of Defence to Jokowi's hand-picked successor lurks in the background.

That is the story of authoritarian revival in Indonesia, and this volume tells it well. But the chapters do not flatten the story of Jokowi's presidency into a simple rebirth of the New Order with different personnel and a slightly different electoral system. Two secondary themes, explicit at some chapters and implicit in others, are continuity with the previous democratic administration of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jokowi's own changing style of leadership over the course of his term. Patunru and Basri's chapter, for example, notes different policy emphases between the Yudhoyono and Jokowi administrations but finds important continuities in growth trajectories and the stubborn problems of labor informality, corruption and ad-hoc-ery in state-led initiatives between the two administrations. Nurdina Merdikawati, Ridho Al Izzati and Asep Suryahadi's chapter on social assistance also shows how Jokowi's social policy framework built on Yudhoyono's foundations even as he greatly expanded their scope and coverage (albeit with mixed success). It is natural to periodize Indonesian politics by noting changes in presidential administrations, but the secondary theme of continuity and evolution represents a more developmentalist approach to Indonesian politics, which should prove satisfying to those interested in the long arc of historical development.

Jokowi's changing leadership style is most evident in the essays by Marcus Mietzner and Rizal Sukma, which focus on Jokowi himself and on his foreign policy orientation. Here, we see clearly that the Joko Widodo who defeated Prabowo in 2014 was a very different politician than the Joko Widodo who handed off the presidency to Prabowo in 2024. These authors also consider Jokowi to be a rather more effective leader on the international stage than most observers of Indonesian foreign relations have done previously, noting that he grew into this role over time and conducted foreign policy in ways that matched his instincts as a businessman.

A central question that will occupy scholars of the Jokowi presidency for years to come is how to understand this evolution of Jokowi's presidency. Jokowi's 2014 election was a cause for celebration among the majority of Indonesians, and also among many academics and analysts. By the end of his second term, although Jokowi's popularity remained sky-high, the broad sentiment among those academics and analysts (myself included) was one of disappointment, as many of these authors had hoped for better democratic performance and meaningful reform. Did the hard constraints of politics change Jokowi into the leader that he eventually became, or did Jokowi grow into his role by remaking the Indonesian presidency after his own image? Editors Jaffrey and Warburton attribute much of Jokowi's presidential style to his background, and the other contributors to this fine volume offer insights as well. Thanks to this collection of high-quality contributions, readers of *The Jokowi Presidency: Indonesia's Decade of Authoritarian Revival* will be able to reach their own conclusions.