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WATCHING THE INDONESIAN
ELECTIONS 2014

ISEAS Perspective

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WATCHING THE INDONESIAN ELECTIONS 2014

EDITED BY
ULLA FIONNA



INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
Singapore

First published in Singapore in 2015 by
ISEAS Publishing
Institute of Southeast Asian Studies
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace
Pasir Panjang
Singapore 119614

E-mail: publish@iseas.edu.sg

Website: <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

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ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

ISEAS Perspective.

Watching the Indonesian Elections 2014 / editor, Ulla Fionna.

1. Presidents—Indonesia—Election—2014.
2. Indonesia. Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat—Elections, 2014.
3. Elections—Indonesia.
4. Joko Widodo, 1961–
5. Indonesia—Politics and government—1998–
 - I. Ulla Fionna.
 - II. Title.

JQ778 I59

2015

ISBN 978-981-4620-83-3 (soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-4620-84-0 (e-book, PDF)

Cover photo: Indonesian front runner presidential candidate Joko Widodo addresses supporters during a campaign rally in Jakarta on 26 June 2014.

Credit: Romeo Gacad/AFP/Getty Images

Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Markono Print Media Pte Ltd

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FOREWORD

ISEAS Perspective was quietly started in the middle of 2013. This series of analytical briefs on Southeast Asian current affairs thus came into being around the same time that the Indonesia Studies Programme was revamped at the Institute.

Already then, the signs were already clear that the Indonesian elections scheduled for 2014 were going to be very significant ones, as a window not only into how the country had been developing since the fall of Suharto in 1998 but also into how the democratization process in the country begun in all earnestness in 2008 had been faring.

In the weeks before, during and after the elections, Indonesia experts based at or otherwise affiliated to ISEAS, were sent out on fieldwork trips to sharpen their sense of what the most profound changes and the most significant trends occurring in Indonesia were; and to write reports on the current state of this giant archipelagic country.

Their findings were made public through *ISEAS Perspective*. A series of well-attended seminars were also arranged at the Institute throughout the period. Events were moving quickly though, and the publishing schedule could not always keep up with changes on the ground, nor with the number of articles submitted. Of the eighteen articles written, only fifteen saw immediate light of day.

This compilation allows for the remaining three to be published for the first time. As a collection, the articles provide anyone interested in Indonesia — and given the prominence of this country, that should include anyone interested in Southeast Asia and East Asia — with an effective introduction to the country's present social, economic and political situation.

The election of Joko Widodo as President in itself robustly challenges the status quo of established political parties and traditional power holders,

and how his term in office develops in the coming years will be closely watched by governments and international businesses — and by ISEAS.

OOI KEE BENG

Deputy Director, ISEAS

Founding editor of *ISEAS Perspective*

INTRODUCTION

The fourth democratic elections in post-*reformasi* Indonesia held in 2014 proved most exciting. The country showed that it had with great success institutionalized the policies and initiatives taken within the democratization process that got underway in 2008. Most notably, it is the decentralization and the implementation of direct local elections that had “given birth” to Indonesia’s seventh president, Joko Widodo or Jokowi.

But by the same token, the country continues to suffer from the dysfunctionality of the institutions and the persisting socio-economic problems. As such, Indonesia’s democratic progress remains a unique one, where although elections are free and civil society is vigilant in keeping government in check, many setbacks linger. Corruption is still rampant and parties continue neglecting formulating clear platforms and policies, and instead heavily on political figures to attract votes.

The collection of articles in this volume represent close-up snapshots of numerous actors and the many issues arising during the 2014 elections. Together, the contributions demonstrate various dynamics that Indonesian voters were faced with even before the real campaign had started.

To be sure, the election of Joko Widodo as governor of Jakarta in 2012 brought a profound change that clearly influenced the subsequent campaigning methods and mechanisms adopted by parties and by individual candidates.

Several articles show how political parties struggled to improve their standing in voters’ eyes, amidst the various scandals and leadership problems that embroiled many of them more than a year before the elections. Non-mainstream actors such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) also receive special attention with a contribution highlighting how these, despite their hostile stand against democracy, acted nevertheless, as vote brokers, through their manoeuvres.

Several shed light on the campaign dynamics at the grassroots level. The new trends and realities that parties and candidates faced that year were especially imperative to investigate — generally, parties took a much less determinant role while candidates occupied the centre stage. As was to be expected perhaps, old practices such as vote-buying became more sophisticated, and will most likely continue to be an important feature in Indonesian elections in years to come.

The votes cast for the various parties also revealed new developments that Indonesia enthusiasts should take note of. These are notably the endurance of the Islam-based parties, the “failure” of the Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (PDI-P), and the influence on voting behaviour of charismatic leaders.

The presidential election took the form of rivalry between the old and new breeds of Indonesian leaders. On one hand, Jokowi represented the new breed that rose from the grassroots and that has few connections with the traditional elite, while his opponent, Prabowo Subianto, exemplified the old elite trying their best to retain control.

These articles also provide the assessment of the presidential campaign as one where the utilization of new and old-but-improved tactics to discredit the opponent created strong polarizing effects on voters. What transpired as a result is a divided government that now has to manage the heavy burden of high public expectations. The various multi-faceted problems and challenges that the Jokowi government faces are thoroughly discussed in these contributions.

In providing an assessment of the undercurrents and challenges that the 2014 Indonesian elections faced, this collection is crucial to an understanding of the contemporary issues that shaped the 2014 elections and that will challenge the government of President Jokowi. These dynamics suggest strongly that the future of Indonesian politics will see a strengthened role being played for individual candidates, and a continuing struggle by parties to find a role that goes beyond them being mere vehicles for candidates. Voting patterns will stay fluid and will remain vulnerable to socio-economic issues that could spell the rise and fall of leaders and parties.