

1 The moderating president: Yudhoyono's decade in power

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Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono presided over a critical period in Indonesia's modern history. During his decade in power, between 2004 and 2014, Indonesia's new democracy stabilised. Not only was Yudhoyono able to serve out his two full terms without experiencing any major political crisis or disruption to his government, but he also managed to implement democratic reforms initiated before he took office, such as popular elections of heads of provinces, cities and districts. Democratic elections were generally well run and the military kept out of day-to-day political affairs. The new Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK) began to make inroads into the elite-level corruption that had bedevilled the country. While the 1998–2004 transition from the authoritarian rule of long-time president Suharto had been marked by significant ethnic, religious and other forms of violent conflict, the Yudhoyono years were far more peaceful, symbolised by the signing of the Aceh peace agreement in 2005. Indonesia maintained an impressive rate of economic growth averaging over 5 per cent, paid off the debts it had accrued to the International Monetary Fund during the 1997–98 economic crisis and succeeded in reducing the official poverty rate from 16.7 per cent in 2004 to 11.5 per cent in 2013.¹ Moreover, it seemed to be playing a major role in world affairs, with the country gaining entry to the G20 club of major economies, and with the president touting Indonesia's international leadership role as a modern Muslim democracy.

1 See the figures by the central statistics agency at http://www.bps.go.id/eng/tab_sub/view.php?kat=1&tabel=1&daftar=1&id_subyek=23¬ab=7.

However, Yudhoyono's record of success was far from being unadulterated. As we shall show in this chapter and throughout this book, every time the president or his supporters pointed to an achievement, his critics were ready to identify a contradiction, failing or shortcoming. With regard to his democratic record, for example, some observers have characterised the Yudhoyono period as being marked by stagnation rather than progress (Tomsa 2010; Fealy 2011; Mietzner 2012; McRae 2013). In the economic field, Yudhoyono was widely criticised for being reluctant to push through major structural reforms (such as the full elimination of costly fuel subsidies) that would have freed funds for much-needed investments in infrastructure, education and other fields. Though poverty declined, it did so at a slower rate than during the late Suharto years; the number of the near-poor living on less than \$2 a day remained close to half the population; and inequality significantly worsened (see Chapter 16 by Manning and Miranti for details). In international affairs, critics often suggested that the president and his foreign policy apparatus appeared unable to enunciate a set of clear and precise goals and did not seem to know quite what to do with Indonesia's newfound global profile. Thus, much controversy surrounds how best to interpret the Yudhoyono presidency and its legacy.

It should not surprise us that assessments of the personal role played by Yudhoyono in Indonesia's stabilisation and transformation have been highly divergent. While controversy is to be expected in assessments of any head of state, they have been unusually polarised in the case of Yudhoyono. Internationally, the president has been lauded as a visionary democratic leader. In 2014, for example, he was feted at UN headquarters in New York and praised by US President Barack Obama for his 'leadership which has succeeded in leading Indonesia toward democratic transition' (Cabinet Secretariat 2014). In contrast, large parts of Indonesia's commentariat and the politically engaged public became increasingly disillusioned with the president, especially as the end of his second term neared. The most consistent line of criticism was that Yudhoyono was a *peragu* – a hesitator or vacillator – who took such care to avoid political controversy that he was rarely able to take decisive policy action. In the place of the authoritative and firm leader many Indonesians had expected when they first elected him, by the end many saw him as incurably hesitant and compromising.

How do we make sense of these very divergent assessments of Yudhoyono, his presidency and his legacy? Our fundamental proposition in this chapter is that Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono might be thought of first and foremost as a *moderating president*. By this, we mean more than that Yudhoyono saw himself as politically moderate or centrist, though this was indeed an important element of his political philosophy. More fun-

damentally, Yudhoyono viewed himself as leading a polity and a society characterised by deep divisions, and he believed that his most important role was to moderate these divisions by mediating between the conflicting forces and interests to which they gave rise. This interpretation of the president's main function as that of a moderator – rather than a decision-maker – differs significantly from what scholars have typically described as visionary, effective and agenda-setting presidencies (Edwards 2012). Of course, Yudhoyono had his own policy priorities and goals, but in practice he often subordinated these to his desire to forestall political confrontation, safeguard stability and avoid alienating public opinion, important interest groups or his own coalition partners. Thus, instead of pursuing a coherent presidential agenda and using his powers to defend it, his overriding goal was to avoid inflaming division.

Yudhoyono's moderating style was apparent in his approach to forming and maintaining oversized government coalitions, where he sought to maximise participation by the major parties represented in Indonesia's parliament, the People's Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR). In these broad coalitions, he was reluctant to discipline coalition partners even when they opposed his policies. But his habit of always seeking the middle ground was also visible in his responses to a host of controversial policy issues. When Yudhoyono encountered entrenched interests or political controversy, his deepest instincts told him to avoid hostility. The result was that he repeatedly cancelled, deferred or modified policy reforms, or otherwise put them in the too-hard basket. This approach accounts for most of the hesitations, shortcomings and failures that critics have identified in Yudhoyono's government. While many political leaders, including in advanced democracies, have routinely been forced into compromises, few of them have rationalised risk avoidance and the need to balance rival forces as a virtue of governance in the way Yudhoyono did. The obvious weaknesses of this approach notwithstanding, it also helps to explain the much-praised stability of his presidency.

The rest of this chapter elucidates this argument and provides a guide to help readers navigate through the remainder of the book. In the first section, we describe Yudhoyono's political background and his rise to the presidency, highlighting his identity as both a product of the New Order and as a reformer. In the second section, we analyse Yudhoyono's view that Indonesia has in effect adopted a 'semi-presidential' system, which supposedly forced him into building large government coalitions. We also place his notion of semi-presidentialism in a comparative context. In the third section, we further deconstruct Yudhoyono's philosophy of presidential rule, advancing our proposition that he was above all a moderating and arbitrating leader. The fourth section presents the

implications of our analysis for the study of Indonesia's democratic transition and consolidation. We argue that viewing Yudhoyono as a mediating president helps us to reconcile the starkly conflicting assessments of his decade in office, with his tenure emerging as a period of both democratic stability *and* stagnation. Finally, we look briefly at the first few months of the presidency of Yudhoyono's successor, Joko Widodo, to see what light they throw on the nature and legacy of Yudhoyono's presidency. We also briefly explain the structure of the rest of the book.

YUDHOYONO'S RISE TO POWER

Yudhoyono's ascent to the presidency was by no means accidental. While born into a relatively humble East Javanese family, his studies at the military academy between 1970 and 1973 made him part of the upper echelons of the New Order elite. He was educated alongside many other soldiers who would later play key political roles, including the defeated presidential candidate of 2014, Prabowo Subianto. Yudhoyono's marriage in 1976 to the daughter of the academy's governor, Sarwo Edhie Wibowo, further advanced his social and political fortunes. In addition to his network in the military and his growing prominence in Jakarta elite circles, Yudhoyono was increasingly known for his sharp intellect, strict discipline and organisational capability. Importantly, this reputation set him apart from many other New Order generals, who were notorious for their crude rhetoric, open hostility to intellectual debate and unashamedly extravagant lifestyles. Between the late 1980s and the mid-1990s, Yudhoyono developed a solid public image as a moderate reformer, in terms both of rethinking the military's political role and of discussing changes to the overall polity. Suharto appointed him to the crucial post of chief-of-staff for social and political affairs in February 1998, hoping that he would be able to moderate the protesters' demands and save his crumbling regime. After Suharto fell, Yudhoyono managed the early phase of the military's extraction from politics, proposing significant changes to its doctrine while at the same time trying to protect some of its privileges.

Yudhoyono's entry into politics came in October 1999, when President Abdurrahman Wahid recruited him into his cabinet as minister of mining and energy. Initially Yudhoyono was reluctant to agree to the appointment, hoping that he would be allowed to complete his military career by climbing to the position of commander. But he relented, and was rewarded in August 2000 with promotion to the senior role of coordinating minister for political, social and security affairs. His years in the Wahid cabinet were decisive in shaping his view of the internal machina-

tions of politics, and what is needed to survive them. He observed at close range how Wahid self-destructed by alienating almost the entire political elite, including his allies. Yudhoyono himself was eventually fired from his position, and Wahid was impeached shortly afterwards. The spectacle of Wahid's downfall had a tremendous impact on Yudhoyono's political thinking, convincing him that a president needed to accommodate rather than confront Indonesia's myriad interest groups. Yudhoyono's defeat in the vice-presidential election of July 2001, at a time when the Constitution still required the president and vice-president to be elected by the members of the People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, MPR), consolidated his view that he needed his own political vehicle to seek higher office. Hence, in September 2001, two months before the MPR approved direct presidential elections, Yudhoyono's supporters formed the Democrat Party (Partai Demokrat, PD). Over the next two years Yudhoyono was reluctant to publicly endorse the party, because he was uncertain whether it was the right time for him to run for the presidency. Megawati Sukarnoputri, who had succeeded Wahid and reappointed Yudhoyono to his old (but renamed) post of coordinating minister for political and security affairs, seemed difficult to beat, so Yudhoyono hoped to be named her running mate (Honna 2012: 475).

Yudhoyono only decided to declare his candidacy for the 2004 presidential elections when his relationship with Megawati soured in early 2004. Megawati had grown suspicious of her minister and his (till then) undeclared ambitions, and had begun to isolate him from government business. In response, Yudhoyono resigned in March 2004, fully endorsed PD and offered himself as an alternative to Megawati. In designing his campaign, Yudhoyono proved far more adept than his competitors at recognising the potential of direct presidential elections. He created the acronym 'SBY' for himself, suggesting a level of informality and familiarity that he did not necessarily enjoy, but which he knew voters would find appealing. He was also skillful at identifying, articulating and embodying the core ambiguity felt in the Indonesian electorate after six years of chaotic transition: he stood for both reform *and* stability. In the campaign, 'He presented himself, above all, as a professional and modern politician who could restore efficiency and competence to government' (Aspinall 2005: 131–2). This strategy led him to victory in the second round of the presidential election, in which he roundly defeated Megawati by a margin of 61 per cent to 39 per cent. When he ran for re-election in 2009, he achieved an even more decisive victory. This time he defeated the competition (Megawati once more, as well as Yudhoyono's first-term vice-president and head of the Golkar party, Jusuf Kalla) with an almost identical result of just under 61 per cent, but this time

in the first round (Mietzner 2009). Indeed, though his popularity fluctuated over the course of his ten years in power, for much of the decade Yudhoyono maintained approval ratings that would have been the envy of most democratically elected leaders. In May 2014, shortly before his retirement, 51.4 per cent of Indonesians declared they were either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with Yudhoyono.²

However, success and popularity were not the only features of Yudhoyono's electoral campaigns and his presidency. Almost immediately after he came to office, media commentators, political opponents and others began to criticise him for indecisiveness. Two years into his first term, one seasoned observer was already concluding:

Yudhoyono's presidency was also defined by his naturally cautious political instincts. The methodical manner in which he went about making decisions was calculated to alienate as few constituencies and organised interests as possible. He intervened in political struggles only when he absolutely had to (as in the case of the fuel price hikes) or if he was confident of a positive outcome (as in the Aceh peace process). These defining features of the SBY presidency resulted in a strong tendency for the government to engage in political compromise and prefer stability over unsettling political and economic change (McGibbon 2006: 322).

These perspicacious remarks might have been written at the end of the Yudhoyono presidency rather than its birth. They not only identified core features of Yudhoyono's style of government, but also point us towards the political and ideological controversies that were to surround his presidency. In the following, we examine the shape and roots of Yudhoyono's particular philosophy of governance, which was centred on moderating, rather than guiding, the political process.

YUDHOYONO AND INDONESIA'S 'SEMI-PRESIDENTIALISM'

In a December 2014 interview with two of the authors of this chapter, Yudhoyono explained how his experiences during the transition to democracy had shaped his approach to government during his own presidency.³ In particular, he recalled pleading with Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) on many occasions to avoid conflict with parliament. During various night-time meetings, he frequently told Wahid, 'We are not really strong enough to confront parliament. We are not strong

2 'Survei PDB: 50 persen lebih masyarakat puas akan pemerintahan SBY' [PDB survey: more than 50 per cent of the people are satisfied with the Yudhoyono government], *Kompas*, 14 May 2014.

3 Any unattributed quotes in this section are taken from Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner's interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Cikeas, 2 December 2014.

enough, Gus'. Though his pleading ultimately fell on deaf ears, Yudhoyono learned valuable lessons from these events. The chief one was that it was critical to maintain 'continuity of this government' and ensure that 'it doesn't collapse halfway through'. Only by securing the government's survival, and ensuring its stability, would Yudhoyono be able to achieve his other goals, including economic development. 'I love stability, I love order', he said. Perhaps most tellingly of all, he concluded from his experience under Wahid that Indonesia's multi-party democracy was, in effect, 'a semi-parliamentary, semi-presidential system'.

With these remarks, Yudhoyono connected to a longstanding debate among democracy scholars about the stability and effectiveness of presidential systems with multi-party landscapes, as in Indonesia. As early as 1990, Scott Mainwaring (1990: 2) had pointed out that presidentialism with multi-party systems was likely to produce 'immobilism, weak executive power and destabilizing executive/legislative conflict'. This is because few popularly elected presidents have a majority in parliament, and if they put together an alliance that delivers one, it is typically difficult to manage. In Mainwaring's view, there were only a handful of presidential systems with multi-partyism that worked well – presidentialism, he contended, is much more compatible with two-party systems such as the United States. While the remarkable democratic consolidation of Latin American countries has since delivered a number of examples in which presidentialism and multi-partyism do successfully coexist (Pereira and Melo 2012), an influential stream in the literature still maintains that presidentialism is a much riskier path to democracy than parliamentarism (Linz 1990; Stepan and Skach 1993). Indeed, Mainwaring suggested that even semi-presidentialism (that is, a system in which both a president and a parliament-supported prime minister run government) is a more effective system of government than pure presidentialism constrained by multi-partyism. Reflecting on his presidency, Yudhoyono also suggested that Indonesia should start a discussion about a more suitable political system, although he offered no specific details about how he would like to see it reformed, that is, whether he wanted the restoration of what he would consider pure presidentialism with an institutionally engineered reduction in the number of parties or the formal entrenchment of semi-presidentialism (or, for that matter, parliamentarism).

Yudhoyono's experience with and analysis of the pitfalls of Indonesia's political system instilled an extreme sense of caution in him. This caution, in turn, became a hallmark of his presidency, notable in particular in his attitudes to coalition building (see Chapter 6 by Sherlock). Like his two predecessors, Yudhoyono chose to create large 'rainbow coalition' cabinets that included not only former military officers, bureaucrats and professionals, but also representatives of a large majority of the

parties holding seats in parliament. His first cabinet (2004–09) included members of seven parties holding 402 (73 per cent) of the 550 seats in the DPR, while the second (2009–14) contained members of six parties representing 421 (75 per cent) of the 560 seats. Such broad coalitions have been the subject of much scrutiny in scholarship on post-Suharto politics. In some assessments, these arrangements constitute a form of ‘party cartel’ in which the major political parties collude to strip contestation from the body politic and share access to state power (Slater 2004; Ambardi 2008; Slater and Simmons 2013).⁴ Even scholars who do not work within the cartel theory framework agree that such inclusiveness undermines the effectiveness of governments by bringing parties with widely varying interests into cabinet—a point Mainwaring had already raised. They also concur that it reflects the centrality of patronage in the polity, with parties eager to participate in cabinet primarily to gain access to the programs and funds that ministries provide, rather than to identify opportunities to steer policy (Diamond 2009; Sherlock 2009; Aspinall 2010; Tomsa 2010).

Certainly, intracoalition conflicts and lack of policy direction were evident throughout Yudhoyono’s reign. The breadth of party representation in cabinet meant that it included ministers who sometimes adopted stances that contravened the president’s own policy preferences. For example, during his second term, when Yudhoyono was emphasising internationally his credentials for religious tolerance, his minister of religion, Suryadharma Ali, the head of the Islamist United Development Party (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, PPP), was a major voice of intolerance, inflaming community tensions targeting minority groups such as the Ahmadiyah and the Shi’a (see Chapter 13 by Bush). Though Yudhoyono was not entirely averse to replacing cabinet ministers who underperformed or who contravened his policies, he was generally reluctant to do so—he only replaced Suryadharma after he was declared a suspect by the KPK towards the end of his term. Between 2005 and 2011, Yudhoyono reshuffled his cabinet four times, replacing a total of 19 ministers; he also had to replace three when they were charged with corruption offences. While Yudhoyono was conservative in removing ministers, the parties in his coalition often quarrelled openly over individual appointments. In late 2009, Golkar leader Aburizal Bakrie engineered a campaign against the respected finance minister, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, after she took decisions that adversely affected his companies; this conflict ended with Mulyani leaving cabinet.⁵

4 For a critique of the cartelisation argument, see Mietzner (2013).

5 See, for example, ‘Golkar bantah dongkel Sri Mulyani’ [Golkar denies ousting Sri Mulyani], *Koran Tempo*, 19 January 2010.

The conflicts within the Yudhoyono government also extended into the legislature. Leaders of coalition parties frequently criticised government policy and worked within the DPR to amend or reject bills proposed by government ministers. In fact, negotiations over bills generally occurred in the DPR committees without clear distinctions between government and opposition parties (Sherlock 2010). Occasionally, coalition parties actually voted against government initiatives in DPR plenary sessions. The most habitual offender in this regard was the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, PKS), which was particularly vehement in its rejection of Yudhoyono's attempts to reduce fuel subsidies. The debate on reducing wasteful fuel subsidies was a critical but controversial issue that bedevilled government policy-making throughout the Yudhoyono years, as Hal Hill demonstrates in Chapter 15 of this book. As late as June 2013, PKS still voted with the opposition against a reduction, even when all other government parties supported it. In the end, the knowledge that he would face parliamentary opposition from his own coalition partners made Yudhoyono very reluctant to move on sensitive issues. He did not make another effort to reduce fuel subsidies in 2014 when the government faced a severe fiscal squeeze, for example, opting instead to cut other spending programs.

However, Yudhoyono was sanguine about these outcomes. As he explained to the authors in December 2014, the 'semi-parliamentary, semi-presidential' nature of the system meant that even if a presidential candidate won 80 per cent of the vote in a direct election, but was opposed by a majority of parties in the parliament, 'Then nothing will work. That's why in my view, despite all the trouble, it is much better to have a coalition'. While such a coalition forced him to make compromises, he claimed that he got most of his policies through (a claim that many of his critics would dispute):

I always had to convince my own coalition about the importance of this policy, the importance of this decision, the importance of this option. And sometimes it was not easy. Sometimes it took great effort. But, at the end, I can calculate that I achieved 70 per cent of my goals, and for 30 per cent I had to accept the reality.

As for aiming for a narrower and more disciplined coalition, for example one representing just 55 or 60 per cent of the parliament, this had never entered into his calculations:

I never designed how big my coalition would be from the beginning ... and that is not Indonesian political culture. What happened was that when I became president in 2004, a number of parties [approached me and asked] 'Can we join?' Yes, of course they were welcome.

Asked why he did not remove parties from cabinet when they refused to support important government policies, Yudhoyono pointed to the

example of PKS. After it rejected his policy of reducing fuel subsidies in parliament in 2012 and 2013, Yudhoyono seriously considered removing its ministers, but decided against it. He felt residual loyalty to PKS because it had been the first significant party, after PD, to back his presidential aspirations. More importantly, however, he feared that 'If PKS was expelled, perhaps politics would become more noisy, more unstable'. Getting rid of PKS might have given rise to more 'tumult in parliament', but in the end that was not what the people would judge him on; what they really wanted, according to Yudhoyono, were results in terms of improved per capita income, education, health, small business activity and internal security.

THE MODERATING PRESIDENT

A fear of political turmoil and a determination to avoid it lay at the heart of Yudhoyono's political philosophy. More than other compromise-wielding politicians in new and advanced democracies, Yudhoyono refrained from advancing his own ideas (if he had them) in a debate—instead, he saw his primary task as being to shepherd through an outcome in which everyone could 'save face'. In his descriptions of how policy was made under his government, he exhibited visible disdain for conflict but also pride in having routinely neutralised it. He recalled that these policy-making processes often followed a similar pattern: a reform proposal would be introduced (rarely by Yudhoyono himself), there would be consultation on it, but then there would be conflict, controversy or 'tumult' (*kegaduhan*), with the result being a compromise in the form of a watered-down version of the reform or its postponement—often for an indefinite period.⁶ This occurred not just when the president was dealing with his cabinet and parliament, but also in interactions with other potential opponents of reform, both within the bureaucracy and among interest groups outside it. On other occasions, commentators observed that the president simply refused to get involved in the negotiations, failing to direct his ministers on key policy issues and intervening only when public pressure had become too great to resist or where polling or other means of gauging public reaction allowed him to choose 'a course of action exactly in accord with the majority view' (Fealy 2011: 335).

This book gives many examples of Yudhoyono either failing to intervene decisively on a major issue or backing off from reform after encountering resistance from ministers, political parties, bureaucrats or interest groups. For instance, in Chapter 9 Dirk Tomsa describes the president's

6 Interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 2 December 2014.

remarkable failure, late in his second term, to set a course that would have protected the system of direct elections of local government heads (*pemilihan kepala daerah, pilkada*) from repeal. Despite proclaiming that popular elections had been a highpoint of democratic performance under his presidency, he allowed members of his own government to develop plans for their abolition, and let his own party connive in a DPR decision to replace them with the previous system of indirect elections by local legislatures (a system that had been notoriously corrupt). Typically, Yudhoyono only took action to reverse this outcome when prompted to do so by a popular outcry. A similar example, discussed by Simon Butt in Chapter 10, was the president's reluctance to vigorously defend the KPK when it came under attack from elements in parliament and the police who were threatened by its anti-corruption drive. This was despite the fact that Yudhoyono himself had acquired much public credit from the commission's work during his first term. Similarly, in Chapter 12 Dominic Berger shows how Yudhoyono stalled any attempts to deal with past human rights abuses, despite having promised victims and their families that there would be credible investigations. Once more, Yudhoyono had avoided conflict with vested interests (in this case, powerful ex-generals) in order to maintain overall stability.

Yudhoyono's instinctive habit of detecting possible sources of conflict early, and then avoiding them, also contributed to his government's low productivity in the drafting of government regulations. For example, while the 2005 Aceh peace accord has rightly been praised as one of Yudhoyono's great achievements (Morfit 2007), his government failed to produce several crucial implementing regulations (Aspinall 2014). Resistance from central government ministries reluctant to cede power to Aceh meant that the province's 'special autonomy' was still incomplete in some areas a full seven years after the deal was signed (Aspinall 2014). Indeed, such failure to enact government regulations that were required to give teeth to a law—sometimes for many years—became something of a hallmark of the Yudhoyono presidency. Often, the relevant government ministries or the president's office would drag their feet in issuing implementing regulations—or produce watered-down versions of the regulations—because full implementation would have harmed either their own interests or those of their cronies. One example discussed in this book is Law 32/2009 on Environmental Protection and Management. As Patrick Anderson, Asep Firdaus and Avi Mahaningtyas explain in Chapter 14, only one of the 19 required implementing regulations had been issued by the end of Yudhoyono's presidency, reflecting 'Yudhoyono's failure to push through reform efforts against resistance from sectoral ministries and associated industries' (page 259). In Chapter 7, Jacqui Baker identifies similar failings in the security sector, as do

Dinna Wisnu, Faisal Basri and Gatot Arya Putra in their account of social welfare policies (Chapter 17).

Yudhoyono's love of stability and concomitant reluctance to court conflict led him to position himself not so much as a political leader trying to persuade the elite and the public of his chosen course of action. Rather, he defined himself as Indonesia's main political conciliator – someone who was willing to ensure that every party felt accommodated regardless of the rationality or constitutionality of its demands. A good illustration of this is found in Yudhoyono's account of his position with regard to the protection of religious minorities such as the Ahmadiyah sect. As Robin Bush demonstrates in Chapter 13, attacks against such groups increased during Yudhoyono's presidency and he was often accused of adopting an equivocal position in response. For Yudhoyono, however, this was not the nub of the issue. As he explained in his December 2014 interview with the authors, he located himself between 'two extremes, two poles': on the one hand, the human rights activists who 'pressured me' to protect Ahmadiyah on the grounds of religious freedom and the Constitution, and on the other, 'a number of Islamic leaders' who also 'pressured me', but this time to ban Ahmadiyah and arrest and jail its followers. A purist interpretation of the constitutional right of religious freedom as urged by the activists would have given rise to 'clashes'; banning Ahmadiyah would have breached the Constitution. Thus, Yudhoyono chose a middle path: 'we only regulated how they could conduct their worship'. In other words, Yudhoyono adopted a utilitarian view of the presidential duty to protect the Constitution; the prospect of a particular decision leading to 'clashes' carried, for him, the same weight as the Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom.

Hence, while many public figures criticised Yudhoyono for his inability to take strong stands on controversial issues, the president himself saw his predilection for the 'middle way' as a positive attribute.⁷ For Yudhoyono, who was acutely aware of the criticisms, it was crucial that an Indonesian president was not only a moderate, but a moderator. This image of a president establishing 'balance' between a myriad of quarrelling forces was central to his political philosophy:

It's like this. Indonesia is diverse. We have a multi-party democracy, decentralisation is rolling out but is not fully mature, there are many interests. So my role and my mission is to safeguard balance, to ensure that it doesn't happen that some win too much while others lose too much ... So maintaining balance is perhaps the most challenging task for whoever would be the leader of Indonesia – balance. There were times when my choice was the middle

7 See, for example, President Yudhoyono's comments in an interview with US journalist Charlie Rose in April 2011, available at <http://www.charlierose.com/watch/50143491>.

way, but there were times when, no, I had to say A is right, B is wrong. So it doesn't mean that for every issue I did not have a position; of course there were some where A was wrong, or B was wrong. But in a broader context, in my opinion, it is better to maintain balance. It shouldn't be a winner-takes-all situation because that, in my opinion, will cause harm in a pluralist nation, in a multi-party democracy. Whenever the winner takes all, it's harmful, there will be losers, and losers generally like to hit back, and if that then gets out of control, then it can be terrible. Ya, I must admit that *I love* to maintain balance, yes, the balance in life, in our country.⁸

Whereas studies of presidential leadership highlight the capacity for persuasion as the most important attribute of an incumbent (Edwards 2012), Yudhoyono arguably did not want to persuade; he wanted to be a mediator in or facilitator of policy-making processes. His lack of ambition to lead by persuasion, however, contrasted sharply with his general ambition to be president and, as Evi Fitriani shows in Chapter 5, his desire to be viewed as a strong leader by his international peers.

What were the sources of Yudhoyono's obsession with creating balance? Any student of Indonesia's modern history will immediately recognise strong traces of the political thinking that flourished under the New Order regime. An emphasis on harmony and balance and an overriding commitment to stability and order were central features of the 'Pancasila ideology' promoted by that regime (Bourchier 2015). Regime leaders used such ideas to legitimate a highly repressive system of rule, and to justify state action against persons who challenged it. As we have already demonstrated, despite his relatively humble origins, Yudhoyono became an important figure in Suharto's New Order, marrying into an important New Order family and rising to near the top of the military; his experience of the transition from Suharto's rule reinforced his predilection for political order. All this is not to say that Yudhoyono was undemocratic – on the contrary, we will argue below that his commitment to constitutional democracy was another core attribute of his political character. But observing the vestiges of New Order thinking in Yudhoyono's outlook does help us to locate him in key respects as a strongly conservative figure who did little to fundamentally challenge the power structures that existed in Indonesia when he came to office.

From a more institutional perspective, scholars of presidential systems argue that Indonesia's political regime – presidentialism combined with multi-partyism – leads to the kind of conflict-mediating leaders that Yudhoyono took pride in being. For Mainwaring (1990), for instance, weak presidents administering the status quo amidst a host of opposing interests are the norm rather than the exception in presidentialist polities with a fragmented party landscape. But in contrast to many of his

8 Interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 2 December 2014.

counterparts in Latin America or Asia who started out trying to implement their agendas but then got frustrated by the political realities surrounding them (such as a succession of Philippine and South Korean presidents), Yudhoyono embraced his reduction to a moderating role very early on in his presidency. In fact, by his own admission, his view of his role pre-dated his coming to power and had its roots in his experiences during the Wahid government. Accordingly, while institutionalist explanations are powerful, they need to be contextualised by an analysis of Yudhoyono's background and thinking. Another, more structuralist explanation is that advanced by John Sidel in Chapter 4 of this book. He argues that Yudhoyono (like Thailand's Prem Tinsulanonda and Fidel Ramos of the Philippines) was the product of a political transition in which moderate military officers were tasked by the political establishment and an anxious electorate with safeguarding stability. Yudhoyono's moderating approach, then, was a reflection of the ruling elite's interest in avoiding social upheaval that could threaten its privileges. And as mentioned above, this longing for stability was also prominent in the regime that Indonesia's 1998 transition had brought to an end.

An alternative source of Yudhoyono's relentless search for the middle way may be found in deeper-seated features of his personality, especially his much-remarked-upon fixation with his personal image. Fealy (2011: 334), for example, reported that

Every morning, he and his wife, Ani, are said to pore over the newspapers at breakfast, paying particular attention to critical coverage of the palace or the government. Personal attacks on SBY in the media will often agitate him for hours, if not days.

Strikingly, Yudhoyono's 2014 book, *Selalu Ada Pilihan* [There Is Always a Choice], an 800-page-long explication of his thinking on diverse matters, is to a large degree structured as a series of responses to public or private criticisms of him. In the same vein, he had staff whose job it was to compile the SMS messages sent to his official feedback number; he then used those data in making important decisions. For example, Yudhoyono recalled that 60 per cent of the messages he received after Suharto's death in 2008 favoured providing a state funeral for the late ruler, 20 per cent urged him to go further and grant Suharto 'national hero' status and another 20 per cent were against official displays of respect to Suharto. 'I chose the 60 per cent', Yudhoyono said.⁹ Later in his presidency, Yudhoyono became an avid user of social media, not only taking pride in his high number of Twitter and Facebook followers, but also paying close attention to critical remarks and responding to them. Finally, Yudhoyono

⁹ Interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 2 December 2014.

was Indonesia's first truly poll-driven national politician; he regularly commissioned polls to track his own popularity, and he used surveys to guide his actions on issues of importance, such as who would be his designated successor or, when he failed to groom someone from his own party, which candidate to support in the 2014 presidential election.

In Chapter 3 of this volume, Fealy locates the source of Yudhoyono's concern with his public image in his abiding sense of personal insecurity. In terms of what this insecurity meant for his moderating presidency, two contrasting political effects stand out. On the one hand, as many critics have argued, Yudhoyono's constant poring over polls and his thin skin for criticism often had a paralysing effect on him. They helped drive his constant search for a middle way, which he believed would prevent individuals or groups from turning against him. We have already described the stultifying effects this had on policy-making and reform. On the other hand – and this point has been insufficiently emphasised in evaluations of Yudhoyono's presidency – his concern for public opinion was part of what made Yudhoyono a democratic leader. Despite having risen to prominence under an authoritarian regime whose ideology had lingering effects on his thinking, he was serious about representing majority views. While he shared the New Order's stress on stability, he did not want to create balance by force, but by mediation and by heeding the popular will. His desire to be popular may have made him highly cautious, but an ability to express mainstream opinion is, to risk stating the obvious, a core quality of democratically elected leaders. His wish to avoid antagonising majority opinion also often acted as a check when he or other members of his government were considering measures that would have seriously undermined democratic institutions. Yudhoyono's pursuit of the mainstream, in short, helps explain why democracy both stagnated *and* was protected under his presidency, a topic to which we now turn.

YUDHOYONO AND INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY

The evaluations in this book of Yudhoyono's achievements in diverse policy fields not only provide a detailed picture of his presidency but also feed into the debate on his overall contribution to democracy. Indeed, when asked to name the greatest achievement of his presidency, Yudhoyono did not hesitate:

I would mention the consolidation of democracy. I would not say it's already perfect; we still have to perfect it. But I must say that in 2004 when I began as president, our democracy was not yet really fully mature. It was not yet stable, not yet strong. At the very least, over the following ten years we were able to safeguard the transition to democracy so that it experienced no setbacks,

no changes of direction. As a result, I can say that my successor can now actually further continue this democratic consolidation.¹⁰

Some scholars agree with this judgment. Liddle and Mujani (2013), for example, argue that Indonesian democracy was consolidated during Yudhoyono's tenure. But we challenge this assessment, arguing instead that Yudhoyono merely stabilised Indonesia's fragile democracy without ensuring that democracy became the 'only game in town' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 5).

Of course, it is difficult to dispute that Yudhoyono presided over a period of remarkable democratic stability. Despite his New Order background, he preserved the democratic system he had inherited, motivated both by his political moderation and by his respect for majority opinion. As global democracy expert Larry Diamond (2009: 338) put it at the end of Yudhoyono's first term, the president 'stands out as a conciliatory and unifying figure, one willing to share power, to compromise and to build broad coalitions'. By adopting such a posture, Yudhoyono helped Indonesia maintain democracy at a time when many countries that had become democratic in the 1980s and 1990s were sliding back towards authoritarianism (Diamond 2010, 2014). Often, it was popularly elected heads of government – such as Vladimir Putin in Russia and Thaksin Shinawatra in Thailand – who were the leading forces of democratic roll-back in these countries. In contrast to such autocratic figures, Yudhoyono did not personally initiate any significant attempt to wind back major democratic reforms, nor did he attempt to concentrate power in his own hands or try to engineer his entrenchment in power.

But although Yudhoyono did not reverse Indonesia's democratic trend, he also did nothing to help democratic attitudes, institutions and practices become so entrenched that we can now speak of Indonesia as a consolidated democracy. As many chapters in this book show, democracy is *not* the only game in town in Indonesia. It is therefore important to emphasise that, despite the overall stability, the Yudhoyono presidency was also an era of missed opportunities to deepen democracy further. Indeed, it is essential to note that Indonesia had already strengthened significantly when Yudhoyono took power in 2004. Most of the political and communal conflicts that had destabilised the transition to democracy had subsided, and institutional reforms were taking root. It is striking, then, that when asked to elaborate on his claim to have overseen a period of democratic consolidation, Yudhoyono pointed to the existence of institutions – such as direct presidential elections and direct elections of regional government heads – that were actually the result of constitutional or legislative changes under his *predecessors*. Similarly, the KPK,

10 Interview with Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, 2 December 2014.

whose investigations into high-level corruption helped burnish Yudhoyono's reputation in his first term, was a product of the Megawati presidency – albeit one that began to function fully only under Yudhoyono.

Most of these important democratic institutions survived, and in some cases flourished, under a combination of positive support and benign neglect from Yudhoyono. Direct local elections and the KPK, however, only narrowly escaped serious attempts to destroy them during the Yudhoyono presidency – and only after public outrage prompted the president to defend them. And as we have already argued, Yudhoyono's reluctance to antagonise powerful entrenched interests meant that reform efforts either failed or produced only partial and ambivalent success in a whole host of second-order areas where it would have been important to build on early gains of the *reformasi* period. Some of these areas are discussed in detail in this book, including internal security (Chapter 8 by Jones), gender equality (Chapter 11 by Budianta, Chandrakirana and Yentriyani) and human rights protection (Chapter 12 by Berger).

A verdict of stagnation is supported by agencies that produce ratings of global democracy. Freedom House, for example, upgraded Indonesia's status from 'partly free' to 'free' in 2006, at the outset of Yudhoyono's presidency, largely on the basis of the country's implementation of direct elections of local government heads in 2005 (based on a 2004 law passed under Megawati). At the end of Yudhoyono's presidency in 2014, however, it relegated the country once again to 'partly free' status, mainly in response to the passage of a new law on social organisations that restricted the freedom of association. In its view, therefore, Indonesian democracy ended the Yudhoyono decade more or less where it had begun. In the *Economist's* Democracy Index, Indonesia increased its overall score only slightly, from 6.41 in 2006 to 6.95 in 2014, ranking it below Timor-Leste, Panama and Trinidad and Tobago in Yudhoyono's final year in office. In our view, such judgments are justifiable and apt: while Indonesian democracy did not go into reverse during Yudhoyono's tenure, neither did it make dramatic forward progress.

In sum, democratic stability does not necessarily amount to democratic consolidation. While the decade of stable rule under Yudhoyono gave key democratic institutions time to bed down, it is far from clear that they became so strong that they were no longer under serious threat. On the contrary, the near-death of direct elections of local government heads and the attacks on the KPK demonstrate that the reverse was the case. The failure to more thoroughly reform institutions such as the police and military, meanwhile, meant that reservoirs of authoritarian thinking remained powerful in the key security institutions, as they did in the parties (Mietzner 2012). These problems did not pose any immediate

threat to the democratic system — precisely because of Yudhoyono's personal commitment to democracy and his reluctance to oversee dramatic change — but they left open the real possibility of future piecemeal erosion. Indeed, the sense of drift that evolved in Yudhoyono's second term, and the public's growing disillusionment with their irresolute leader, came close to propelling an outright authoritarian figure, Prabowo Subianto, into the presidential palace during the 2014 presidential election (Aspinall and Mietzner 2014; Mietzner 2015). Overall, then, the Yudhoyono years should not be interpreted *only* as a period of democratic stability; it was also a decade of democratic stagnation that actually exacerbated the long-term threats to Indonesia's democratic consolidation.

CONCLUSION AND STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

While there is much to criticise in Yudhoyono's record (and the contributors to this book certainly do not hold back in this regard), early insights into the presidency of his successor, Joko Widodo (Jokowi), suggest that history may treat Yudhoyono rather generously. Jokowi ran his campaign on the promise of being more decisive, less dependent on elites and cronies, and more effective in overcoming bureaucratic resistance to policy implementation than Yudhoyono. But the first few months of his presidency have demonstrated just how difficult it is in Indonesia's multi-layered democratic polity to realise such promises. Rather than being more decisive, Jokowi has displayed visible desperation when having to make tough calls, such as the decision to cancel the appointment of Budi Gunawan as police chief in February 2015. Rather than being less dependent on patronage networks, he has come under strong pressure from his own party and the oligarchs who supported him during his campaign. And rather than achieving legislative and bureaucratic breakthroughs, he has postponed key initiatives because they were deemed too 'controversial' (with the exception of cutting fuel subsidies, which he was able to do in late 2014 and early 2015, aided by collapsing international oil prices). At the same time, Jokowi has exhibited none of Yudhoyono's ability to communicate the difficulties of presidential decision-making — where Yudhoyono gave lengthy speeches or uploaded YouTube videos to explain his stance, Jokowi has resorted to reading a few wooden sentences from a prepared script. To a certain extent, Jokowi's less than impressive start provides evidence for Yudhoyono's argument that Indonesia's socio-political arena is a minefield through which one must tread carefully rather than with a false sense of dynamism.

Indeed, as John Sidel points out in Chapter 4 of this book, Yudhoyono's presidency left his successor an artificially domesticated polity

that is unlikely to serve as a strong foundation for coherent and decisive governance. Yudhoyono's tendency of bottling up rather than resolving tensions has handed Jokowi a political system in which the country's longstanding patronage practices persist and, consequently, limit the new president's room to manoeuvre. In addition, Jokowi has inherited a host of other problems, from Indonesia's continued dependence on natural resources to debilitated infrastructure, which any new leader would need many years to tackle.

Hence, Yudhoyono will most likely be remembered as a president who used democratic means to bring Indonesia stability for the decade he governed – which is a better record than any of his predecessors can claim. Yudhoyono's rule was longer than that of any other democratic leader in Indonesian history; in fact, it was longer than that of all seven democratic prime ministers in the 1950s combined, and longer than the combined terms of all three of his post-Suharto predecessors. But Yudhoyono will also go down in history as a president who did little to lift Indonesia to the next level of institutional sophistication, democratic quality and economic maturity. In short, while Yudhoyono ensured that Indonesian democracy did not break down, his name will not be tied to any major reform that could have made the democratic system more resilient beyond his own presidency.

The structure of the remainder of this book is straightforward. It begins with a brief prologue by Dewi Fortuna Anwar, who was a government insider during the Yudhoyono presidency. The remaining chapters are grouped in four themed segments: personal, comparative and international perspectives (Part 1); institutions, politics and security (Part 2); gender, human rights and environment (Part 3); and the economy and social policies (Part 4). Within these segments, the various chapters explore different topics that were vital policy areas in the Yudhoyono years. In each case, they endeavour to provide an overall assessment of achievements and failings in the area covered, to assess Yudhoyono's personal contribution to those outcomes and, where possible, to compare Indonesia's experience to those of relevant comparator countries. While a range of views are expressed, and not all of the authors share our assessment of Yudhoyono's legacy, overall we believe that the analyses presented in the book furnish a significant body of evidence to support our fundamental contention that the Yudhoyono decade was a period of *both* remarkable democratic stability *and* underlying democratic stagnation.

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