government agencies involved in rice production and marketing on the one hand and domestic consumers on the other. We know from agricultural censuses and other surveys that ownership of irrigated land is restricted to a minority of all cultivators, especially in the densely settled parts of Indonesia and the Philippines. They are often among the better-off cultivators, and they have benefited from Green Revolution policies more than other farmers. But increasingly they are cultivating irrigated land with more non-rice crops, including a range of vegetables that are more profitable than rice. Some economists argue that in all three countries, rice imports will almost certainly continue in the coming decade and that the private sector could do a better job in importing and marketing rice than parastatals. These debates are unlikely to go away any time soon, and this book will continue to be an important guide to analysing the complex issues arising from rice policy across Southeast Asia.

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Ruling Indonesia: Jokowi's Presidency in an Age of Democratic Crisis and Great Power Competition. By Marcus Mietzner. University of Michigan Press, 2026. xxii+259 pp.

When Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") entered national politics in 2013, he was widely seen as a breath of fresh air: a modest furniture entrepreneur from Central Java unencumbered by the patronage networks and dynastic politics associated with Indonesia's established elites. His meteoric rise from mayor to governor and then president was fuelled in part by hopes that he would consolidate the gains of the post-Soeharto era, provide a democratic counterweight to his rival Prabowo Subianto and usher in a new phase of political and economic reform.

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Eleven years and two presidential terms later, Jokowi left office, having centralized executive authority, weakened key democratic institutions and reshaped the party system around an infrastructure-focused developmental agenda. The outsider expected to deepen Indonesia's democratic transition instead demonstrated how electoral popularity could be converted into a powerful instrument of executive consolidation. Sustaining remarkably high approval ratings throughout, he narrowed the space for political competition and helped elevate his former rival Prabowo to the presidency and his own son to the vice-presidency.

In *Ruling Indonesia*, Marcus Mietzner delivers an incisive account of Jokowi's transformation, tracing the logics that shaped his political behaviour, the techniques through which he consolidated power and the consequences of his brand of infrastructure-focused developmentalism for Indonesia's party system, democracy and geopolitical orientation.

Drawing on direct access to Jokowi and key elite actors, Mietzner develops this argument through thematic chapters covering coalition management, infrastructure, foreign policy, pandemic governance, democracy and the succession manoeuvres that defined the end of his tenure.

The picture that emerges is that of a president fixated on economic development and largely uninterested in ideas, policy detail or institutional reform. Jokowi is depicted as being driven by an instrumental pragmatism: effective at mobilizing projects and managing elites, but thin in vision and unable to articulate a coherent governing framework.

Chapter 1 situates Jokowi's rise within Indonesia's post-*reformasi* context, where fragmented elites and a personality-centred electoral system created opportunities for popular regional leaders to scale local popularity into national power. Jokowi's ascent from mayor to national office highlighted the vulnerabilities of a political system in which parties lacked institutional depth and loyalties remained fluid.

Chapter 2 examines Jokowi's approach to power-building, which Mietzner characterizes as methodical and transactional. His authority

expanded through the systematic co-optation and disciplining of political actors. Rather than treating parties as programmatic organizations, Jokowi used them as instruments of coalition-building, maintaining their loyalty through a calibrated mix of patronage, access and pressure. Mietzner argues that his political skill lay in understanding that power rested less on ideological commitments than on the effective balancing of elite interests.

Popularity was central to this strategy. Jokowi treated approval ratings as political capital, using them to bend elites to his will and as democratic validation. This logic underpinned his ostensive pragmatism, producing a governing style that was reactive to polling and focused on infrastructure. It made Jokowi an effective political operator, though one who rarely translated political success into a broader programme of institutional change.

Chapter 3 examines Jokowi's infrastructure-centred developmentalism, with Nusantara serving as its most ambitious expression. The new capital project highlights both his relentless drive for large-scale projects and his willingness to incur substantial economic, social and democratic costs, even when public support was weak. It also reveals developmentalism as a coalitional enterprise of business groups, brokers and local strongmen, with infrastructure serving as a distribution mechanism for contracts and rents.

Jokowi's navigation of intensifying US-China rivalry, covered in chapter 4, illustrates how he combined Indonesia's tradition of non-alignment with a distinctly pragmatic foreign policy. Seeking economic benefits from China while maintaining security ties with the United States, he avoided alignment with either camp. Mietzner argues that external relations were shaped less by geopolitical vision than by domestic political imperatives, particularly sustaining popularity, retaining elite support and preserving presidential autonomy. As Rizal Sukma, a leading foreign policy intellectual and former presidential adviser, observed, foreign policy ideas had to be translated into economic terms before Jokowi could understand their significance.

Jokowi's instrumental approach to governing was thrown into sharp relief during the Covid-19 crisis, the subject of chapter 5. His response was marked by emotional detachment, inconsistent

public health measures and repeated delays, even as both the health emergency and economic downturn deepened. Despite presiding over Indonesia's largest irregular loss of life since the 1965 massacres, Jokowi maintained exceptionally high approval ratings. Mietzner argues that this resilience owed less to effective crisis management than to the extensive political power he had accumulated by the end of his first term.

Close relationships with media oligarchs, control over the police and military and a governing coalition holding more than 80 per cent of parliamentary seats insulated Jokowi from accountability. This came at the cost of shrinking space for opposition and dissent. The period revealed a striking tension between Jokowi's attentiveness to public opinion, measured through constant polling, and the increasingly restrictive political environment produced by executive dominance. As Mietzner notes, polling in 2022 found that 62 per cent of respondents were fearful of expressing their views, including a majority of Jokowi's own supporters.

Chapter 6 assesses Jokowi's impact on Indonesian democracy, showing how he frequently perceived institutions as impediments to his development agenda. Mietzner argues that he weakened parties and oversight bodies when they obstructed priorities, a course broadly approved by the majority. Democracy was thus understood in practice as majority consent rather than institutional constraint.

Mietzner concludes that Jokowi left Indonesia with a democracy formally intact but substantively diminished. His infrastructure drive delivered visible gains. However, economic outcomes were uneven and fell short of the transformative narrative that he projected. His governing style expanded executive dominance, weakened party autonomy and normalized poll-driven decision-making. At the same time, media regulation, the policing of dissent and the containment of opposition contributed to a more tightly managed political environment. Democratic procedures endured, but the space for meaningful contestation narrowed considerably.

Chapter 7 examines what is perhaps Jokowi's most consequential legacy, his intervention in the succession politics. Despite early warnings of Prabowo's unsuitability for the presidency, Jokowi

ultimately helped facilitate his ascent, driven by a desire to secure his legacy through his son's advancement. Mietzner argues that this set a precedent for incumbent influence over electoral outcomes without altering formal rules, one that future presidents may be tempted to emulate.

In the end, Mietzner offers a critical yet measured appraisal of a leader whose popularity and developmental ambitions reshaped Indonesia's political landscape while narrowing the scope of democratic contestation. *Ruling Indonesia* is indispensable reading for anyone seeking to understand Jokowi's presidency, offering the most detailed and analytically coherent account to date of how his governing style transformed Indonesian politics.

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Domestic Nationalism: Muslim Women, Health, and Modernity in Indonesia. By Chiara Formichi. Stanford University Press, 2025. xix+271 pp.

Chiara Formichi's *Domestic Nationalism* is a refreshing and timely intervention on the important yet under-recognized role that Muslim women play in Indonesia's public health and nation-building. She argues that indigenous women deploy and reconfigure both religious and scientific approaches in their traditional, everyday, gendered roles of care work and domestic labour to claim their agency in both the home and public spheres. Tracing women's engagements in Java and Sumatra across four historical phases under different regimes between 1901 and 1959, she brings out the complex "interplay of class, education, race, and religion in the colonial and postcolonial contexts" (p. 4) through their voices and experiences, which are often ignored except when appropriated to benefit colonial and national agendas.