Indonesia's 2024 Election

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It is 2024, and in 64 countries worldwide, about 49% of the world's population is asked to vote in national elections. On Wednesday, the 14. February 2024 was Indonesia's turn. In the world's largest single-day election, 204 million Indonesians were asked to vote. While the official result is to be expected by 20 March, nationwide quick counts by different independent pollsters show Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's current Defence Minister, and his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of incumbent president Joko Widodo, well ahead of their rivals. With around 58% of votes in his favour, the 72-year-old former special forces commander Prabowo declared victory.

Echoes of a Bygone Era

The circumstances of Prabowo's victory, however, cause concerns. For critics, Prabowo, the former son-in-law of military dictator Suharto, symbolises the old political system of Indonesia. Allegations of human rights violations during his time in active military service in the Indonesian counterinsurgency campaign in East Timur and West Papua and his alleged involvement in the kidnapping of Pro-democracy activists in 1998 are reoccurring despite never being proven. In his previous attempts to become president in 2014 and 2019, he vigorously promoted nationalism. He cooperated with Islamist extremist groups, and both times initially denied his defeat, which led to 8 people dying in riots. This time, he rebranded himself as a 'harmless grandpa' who danced in TikTok videos. This resonated particularly well with the younger demographic below 40, representing more than half of the voting population.

Another source of criticism is Prabowo's running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka. Despite being the son of the popular President Joko Widodo, commonly known as Jokowi, Gibran is faced with scepticism. Though he had followed in his father's footsteps by assuming the mayoral office in Solo in 2021, he did so at a much younger age. Now, at 36 years old and with two years of experience in public office, he is likely to become vice president of Indonesia. Next to his lack of experience, the process of becoming a candidate was harshly criticised. While the minimum age for the office is 40, Indonesia's Constitutional Court ruled in October 2023 that the minimum age does not apply to candidates who got elected to public office before. Chief Justice Anwar Usman, Jokowi's brother-in-law, took the decision. After corruption allegations, Usman stepped down, but the ruling was upheld, and Gibran became Prabowo's official running mate.

Foundation of Democracy

Looking ahead, despite criticisms of Prabowo's past and the contentious court ruling, the duo secured the majority of votes. While some human rights activists raised concerns about the role of President Jokowi and allegations of the misuse of state resources during Prabowo's campaign, independent analysts found no evidence of electoral fraud in the voting process itself.

The onus now lies with Prabowo and Gibran to dispel fears of a regression to Indonesia's authoritarian past, pay back the voters' trust, and demonstrate their commitment to democratic values and governance.