RULING INDONESIA

Jokowi's Presidency in an Age of Democratic Crisis and Great Power Competition

MARCUS MIETZNER

Ruling Indonesia

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Abbreviations

AJI	Aliansi Jurnalis Independen, Alliance of Independent Journalists
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASMINDO	Asosiasi Industri Permebelan dan Kerajinan Indonesia, Indonesian Furniture and Handicraft Industry Association
AUKUS	Australia–United Kingdom–United States (military alliance)
BIN	Badan Intelijen Negara, State Intelligence Agency
BPOM	Badan Pengawas Obat dan Makanan, Indonesian Food and Drug Supervisory Agency
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (intergovernmental organization)
DPD	Dewan Perwakilan Daerah, Regional Representatives Council
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EU	European Union
EV	Electric Vehicle
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FPI	Front Pembela Islam, Front of the Defenders of Islam
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
Golkar	Golongan Karya, Functional Groups (political party)
HIPMI	Himpunan Pengusaha Muda Indonesia, Indonesian Young Entrepreneurs Association
HTI	Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia, Indonesian Party of Liberation (organization)
IBM	International Business Machines (corporation)

IMF	International Monetary Fund
INA	Indonesian Investment Authority
IRR	Internal Rate of Return
KASN	Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara, Civil Service Commission
KIB	Koalisi Indonesia Bersatu, United Indonesia Coalition
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
KPK	Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, Corruption Eradication Commission
KPU	Komisi Pemilihan Umum, General Elections Commission
Lemhannas	Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional, National Resilience Institute
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Intersex
LRT	Light Rail Transit
MK	Mahkamah Konstitusi, Constitutional Court
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPR	Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat, People's Consultative Council
MUI	Majelis Ulama Indonesia, Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Nasdem	Nasional Demokrat, National Democrats (political party)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NU	Nahdlatul Ulama, Revival of the Islamic Scholars (organization)
PAN	Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party
PDI-P	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia—Perjuangan, Party of Indonesian Democracy—Struggle
Perindo	Partai Persatuan Indonesia, Party of Indonesian Unity
PKI	Partai Komunis Indonesia, Indonesian Communist Party
PPP	Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Party of Unity and Development
PSI	Partai Solidaritas Indonesia, Indonesian Solidarity Party
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
VIP	Very Important Persons
VOC	Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, United East India Company
VP	Vice President
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Acknowledgments

This book would not have been possible without crucial assistance by its protagonist: that is, Joko Widodo, or Jokowi, the Indonesian president from 2014 to 2024. He agreed to a series of interviews; he gave instructions that key members of his cabinet should meet with me; and he invited me on trips, including to his new capital. But most importantly, he accepted rules of the game that were rather unusual for a powerful president like him. I say more about these rules in the preface, but it suffices to state here that he refrained from interventions; was happy to respond to questions that were not on the list submitted to him; and generally enjoyed an unscripted banter. At no point did he or his staff demand to know what I would write about him. I am deeply grateful to President Jokowi for this fair and open-minded cooperation. There is no doubt that he will dislike much of what is presented in this book, and he may even regret not having asked for controls being imposed on my work. But the fact that he was prepared to participate in this project without the formal parameters normally established gives insights into some of the unconventional aspects of his political persona. Indeed, in his willingness to bypass protocol and engage in an exercise that carried significant risk for him, we find characteristics of both his origins as a political outsider and his self-styled image as a maverick. It is fair to say that few of his predecessors would have consented to participating in the production of such a book. Whatever one may think about Jokowi and his political legacy, he deserves credit for his sportsmanlike attitude to going on this ride.

Among Jokowi's staff, I am indebted to several people who helped with the project and were always at hand to arrange interviews and other aspects of the research. Sukardi Rinakit, Jokowi's special staff and speech writer, was

instrumental in this regard. As an academic himself, he was a strong believer in the need for Jokowi to receive systematic and balanced scholarly treatment, rather than the over-the-top praise offered in many hagiographies. Anggit Nugroho, Jokowi's private secretary, also showed great interest in the project and was present in several of the interviews. Jokowi's state secretary, Pratikno, was key to securing interviews with the most prominent members of the cabinet. When that effort initially stalled—despite Jokowi's instructions to staff—Pratikno came to the rescue: during a dinner with me, he grabbed his phone and called more than a dozen ministers directly. From then on, my calendar was always full. I had known Pratikno for more than two decades, and I could always trust that he and his passion as a political scientist would move this initiative forward. Luhut Pandjaitan was another of Jokowi's close confidants who strongly supported me. A controversial figure, Luhut had been a feisty interview sparring partner for me since I first met him in 2013. He didn't disappoint in this case, either. He took me on a two-day trip to Bali, during which I interviewed him for eight hours. I am also immensely thankful to all other ministers, officials, academics, and activists who were willing to be interviewed. This includes people who had very difficult relationships with Jokowi during that time, such as my longtime friends Ganjar Pranowo and Faisal Basri. Sadly, Faisal died before the completion of this book.

Among my academic colleagues, I am particularly appreciative of the close cooperation with Jun Honna, from Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto. Indeed, without him, the project would not have taken off. Jun had also been approached by Jokowi's assistants to do a book on Jokowi, and it was in the context of these conversations that the palace reached out to me, too. Subsequently, Jun and I did one interview with Jokowi together (in August 2023), and Jun will publish his own, separate books—in Japanese and English—in due course. Furthermore, much of my book was written during two visiting fellowships at Ritsumeikan University in 2023 and 2024. Jun and I also organized a conference on Jokowi's legacy in November 2024 in Kyoto. The event, which brought together academics and observers from Indonesia, Japan, and Australia, was jointly run by the Australian National University (ANU) and Ritsumeikan University. We are grateful to the director of the Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs at ANU, Julien Barbara, for generous financial support for this gathering of leading Jokowi experts, and to the director of the Institute of International Relations and Area Studies at Ritsumeikan University, Kenki Adachi, for invaluable logistical assistance in hosting it.

It is hard to overstate the long-term scholarly support I have received from my home institution, the Department of Political and Social Change at ANU's Coral Bell School. The department now houses the largest team of Indonesian politics researchers outside of Indonesia. Edward Aspinall, Greg Fealy, Eve Warburton, Sana Jaffrey, and Robert Cribb have shaped my view of contemporary Indonesian politics more than they know. I have also learned a lot from my current and past PhD students, such as Monty Pounder, Jefferson Ng, Chris Morris, Liam Gammon, Bayu Dardias, and Burhanuddin Muhtadi. Burhanuddin is now Indonesia's leading pollster, and this book draws heavily from some of his data and information. Outside of ANU, I have benefited from conversations with a wide range of international colleagues, including Dan Slater (who is also the editor of the series in which this book appears), Thomas Pepinsky, Bill Liddle, Vedi Hadiz, Sidney Jones, Margaret Scott, Nick Kuipers, and John Roosa. Diplomats in Jakarta who have exchanged views with me on the Jokowi presidency include Julian Bowen, Tom Coghlan, Laura Beke, Gustav Dahlin, and Daniel Blockert. Finally, I acknowledge financial support by the Australian Research Council, through my Discovery Project "Presidential Power and Its Limits in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia," which ran from 2015 to 2023, with follow-up funding from ANU for another year. These funds allowed me to do this project independently, and I hope that readers will see value in this independence.

A Note on the Use of Names

In this book, I have chosen an eclectic approach to the use of Indonesian names. This is because there is no set standard in this regard, especially as far as the identification of the "main" or "family" name is concerned. Both Indonesian and Western press outlets have used widely different formats. In the case of Prabowo Subianto, for instance, both "Prabowo" and "Subianto" have been used. This book adopts a case-by-case approach—sometimes following majority usage, and at other times highlighting the "main" name in order to distinguish between persons using the same first name (both Jokowi's then minister of health and his minister of transportation, for example, are commonly referred to as "Budi"). This "system" might be unsatisfactory to some readers, but a forced standardization—using only first names or only "main" names—is even less effective. In terms of the use of the popular acronym "Jokowi" (a combination of "Joko" and "Widodo"), I have adopted it for this book because it best reflects the evolution of his political brand. In some of my other, more formal political science publications on Jokowi's Indonesia, I have used "Widodo" instead. But for a book that so heavily focuses on his personality and style of politics, I found the use of "Jokowi" more appropriate. The moniker was key to his rise and the manufactured image of a benevolent man of the people—and as such, it is part of the story of his presidency that this book intends to tell.

PREFACE

"When He Signals to the Right, He'll Turn Left"

Writing about Jokowi

When an aide to President Jokowi asked me in July 2023 whether I wanted to write a book about his rule, I was surprised. Over the years, I had published some unflattering things about the president, and Jokowi's assistants were well aware of that. To be sure, when Jokowi first ran for the presidency in 2014, I had viewed him as the best option to prevent the rise of Prabowo Subianto and his neo-authoritarian agenda at that time. But once in office, Jokowi displayed some autocratic tendencies of his own, and much of my scholarly writing on this period was therefore critical in nature. For a book on Jokowi's coalition management, published in 2023, I had submitted a written interview request to the presidential office, but never received a reply. I concluded from that that the president and his staff were unimpressed by my publications about the democratic crisis in the Jokowi era. Thus, as the request to produce a book on Jokowi was put to me, I asked his aide whether he—and the president—knew what they were doing. The answer was encouraging: the president's assistant said that the last thing they were after was yet another Jokowi hagiography, and what they wanted was a scholarly, sound book. In my first meeting with Jokowi on the project, the president echoed this. "Just write the good and the bad," he said, looking both confident and willing to accept some roughness. Initially skeptical, I began to feel that a book on Jokowi's presidency that incorporated and

critically tested Jokowi's own thinking about his rule would be worthwhile. Having worked on Indonesian elite politics for a quarter of a century, I also knew that the chance to directly probe a sitting president was a unique opportunity.

Ultimately, I decided to write the book after Jokowi's team, at my request, gave me a number of assurances. First, I made it clear that I would not accept any form of payment or other compensation. All funds required for the writing of the book were to be taken from my existing research grant. Obviously, financial independence is crucial in such contexts, and while Jokowi's advisers at the beginning thought that some "logistics" should be provided, they dropped that idea after I asked them to. The only thing I sought from Jokowi and his aides was access to him and his cabinet, and this was granted. Second, I was given full editorial autonomy. The president or his assistants would not get to see the manuscript before publication. Had a request been made for the text to be pre-approved or otherwise scrutinized, I would not have agreed to the project. Third, the choice of publisher was mine. At first, Jokowi's aides suggested that they could handle the publication and cover the printing costs, but I quickly disabused them of that notion. Not only would that have collided with the principle of my editorial autonomy, it would also have undermined the credibility of the output. Like any other scholarly publication, the manuscript emerging from this project had to undergo rigorous peer review. Fourth, while Jokowi's team would have preferred publication in 2024—the last year of his presidency—I argued that this was not doable. In addition to the in-depth interviewing of Jokowi, the interviews with other figures, and the time to write up the research into a book, the publication with a university press would take up a lot more time. This was accepted. With all these guarantees provided, the project was now mine, not Jokowi's.

As the conditions under which the book would be produced had been clarified, my mind turned toward the question of what *kind* of book it should be. In this regard, I was more certain about what it should *not* be than what the ideal format could look like. For instance, I was convinced that it could not be a biography. I had too much respect for the authors of *magnum opus* biographies of Indonesian leaders than to claim that my book would be in the same league. John Legge's biography of Sukarno (1972), Rudolf Mrázek's of Syahrir (1994), Penders's and Sundhaussen's of Nasution (1985), or Bob Elson's of Suharto (2001)—all these were based on many years of interviews and meticulous archival research. Giving as much attention to their subjects' childhood and rise as to their time in power, these authors deeply penetrated their protagonists' character and family. In recent

years, David Jenkins (2021) delivered the most compelling example of this genre: a thorough biography of the young Suharto. As a political scientist rather than a historian, I did not intend to research Jokowi's childhood or pre-presidency life at the level of detail that a proper biography would have required. I also had no interest in following in the footsteps of Greg Barton (2002), who wrote an "authorized biography" of Abdurrahman Wahid. His book was "lighter" than that of other presidential biographers, and its label as an "authorized" account took away much of its potential analytical edge. Finally, I was also reluctant to adopt the approach taken by Ben Bland (2020a), who too casually had called his very short yet well-written book on Jokowi a "political biography." It was clear to me, then, that my book had to stay away from the biography brand.

While I had written on Jokowi's presidency as a political scientist for almost a decade, I also felt that there was little benefit in adding another attempt to theorize Jokowi within the existing conceptual literature. As noted, I had published a book on the patterns of Jokowi's coalition-building in 2023, which was embedded in comparative presidentialism and democracy studies. But while theory can help sharpen the perspective on particular elements of a polity, it can also be limiting. In Jokowi's case, for example, it is true that his presidency was much concerned with power accumulation, the Machiavellian art of dispensing rewards and punishments, and the accommodation of oligarchic interests. But it was about other things, too. It was, in more ways than sometimes acknowledged by political scientists, about economic strategies, infrastructure development, foreign policy, and the management of a historic pandemic. And it was, much to the frustration of political theorists as well, about the odd character of a man who had risen from his rather mundane existence as a furniture entrepreneur in Central Java to the apex of the Indonesian state. Unpacking the effectiveness of this unlikely politician—who would retire as Indonesia's most powerful post-autocratic president—does not only require a conceptual understanding of the political system in which he operated. Importantly, it necessitates a close look at the personality of Jokowi in equal measure. Hence, I concluded that my book on Jokowi could draw from, but eventually had to sit outside of, the traditional political science writings that had marked my academic work so far.

Weighing the considerations of scope and the extent of theoretical treatment, I resolved that a book concentrating on Jokowi's ten-year presidency and appealing to a broad readership—but one generally interested in Indonesia—would deliver the best value for most. Avoiding academic jargon and involving techniques of storytelling, the book I decided to write offers

a portrait of Jokowi's rule and explains how it impacted his country and the world. Of course, in telling the story of Jokowi's presidency, the book is still rooted in the scholarly discourses on the president and his time. But it eschews the use of a singular theoretical framework or even the use of one disciplinary lens. Having observed the Jokowi presidency since its inception, I sensed that its story could not be told without discussing how he built and defended his power; how economic development served as his primary compass; how he navigated the Sino-American rivalry in search of stability and commercial benefits; how he prioritized the economy during the COVID-19 crisis; how he subordinated democracy to his overall development agenda; and how he planned his succession to protect his legacy and the interests of his family. Delivering this narrative requires an openness toward contributions from multiple disciplinary fields that some might equate with a lack of conceptual cohesion. But in this book, such heterogeneity is—for once—fully intended. Indeed, it is foundational for the book's mission of producing a comprehensive picture of the sociopolitical forces that Jokowi dealt with as leader, while also analyzing what made the president tick—and what made him so popular.

The interviews with Jokowi for this book were conducted over the course of one year, between July 2023 and July 2024.[1] Each session was based on one of the themes mentioned above, and lasted between forty-five minutes and two and a half hours, depending on the president's schedule. The themes discussed then served as the foundation for the various chapters in this book. Outside of the thematic discussions, however, Jokowi typically started every interview with an exchange about the latest political developments. In these exchanges, he asked me questions, and I asked him questions in return. These political update segments allowed me to trace the president's thinking throughout what was arguably the most important period of his rule: that is, the search for his successor and the run-up to the vital 2024 elections. The interviews were carried out in three locations: Jakarta's Merdeka Palace, Bogor Palace, and Nusantara, the site of the new capital. In addition to the interviews, I followed Jokowi on four days of travel to his home town of Solo, Samarinda in East Kalimantan, and Nusantara. This travel gave me the chance not only to ask more questions, but to observe his interactions with aides, ministers, and crowds. These observations were essential in informing my assessments presented in this book. But as important as interviewing Jokowi was learning from other sources. As noted, Jokowi opened access to his cabinet to me. I interviewed twenty-three sitting or former ministers and cabinet-level officials. Moreover, I met independently with human rights activists, observers, economists, and pollsters. This produced a pool of inter-

viewees that included both those personally and politically closest to him and fierce critics of his rule.

Interviewing top-level elites brings with it a series of methodological challenges (Mikecz 2012; Harvey 2010; Berry 2002). These relate to power imbalances, the reliability of what is conveyed, and the use of the data itself. In my experience, the most effective way to mitigate these concerns is by presenting the interviewee with critical counterpoints to their statements. These "rebuttals" can be drawn from other interviews, media reporting, quantitative statistics, and additional empirical and analytical sources. Such an approach, in turn, requires a maximum level of preparation. Similarly crucial is the later contextualization of the interviewee's quotations in a set of potentially contradicting information. Jokowi was a particularly challenging interviewee in this regard. While we should generally assume that elite politicians aim to present themselves in the best possible light when being interviewed, and do not shy away from bending the truth in the process, Jokowi had a legendary reputation for trying to put others on the wrong track. Romahurmuziy, one of Jokowi's former ministers, put it aptly in 2023: "Often, when he signals to the right, he'll turn left, or he signals to the left, and then turns right" (Sidik 2023).[2] He warned that everything Jokowi said had to be seen in a larger context of his political interests, and reading him accurately demanded a long-term understanding of what these interests were.[3] This brings us back to the issue of preparation: interviewing Jokowi without knowledge of the concrete strategic situation he faced at the time of the interview would have been a doomed-to-fail enterprise. I certainly will have missed some nuances and internal secrets, but I am confident that I was as well-prepared as one could be.

Another methodological challenge in interviewing elites, and especially someone as senior as Jokowi, is to separate the person's own, original thinking from what staff might have prepared for them. For the interviews with Jokowi, I was asked to submit questions prior to the sessions, and his aides prepared material for him. As a general rule, I omitted anything Jokowi said while looking at this material. Instead, I tried to draw him into an open conversation, and in the vast majority of cases, he was happy to oblige. He never objected when additional questions were asked, or when probing follow-ups were put to him. Whenever he passionately defended a point in a free-wheeling manner, in unpolished language, and without notes, I sensed that I came as close to his raw thinking as possible. There were many points in our interviews that provided such moments of rawness and clarity. They were often accompanied by intense hand gesturing that signaled that he strongly believed in what he expressed. Having said that, I remain conscious that

Jokowi did not disclose certain things to me, and that—as Romahurmuziy indicated—he tried to gaslight me if it served his goal of designing a narrative he wanted to see presented in the book. As the reader will note, I clearly marked the passages where I was convinced that Jokowi was not offering the full story or claimed to have turned left when in fact he had turned right. In this sense, interviewing Jokowi was not different from the dynamics of other book projects on prominent political leaders—it meant navigating a web of self-interest, vanity, strategic truth-telling, and gaslighting. All the author can do is be constantly on alert to identify each of these strategies or traits.

Any book focusing on political leaders inevitably steps into the eternal debate on the role of structure and agency in producing historical outcomes (Hays 1994; Holls and Smith 1994; Dowding 2008). It is obvious that presidents such as Jokowi do not determine political events through their sheer will; they operate in a long-grown social and institutional environment, and respond to the actors who have emerged from it over time. This book highlights many examples of the constraints Jokowi faced when trying to make decisions or execute policies. At the same time, however, it is important not to downplay the power that top-level elites have to shape the course of action in their regimes. As far as Jokowi was concerned, there is ample evidence that whenever he decided to invest his political capital in an issue, and mobilized all his resources to advance it, he was more likely than not to succeed. Many of the symbols of economic modernization in the early 2020s—whether the high-speed rail from Jakarta to Bandung or the many new airports across the country—carry Jokowi's signature. In fact, he was even able to push through a project almost everyone else thought was irrational: that is, the relocation of the capital to Nusantara. Conversely, when he was uninterested in a specific topic, and thought it deserved less attention than his priorities, the outcome was neglect and decline in this area. From this perspective, Jokowi's lack of interest in the management of democratic institutions was as consequential to Indonesia as his passionate advocacy for improved infrastructure. Thus, this book shows Jokowi as the most powerful Indonesian figure of his time—through both his deliberate actions and strategic omissions.

CHAPTER 1

"Genius" or the Bringer of a "Rotten Smell"?

Jokowi, Indonesia, and Their Place in the World

In 2021, seasoned Singaporean ex-diplomat and academic Kishore Mahbubani left an interview with President Jokowi beaming with admiration. Mahbubani had made a name for himself as a critic of the West's views of Asia, which he believed focused too much on its own liberal values and too little on the region's need for socioeconomic development (Mahbubani 2018). In Jokowi, Mahbubani had found his ideal Asian politician. When he decided to pen his thoughts on the Indonesian leader, his prose burst with superlatives. Jokowi, in Mahbubani's eyes, was the globe's "most effective democratically elected leader today," who provided "a model of good governance from which the rest of the world can learn" (Mahbubani 2021). Titled "The Genius of Jokowi," Mahbubani's essay claimed that Jokowi "set new standards of governance that should be the envy of other large democracies." Jokowi, according to Mahbubani, was a unifier: whereas the United States and other Western societies had become polarized, the Indonesian president brought former opponents into his government. Mahbubani asserted that Jokowi, inspired by his own upbringing in poverty, made policies for the poor when "he could have naturally drifted into the company of billionaires, as many politicians do." At the same time, as Mahbubani was quick to note, Jokowi remained a "staunch capitalist" who advanced business competitiveness and built infrastructure. Mahbubani also praised Jokowi for "prudent" geopolitical strategies, balancing Indonesia's ties with China and the United States. Given these achievements, Mahbubani concluded that Jokowi deserved more "acclaim" than the world, and some at home, were prepared to give him.

Indeed, other commentators were much less kind than Mahbubani. While broadly acknowledging Jokowi's economic achievements, some observers and media outlets saw his impact on Indonesia's political system in a distinctly critical light. *Time* magazine, for instance, which in 2014 had celebrated Jokowi's rise as a beacon of hope, expressed its disillusionment ten years later. "As the curtains fall on Jokowi's decade of rule, he may be remembered more for ushering in a new era of democratic decline," its correspondent Koh Ewe (2024) remarked. Highlighting areas of governance Mahbubani strategically overlooked, the magazine lamented that "under his leadership, Indonesia has [. . .] seen increased online censorship and a crackdown on critics, as well as legislative changes that critics say infringe on democratic values." *Time* also pointed to trends that were very common in late-stage presidents in the developing world and beyond: "Jokowi has [. . .] unabashedly begun fashioning his own political dynasty, having installed his family members in key state positions." Even in Jokowi's primary area of interest, infrastructure-building, *Time* saw evidence of hubris and failure. The magazine indicated that Jokowi's most ambitious infrastructure initiative, the relocation of Indonesia's capital from Jakarta on the main island of Java to Kalimantan on Borneo, carried all the hallmarks of a white-elephant project. *The Economist* (2024), reflecting on Jokowi's presidency, echoed *Time*'s assessment: "Jokowi arrived in 2014 as a breath of fresh air. But by failing to entrench Indonesia's democracy, even as he has strengthened its economy, he leaves behind a rotten smell."

What, then, do we make of Jokowi's decade as the leader of the world's third-largest democracy? Was he an underrated "genius" who advanced the prosperity of his people and taught the declining democracies of the West a lesson? Or was he a flawed politician who undermined democracy while building a dynasty and spending funds on unnecessary projects? In Indonesia itself, the vast majority sided with Mahbubani: Jokowi commanded some of the highest approval ratings of any president or prime minister in the world. But leaders, especially of democracies, need to be measured not only by their majority support, but by how they treated—and were perceived by—critical minorities. In this regard, the gap between how most Indonesians viewed Jokowi, and what the critical fringes of society felt he did to the polity, was wide. This book tries to give justice to both sides of the debate on Jokowi's presidency. In doing so, it argues that he was a single-minded leader with a near-obsessive focus on economic development. All other aspects of presidential governance were subordinated to this goal: the nurturing of institutions; the maintenance of democratic and electoral processes; the formulation of foreign policy; and even the management of

a once-in-a-century pandemic. Jokowi left an Indonesia that was economically stronger than he found it, but also one that was institutionally and democratically diminished. This legacy was, in many ways, a reflection of his personal character. A proud opponent of multitasking, he believed that presidents needed to focus on a limited number of themes in order to succeed.[1] Predictably, this led to successes in the areas he concentrated on and to neglect in those that he undervalued.

This chapter sets the scene for the systematic investigation of Jokowi's presidency in the rest of the book. It starts with an exposition of the reasons why readers around the world should care about Indonesia and the man who led it for a decade. While Jokowi's thinking and actions were Indonesia-centric, they were also similar to the attitudes of many of his Global South peers. This makes insights into Jokowi's rule essential for the understanding of a broader group of world leaders who prioritize their economies over Western appeals to their supposed democratic obligations. In this initial section, we also review the streams of literature that have discussed Jokowi thus far. The second section briefly explores Jokowi's rise to the presidency. While a deeper discussion of Jokowi's origins in politics is beyond the scope of this book, we need to recognize the motivations and mechanisms that facilitated his ascent to power. The third section delves into the sources of Jokowi's popularity, which served as his main political capital throughout his rule. Without understanding Jokowi's unique appeal to the electorate, it is not possible to grasp why he became Indonesia's most powerful post-Suharto president. The fourth section delivers a portrait of Jokowi's character. Jokowi's rise was all the more remarkable because his personal traits seemed so at odds with his public persona of a charismatic man of the people. A poor public speaker, often socially awkward, and emotionally distant, he needed assistance in crafting the energetic image ordinary people had of him. His social aloofness helped him, however, to be a focused and ruthless Machiavellian ruler. The final section then presents an overview of the chapter structure of this book.

Indonesia and Jokowi

In a compelling piece in the *Washington Post* in February 2023, columnist Max Boot remarked that "it's hard to think of another country as big and important as Indonesia that is so completely ignored by the American public." Indeed, Indonesia boasts numerous superlatives that should make it a priority for geopolitical actors: with 285 million citizens, Indonesia has the

world's fourth-largest population; it is the third-most-populous democracy, just after India and the United States; and it is the biggest Muslim-majority country, dwarfing the likes of Saudi Arabia. It is a member of the exclusive club of the world's twenty largest economies, ranking 16th with a total GDP of US$1.4 trillion in 2024. Some economic forecasts project it to be the fourth-largest economy by 2050 (PwC 2017). The country is the world's largest nickel producer, making it a key player in the future market for electric vehicle batteries. Indonesia is also the planet's biggest archipelago, and thus hosts strategic waterways. This includes the Malacca Straits, through which most of China's energy supply passes. Predictably, then, American and Chinese policymakers have taken interest in Indonesia, trying to pull it on their respective sides in their growing rivalry. And yet, as Boot (2023) asked, "how many Americans could name the [then] president of Indonesia, Joko Widodo (known as Jokowi)? Americans generally only pay attention to news from Indonesia when there are [. . .] disasters [. . .]. Few Americans have visited any part of the vast archipelago other than Bali." Despite its colonial connections to Indonesia, Europeans wouldn't score much better in this regard. Boot, therefore, called on the West in a shouting headline to "Pay Attention to Indonesia: It Will Help Determine the Future of Asia."

As Boot indicated, the West's lack of interest in Indonesia led most citizens in the industrialized world to be ignorant of Jokowi's existence or significance. In contrast to Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of Brazil, Mahendra Modi of India, or Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Türkiye, who became household names in the West, Jokowi was known only to experts or intellectual elites. Even in Australia, Indonesia's neighbor to the south, many citizens did not know who Jokowi was. In a poll by the Lowy Institute (2024), respondents were asked who among a selection of twelve world leaders they trusted the most. Thirty-one percent of respondents professed not to know Jokowi or not to know how to answer—the highest percentage for any president or prime minister on the survey list. By comparison, only 13 percent of respondents did not know then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Even UN Secretary-General António Guterres—not precisely a decision-maker in international affairs—had a higher name recognition than Jokowi. Furthermore, just 33 percent of respondents said that they trusted Jokowi, while 36 percent did not. Only Xi Jinping of China, Vladimir Putin of Russia, and Kim Jung Un of North Korea had lower trust rates with the Australian population. Thus, even after a decade in power, six visits to Australia, and regular travel by Australian prime ministers to Indonesia, Jokowi did not register easily with the Australian public, and many of those who recognized his name did not trust him. Tellingly, while a small book written on

Jokowi by the Lowy Institute's Ben Bland (2020a) sold well, its readership was largely limited to diplomatic, business, and academic circles.

Outside of Indonesia's size, economic potential, geostrategic location, and natural resource wealth, there are additional reasons for the world to pay more attention to the archipelagic nation and its leaders. Chief among them is that Indonesia and its presidents have traditionally offered a window into the thinking of Global South countries vis-à-vis the West and its rivals. In the 1950s, for instance, Indonesian President Sukarno was a spokesman for post-colonial states that wished to escape the Cold War dilemma of having to choose between Washington and Moscow (Anwar 2012). The United States's failure to properly understand Sukarno's political and ideological predispositions led it into a disastrous policy toward the country: America got involved in the regional rebellions of the late 1950s, actively worked toward a breakup of the nation, and ultimately supported the army-led massacre of up to a million suspected communists in 1965/66 (Kahin and Kahin 1997; McMahon 2003; Simpson 2008). As Vincent Bevins (2020) demonstrated, Washington then replicated this misguided approach in other Global South countries, entangling it in a series of coups and dictatorships that damaged its reputation. Similarly, American leaders misread the domestic anticommunism and developmentalism of Suharto (who ruled from 1966 to 1998) as genuine pro-Americanism (Fibiger 2023). United States leaders only became aware of their misconception when Suharto turned toward China, the new Russia, and the Islamic world after the fall of the Berlin Wall. In both cases, a better understanding of the motivations and orientations of Indonesian leaders could have saved America and the West from many a misstep in the rest of the world.

Strong reasons exist, too, to focus on Jokowi's presidency in particular. For a start, he was Indonesia's most powerful post-Suharto president. No other democratic leader of Indonesia exercised such control over the elite, and none commanded such high approval ratings (Sulistiyanto 2018). Moreover, no Indonesian president had defied his skeptics in the way Jokowi had: he was the first head of state not to have emerged from a political, military, or religious elite, and he became the first who managed to anoint his successor. As a result, studying Jokowi promises to deliver valuable insights into how a political upstart came to command the world's third-largest democracy, and how he did so with unprecedented popularity and Machiavellian shrewdness. One does not have to subscribe to Mahbubani's hyperbole to find Jokowi's rise intriguing, especially in an age in which most Western leaders struggle to sustain not only their personal electability, but also the legitimacy of their democratic regimes (Kupchan 2012). As were Sukarno

and Suharto before him, Jokowi was also a representative of his times. In aggressively promoting a developmentalist understanding of democracy, and in placing economic growth over the niceties of democratic procedure, he gained applause from many of his fellow leaders in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. As in past periods, too, Western capitals poorly understood, and thus underappreciated, this thinking. The lukewarm response of Jokowi and others to then US President Joe Biden's Summit for Democracy—an American attempt to forge an alliance of democracies against China—was testament to this weak Western grasp of the thinking in Indonesia and elsewhere in the Global South (Jones 2021).

While overlooked in broader policy debates, Jokowi was the subject of several streams of *academic* literature. But even in these literatures, most contributions were produced by Indonesia experts rather than globally oriented comparativists. The first and perhaps most prominent stream focused on Jokowi's role in Indonesian democracy. In this body of literature, the treatment of Jokowi underwent significant changes over time. Initially, Jokowi was either interpreted as Indonesia's only hope to defeat the neo-authoritarian challenge of Prabowo Subianto in the 2014 elections (Mietzner 2014), or as a puppet of established oligarchic forces (Winters 2013, 2014; Muhtadi 2015). But both groups had to eventually acknowledge that Jokowi had his own plans, and that they aimed neither at saving Indonesian democracy nor at playing second fiddle to the oligarchy. Instead, he systematically built his own regime that mixed democratic and autocratic elements in a way that left the formal foundations of electoral democracy standing but chipped away at their core substance. Consequently, by the early 2020s, most political science authors on Indonesia depicted Jokowi as an agent of democratic decline (Power and Warburton 2020; Mujani and Liddle 2021). Few writers claimed that he had fully crossed over into authoritarian territory, but most were critical about him coming so close to it. By the end of his rule, much of the debate concentrated on how to appraise his democracy-undermining actions against the fact that Indonesia's overall democratic status quo had not collapsed under his rule. Dan Slater (2023, 2014), for instance, found that he was responsible for both outcomes, and that they offered—in equal measure—lessons for the democratic world.

The second stream of scholarly literature on Jokowi was concerned with his economic policies. Once again, most writings in this field have come from long-time Indonesia watchers, especially in the country itself and in Australia. Less worried about democratic decline than their political science colleagues, many economists were impressed with Jokowi. They highlighted his continuation of Indonesia's post-Sukarno tradition of prudent fiscal poli-

cies, his increase of investments in infrastructure, his generally pro-business attitude and initiatives, and his presiding over Indonesia's graduation to an upper-middle-income country (Hill and Negara 2019). This does not mean that they were entirely uncritical, however. Some authors emphasized the growing protectionism during Jokowi's presidency (Gupta 2024); others pointed to his failure to lift annual growth rates beyond a moderate average of 5 percent (Rajah 2018); many were skeptical of Jokowi's use of state-owned enterprises to fund and build his infrastructure projects (Kim and Sumner 2021); and almost everyone believed that moving the capital to Borneo was a bad idea (Mokhtar 2022). But overall, there was little disagreement that Jokowi's economic achievements were more laudable than his political record, and that he had steered Indonesia toward a more modern economy. The magnitude of this success, however, was not great enough to enthuse leading international economists into making Jokowi's Indonesia a focus of their research. For them, it remained a peripheral story.

In the third body of scholarship that touched on Jokowi, authors considered his role in international affairs. Within this discussion, three major perspectives on Jokowi stood out. The first was based on initial statements by Jokowi himself that indicated a lack of interest in foreign policy and a clear preference for the domestic arena (Rosyidin 2017). While this reflected Jokowi's early view on international affairs, it continued to influence foreign policy analyses of him until the end of his term (Arifin 2023). The second main viewpoint on Jokowi's engagement with the world was centered on his alleged geopolitical proximity to China. In this school of thought, Jokowi was described as pursuing Chinese investments, and thus as prioritizing ties with Beijing over those with the United States (Yuliantoro 2020; Rakhmat 2023; Liu and Lim 2023). Most seriously, this interest in Chinese funds led him—in the eyes of some scholars—to go soft on Beijing's aggression in the South China Sea and elsewhere (Sulaiman 2016). As we will see in this book, Jokowi strongly rejected this assessment. The third angle on Jokowi's role in international affairs was that of a hedger toward the great powers (Primarizki 2024; Anwar 2023; Yoshimatsu 2022). In using this technique, some scholars argued, Jokowi was similar to other Southeast Asian leaders who hedged because they wanted to avoid having to choose between China and the United States (Parks 2023). But while they differed on Jokowi's level of interest in foreign policy and his leanings in the Sino-American conflict, most authors agreed that Jokowi did not massively lift Indonesia's international profile during his presidency. For realists in particular, the country remained a benign middle power.

Few attempts have been made to integrate the disparate academic dis-

courses on Jokowi's presidency into an overarching evaluation of his rule. To be sure, there has been no shortage of hagiographies. Of these, Darmawan Prasodjo's (2022) has been the most prolific, with his book published in several languages. But as an account written by a presidential aide, Prasodjo's "political biography" of Jokowi is of limited analytical value. The only scholarly grounded treatment of Jokowi's presidency published during his rule was Blen Bland's *Man of Contradictions*.[2] As noted, Bland's short book was published in Australia in 2020.[3] It portrays Jokowi as a man torn by contradictions within himself and his nation: for instance, by his rise through elections and his antidemocratic actions; his humble origins and his mingling with corrupt oligarchs; his free-trade instincts and his protectionism; and so forth. Ultimately, Bland (2020a) wrote, "the conflicts within Jokowi reflect the profound tensions in a young democracy that is still trying to escape a legacy of colonial oppression and domestic dictatorship, and make its own way in the world." This book will take a different approach. It unpacks the core principle that underpinned Jokowi's thinking and actions as president. This principle was the belief in the primacy of socioeconomic development over other areas of government. In implementing this paradigm, he was remarkably consistent. While he trialed and errored on details, the key events and steps of his presidency exhibited fundamental patterns of placing non-economic areas of governance under the supremacy of Indonesian development. Through this lens, Jokowi's attempt to domesticate democracy, for example, does not appear as an unresolved contradiction: it was, on the contrary, quintessential Jokowi.

Rise to Power

In November 2013, as Jokowi was leading the polls of presidential contenders for the elections in the following year, *Jakarta Post* journalist Sita Dewi visited the candidate's mother in his hometown of Solo in Central Java. At that time, stories of Jokowi's upbringing in poverty were becoming part of his political narrative and brand. According to these accounts, Jokowi's family moved from one rented riverside shack to another throughout his childhood, and at one point was even forcibly evicted. But when Dewi asked Jokowi's mother about this eviction, she could not recall it. She also denied that the family lived in successive run-down houses at the river. "The house was indeed a few hundred meters from the river, but it is located on a street and it is our own house," she said (Dewi 2013). Many politicians running their campaigns as political outsiders tend to embellish the details of their

humble upbringings, and Jokowi was apparently no exception. Born in 1961 in Solo, Jokowi was part of a family of wood and bamboo traders. Jokowi's birth in a hospital—a convenience out of reach for most Javanese in that era—indicates that his family was of lower-middle-class status, rather than poor.[4] Jokowi addressed this tension in his autobiography, assuring readers that he was born in the hospital's "cheapest room" (Endah 2012, 21). But whatever the exact circumstances of his upbringing, and however much he massaged the narrative to fit his desired image as an understander of the poor, there is no doubt that he was different from the exclusive class of Indonesian politicians. He lacked their connections, wealth, and international flair, and he wanted everybody to know. "Look at this village face," he would say during campaign stump speeches.[5]

While his ordinary origins gave him an instinct for grassroots moods, his subsequent career in business was equally formative. Continuing in his parent's line of business, Jokowi became a furniture entrepreneur with a medium-sized company. Over time, he developed into an exporter, visiting trade fairs in Europe. His identity as a businessman shaped his mindset more than he initially let on. In his early political campaigns, he emphasized his non-elite roots and his "averageness" over his business background. But his sense of pragmatism, his transactional view of politics and society, and his affinity toward entrepreneurial risk-takers and their commercial successes—all these traits of his political persona evolved during his time in business. Indeed, as president, he equated running the country to managing a business: "As an entrepreneur, you need to create a product that people will trust. Being president is about gaining trust for what you offer, too, both at home and internationally."[6] The logic of business, then, offered him a blueprint for solving problems of governance, and the practice of convincing customers to buy merchandise became his model for how to persuade voters in elections and diplomatic counterparts in international negotiations. Importantly, too, his joining of business associations marked his entry into organizational life and allowed him to build a network with powerful actors from which he would draw during his presidency. For instance, he joined the Association of Young Indonesian Entrepreneurs (HIPMI), and in 2002 founded the Solo branch of the Indonesian Furniture and Handicraft Industry Association (ASMINDO). Although not originating from the elite, he was now mingling with it.

From his involvement in Solo business groups in the early 2000s, it was only a small step into politics. While his biographer suggested that Jokowi was reluctant to enter politics even though many of his colleagues urged him to do so (Prasodjo 2020, 86), he needed little convincing. Indeed, soon

it was him who approached political parties to support his nomination in the 2005 mayoral elections in Solo. This ballot was part of a nationwide reform to Indonesian elections: for the first time, mayors, district heads, and governors would be elected by popular vote instead of by local legislators or the interference of a centralist regime.[7] This was Jokowi's chance to rise to the top of local government without a long-term history of internal party activism.[8] However, he still needed to find enough party support to pass the nomination threshold. Eventually, Solo's biggest party, the Indonesian Party of Democracy-Struggle (PDI-P), agreed to nominate him. Its local chairman was popular, but as a Catholic, had no chance of winning. Thus, he ran as Jokowi's deputy, no doubt in the hope of controlling him after the elections. Jokowi, for his part, had only superficial affection for PDI-P. His father had been a low-ranking PDI-P official, and works by the party's patron, Indonesia's founding president Sukarno, were on his family's bookshelves. But when I questioned Jokowi in 2014 on what the party and Sukarno meant to him in his early years, he deflected and changed the subject.[9] For him, parties were a necessary evil to succeed within Indonesia's existing system, but other than that, he viewed them as unpopular, self-absorbed, and ineffective. He did not change his view throughout his presidency, and would end his rule by breaking with PDI-P.

Jokowi won the 2005 Solo elections with 37 percent of the votes in a field of four candidates. Five years later, he secured reelection with a 90 percent majority against a perfunctory opponent. What happened between these two ballots that can explain this massive increase in Jokowi's popularity? To begin with, he became a hands-on mayor known for solving day-to-day problems (von Luebke, McCulloch, and Patunru 2009). No issue was too small for him, from arranging parking spaces at markets to relocating vendors from busy streets. For Indonesians used to pompous, aloof bureaucrats, this was a refreshing novelty. Jokowi also brought new business initiatives to Solo, increasing investments and expanding his elite contacts at the same time. Sandiaga Uno, a venture capitalist and later a Jokowi minister, recalled that "my firm wanted to hold its annual investors conference in 2010, and usually we did it in Bali or Jakarta. But Jokowi sent a team to me that offered a lot of goodies if we were to hold the event in Solo. We did, and it was great. He was very innovative."[10] Jokowi also introduced the concept of *blusukan*, or impromptu visits to public sites and projects, in which he would talk to locals and gather their views (Hatherell 2014). This approach consolidated his conviction, and that of others, that he had insights into the masses' thinking that other politicians didn't. Of course, he also made sure that the media recorded all his steps. Hungry for good news stories amid Indonesia's

increasingly dirty post-authoritarian politics, media outlets happily jumped on young, rising local leaders. Jokowi was one of them, and he made the most of it (Tapsell 2015).

There has been much debate on whether Jokowi, even at this early stage, could be described as a populist. Some have rejected using this label for him (Hatherell and Welsh 2019). But there is much to suggest that Jokowi viewed himself, and his place in Indonesia's politics, in populist terms. Mudde (2004, 543) defined populism as a "thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people." In other words, populism is not a thick, content-centered view of the world, but can pair with many ideologies, such as socialism, Islamism, and so forth. In later chapters of this book, I note how Jokowi, as president, viewed himself as fundamentally distinct from Indonesia's corrupt party politics, and how he claimed to understand what the ordinary people wanted. Even during his time in Solo, however, he situated himself in this way. Looking back at his mayorship, Jokowi said that "actually, in 2010, I didn't want to run again. The world of politics wasn't for me. Too dirty. That's not me."[11] Of course, this was only a strategic humblebrag, but one that said a lot about his self-perception. He did stand again in 2010 and won in a landslide—precisely because he profiled himself as a nonpolitician. With this, he also fit into Levitsky and Loxton's definition (2013, 110) of populists as those who "mobilise mass support via anti-establishment appeals, [. . .] and profess to establish a direct 'linkage' to 'the people.'" Significantly, his populism mixed with themes of technocratic development, and he stayed away from the radicalism of many other populists. Jokowi, then, subscribed to a populism-light with technocratic imprints (Mietzner 2015).

Riding on the fame of his spectacular Solo reelection, Jokowi quickly became a candidate for the governorship of the capital Jakarta. The elections were scheduled for 2012, with the incumbent appearing vulnerable. The chair of PDI-P, former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, was keen on Jokowi's nomination. But she needed at least one other party to proceed, and so she formed a coalition with the Gerindra party, headed by the former general Prabowo Subianto. As Jokowi's running mate, they chose Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a political maverick of ethnic Chinese origin and Christian faith. Coming from behind in the polls, they prevailed in a runoff in September 2012 (Hamid 2014). From the moment of his election, however, Jokowi set his sights on a higher goal: that is, the 2014 presidential elections. The national hype surrounding the Jakarta ballot propelled him to the top

of the national polls, and by early 2013, it was evident that it would be hard for the elite to ignore him. The sociopolitical climate was also supportive of a Jokowi candidacy. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had ruled for a decade in a calm and stable manner (Aspinall, Mietzner, and Tomsa 2015), but the electorate now wanted a different kind of leader. Guarded, officious, and risk-averse, Yudhoyono had sat out the final of his two constitutionally allowed terms without major achievements. At the same time, voters did not seek the radical change that Prabowo, second-ranked in the polls, offered (Aspinall 2015). His aggressive populism scared many citizens, driving them toward Jokowi's "polite" version of populist politics. Thus, Jokowi had well and truly arrived in national politics, with his governorship of Jakarta seen by most as merely transitory.

Jokowi's standing in the national polls irritated many elite actors. This included Megawati, the chair of his party. Although she had lost the 2004 and 2009 elections decisively, she still had not given up on running for the presidency again. Her initial instinct in response to Jokowi's rise, then, was to use it for her benefit. According to one pollster, "Megawati's husband, Taufik Kiemas, asked me at the time what I thought of the idea of pairing Megawati with Jokowi as her running mate. I told him that the only thing that mattered was what the people thought, and the poll numbers for such a constellation were weak."[12] Megawati, after a long and painful process, decided to nominate Jokowi for the presidency in March 2014. But she had only done so with indignation, and in the belief that she would be something akin to a supra-president if Jokowi was elected. The way Jokowi was nominated prefigured his future complex relationship with Megawati, culminating in their falling out a decade later. Prabowo, for his part, felt offended by Jokowi's presidential quest. He had not only *supported* Jokowi's 2012 Jakarta campaign, but also *funded* some of it. That Jokowi now shaped up to be his rival in the 2014 elections made him feel betrayed, and it fed some of Prabowo's notorious complaints about the untrustworthiness of politicians (Bland 2013).[13] Similarly, many oligarchs were confused by the meteoric rise of someone so remote from their orbit and so popular without being rich. Some of them quickly adjusted and attached themselves to Jokowi's campaign, while others decided to fight him. For instance, Aburizal Bakrie, the chair of Suharto's former party Golkar, became hostile to Jokowi, having expended millions of dollars on his own fledgling presidential ambitions.

The 2014 elections were a roller-coaster for Jokowi. For the first time since Indonesia introduced direct presidential elections in 2004, there were only two candidates: Jokowi and Prabowo. This contributed to a sharp socioreligious polarization of the electorate (Warburton 2020). In this divi-

sion, Prabowo aligned with highly vocal and influential Islamist groups, which, in turn, depicted Jokowi as a secularist lacking Islamic devoutness. Indeed, in some of the dirtiest attacks of the campaign, it was falsely claimed that Jokowi was the son of a Christian Chinese from Singapore (Tyson and Purnomo 2017). In this emotionally charged constellation, Jokowi's initially huge lead in the polls melted away. Two weeks out from election day, the two contenders were neck and neck. But a last-minute effort by Jokowi to mobilize support, including through a rock concert in Jakarta, handed him victory by 53 to 47 percent. This outcome was a seminal experience for Jokowi and influenced the way he would approach his presidency. Crucially, it indicated that his biggest political adversary would be the Islamist right. More encouragingly, however, it proved to him that his personal popularity was his deadliest political weapon. Asked why he thought he had won, he said "it's because people view me as hard-working, humble, and honest—that's it."[14] He put little stock in the organizational power of parties or even his own volunteers. His real power base, he came to believe, was his centrist electorate: that is, mostly rural, low-income, and politically not very engaged citizens who wanted economic advancement and rejected religious or political radicalism (Mietzner 2014). This was the country's mainstream upon whose support he planned to build his presidency.

Jokowi's rise to power, then, taught him important lessons. In addition to helping him identify his core constituency, it showed him how to relate to the broader electorate and the elites. To begin with, his outsider status was central to his political brand, and his non-elite origins assisted him in nurturing it. However deeply he got embedded in the country's elite over the years, he was aware that he owed his ascent to the image of not being part of the oligarchic club. Wearing modest clothes, abstaining from any obvious extravagances, and maintaining his unpolished way of speaking were hence key to his ongoing success with voters. At the same time, his climb to the top had impressed on Jokowi that Indonesia's elites would never be more than reluctant allies to him—and that even this spurious support was contingent on his continued popularity. In his view, therefore, elite actors needed to be kept under control, and since they only understood the language and instruments of power, he would not be hesitant to use the latter. Establishing control over powerful elite actors would take time, but he had little doubt that he would achieve it: from the very beginning, his aides conceptualized his first term as a period of power consolidation.[15] Jokowi's stints as mayor of Solo and governor of Jakarta also equipped him with an instinct for the kind of programs that voters would reward. In Solo, for example, he had upgraded the city's bus system, and in Jakarta, he kick-started the long-

delayed subway system. These were tangible outcomes easy to grasp for electorates, and Jokowi acquired a taste for producing them. In short, he entered the presidential palace with a strong sense of what got him there, and what it would take to extend his stay.

Sources of Jokowi's Popularity

In March 2014, I accompanied Jokowi on a campaign trip to Lampung on the southern tip of Sumatra. Megawati had just declared him the presidential candidate of her party, hoping that this might lift its vote in the upcoming April legislative elections. Under Indonesia's electoral system at that time, parties had to gain 20 percent of the seats or 25 percent of the votes in the legislative elections to make a nomination for the presidential contest to be held three months later. Thus, Jokowi was under pressure to meet the expectations of his party and deliver a result that would put him in the pole position for the presidential race. In order to do so, he structured his campaign stops around his trademark *blusukan* visits that had helped him ascend to the top of the polls. He stopped at small markets, malls, and other public places to chat to visitors and ask them questions about their daily lives. "What's the price of onions this week?" he would ask in a market. "What's the best-selling pair of shoes here?" he inquired in a mall. Few of the conversations were about substantive policy issues. More to the point, he showed that he understood election campaigns not only as performances in which speakers addressed a paid or otherwise mobilized crowd. To be sure, he held such events, too, continuing a decades-old tradition of electoral campaigning in Indonesia and elsewhere (Hadiz 2012). But his real selling point was the distinctiveness of the *blusukan*. Most people were enthralled that a presidential candidate would make his way into the smelly labyrinths of Indonesian small-town markets, and while Jokowi was often stiff in his small-talk attempts, he was met with much affection. In fact, his social awkwardness added to his authenticity.

Almost a decade later, I followed Jokowi again on one of his trips. This time, of course, he was a two-term president nearing the end of his rule. Visiting a market in Samarinda in East Kalimantan, Jokowi's routine still displayed many of the hallmarks of his pre-presidency *blusukan* practice. Questions about the prices of goods remained his favorite topic in the chatter with locals, and he made a point of mixing with the crowd. Under his rule, many lower-middle-class citizens had done well enough to purchase

cheap smartphones, and so taking selfies with the phones of his admirers became a standard item in his meeting-the-people repertoire. But unlike the 2014 campaign stops, which were often poorly organized (Tapsell and Gammon 2014), Jokowi's presidential *blusukan* were professionally choreographed and executed. The apparatus of presidential bodyguards screened the site of the visit beforehand, and members of Jokowi's political staff visited days in advance to ensure that everything was in place. Most importantly, however, in almost all of Jokowi's meet-and-greet visits as president, he had money or other forms of social assistance distributed to at least some of the participants. In Samarinda, many of the sellers in the market Jokowi visited were smiling with joy, holding up envelopes with cash they had been given by the presidential entourage. The money was typically taken from discretionary social aid funds every president has access to. When Jokowi was on the road, he resorted to distributing more mundane and practical presidential souvenirs: he had a huge stock of T-shirts featuring his image in his car, which he often threw from his window into the masses during stops. The bystanders usually cheered with delight.

These two snapshots from different periods demonstrate how Jokowi, once in office, amplified the initial elements of his popularity by deploying the powers of the presidency. While he retained the core of his brand—the image of a modest man close to the people—he did not hesitate to enhance its attractiveness by handing out material benefits to his audiences. Indeed, the longer he governed, the more he relied on the magnetic power of patronage distribution. The population liked what it saw: in a January 2024 poll, respondents who approved of Jokowi's job performance—about 80 percent of the survey participants—were asked why they liked him. Thirty-nine percent said it was because he "gave aid to ordinary people"—by far the highest percentage for any reason given (Indikator 2024a, 10). As president, Jokowi made sure that he had the necessary resources to satisfy the public demand for social assistance. Between 2015 and 2024, he doubled the annual social support budget to about 500 trillion Rupiah (US$31 billion). To his credit, he also expanded more institutional social security networks such as the universal health care scheme, introduced shortly before his predecessor left office. But he also watched carefully that there were parts of the social assistance regime that allowed him to be seen as a personal benefactor. Like in Samarina, he not only wanted citizens to receive government aid—he wanted them to receive it from *him*. The image of Jokowi distributing aid at the grassroots became deeply engrained in the nation's psyche, and as the above-mentioned survey proves, it was a significant pillar of his popularity.

As we shall see in this book, he also leaned on it to back his preferred candidates in the 2024 elections.

Jokowi's record of infrastructure-building was the second-most-cited reason for his popularity in the 2024 poll. Twenty-four percent of respondents said that they were impressed by him because of his achievement in this area (Indikator 2024a, 10). For Jokowi, this was a happy circumstance: building infrastructure was at the heart of his development agenda, and he saw it as a nation-building effort, too. The fact that it also lent itself to public relations campaigns and thus boosted his popularity was not lost on him. For the population, the building of hospitals, roads, ports, airports, and other structures that made life easier and faster for them was an example of how Jokowi impacted their day-to-day affairs. Just as the pictures of Jokowi handing out benefits were a constant in the imagery of the regime's public profile, so photographs of him opening or checking on the status of an infrastructure project became a central part of the view Indonesians held of their president. This was also how Jokowi preferred to present himself: wearing a hard hat and a safety vest, he loved being seen as the nation's chief architect and builder. Ironically, however, the population was cooler on Jokowi's favorite project: there was only soft public support for the president's idea to move the capital from Java to Kalimantan. Many were skeptical of the relocation's viability and costs, while others were simply indifferent.[16] In this case, Jokowi used the strength of his popularity in other fields of infrastructure-building to cover for the unpopularity of his pet project. As discussed later, he went all-in on the new capital, ignoring all genuine concerns and white-elephant warnings.

Another important source of Jokowi's popularity was his awareness of the need to keep inflation low, and his effectiveness in achieving this outcome. We will discuss inflation control in detail later when analyzing his economic performance. It suffices here to say that he was driven by this issue. His constant inquiring about the prices of goods in markets was an easy conversation starter for him, overcoming many potentially odd moments when he didn't know what else to say. But he also used this information to position himself as the price-controller-in-chief, whether as mayor of Solo, governor of Jakarta, or president. He knew that nothing else was as consequential to lower-income citizens as price pressures, and he was conscious of who the people blamed for them. Consequently, wherever he went, he paraded his concern for inflation control and picked on officials who did not share his prioritization of it. In July 2024, as his presidency came to an end, he publicly chided local government heads who didn't know the inflation rate off the top of their heads when he visited. "When I visit a region, I of course visit

a market, and then I ask the head of the district what the rate of inflation was last month" (CNN Indonesia 2024), he told a local government conference. "I'm sorry, there are still one or two who can't answer," he remarked with the sternness of a school headmaster disciplining unruly pupils. He then proudly added that inflation at that time stood at 2.5 percent, knowing that this was a good rate by Indonesian standards and by international comparison. Indeed, the stability of Jokowi's presidency was to no small extent owed to its price stability.

Jokowi's popularity was also the result of him systematically checking the pulse of his core constituency. As noted, the 2014 elections had confirmed to him what that constituency was: middle-of-the-road, lower-income citizens concerned with welfare rather than politics or ideology. This community formed the electorate's majority, and he therefore cultivated it as the foundation of his rule. To gauge what this majority wanted, he turned to opinion surveys. In fact, as this book later highlights, Jokowi equated democracy to implementing the majority's will as expressed by the polls. This narrow and majoritarian view of democracy led him to take little account of Indonesia's institutional development and the health of its civic discourse, but it handed him a powerful instrument to sustain high popularity rates. His positioning as the ultimate man of the center who understood that the mainstream longed for prosperity while rejecting religio-ideological extremes was a winning formula for most Indonesians. His advantage was that he embodied this pragmatic centrism more credibly than Indonesia's established politicians who had climbed up the ranks through elite lobbying and by amassing the capital to operate in politics. Over time, Jokowi developed a near-infallible instinct for what the majority wanted or was willing to tolerate. Whenever he was in doubt, an army of pollsters stood ready to confirm or amend his gut feelings. In most cases, he acted on what his hunch and the pollsters told him, cementing both his self-styled image as an executor of the people's will and his rock-solid popularity.

But Jokowi's popularity was not only the product of his crafted biographical narrative, distribution of aid, control of inflation, and clever assessment of the majority's centrist preferences. There was a great deal of political engineering, too. Just as Jokowi used the power of the presidency to hand out patronage, so did he utilize his coercive apparatus to control the flow of information in society. In this way, he mitigated the impact that the unfettered sharing of damaging opinions or facts could have had on his popularity. To be sure, Jokowi did not preside over an autocratic regime that would only allow pro-government views to be aired and otherwise crack down on any expression of dissent. Jokowi's Indonesia retained a vibrant civil society

with a cacophony of viewpoints (Yazid and Pakpahan 2020). But Jokowi found ways of discouraging the expression of fundamental opposition to his regime, and his law enforcement officers pursued people accused of having offended him (Hamid 2019). This book documents the mechanisms through which this was done—and it demonstrates how he discouraged the elite from acting against him as well. Many elite leaders fearful of Jokowi's wrath switched to offering effusive praise of him, which in turn colored the public discourse on his presidency. Importantly, many media oligarchs were "persuaded" to side with Jokowi, with their outlets covering the president in an overall friendly way (Tapsell 2017). Hence, this book's account of Jokowi's presidency is as much about his Machiavellian manipulations as it is about the genuine affection of Indonesians for their "man-of-the-people" president.

An Unlikely People's President

As Jokowi walked into the arrival hall of the Manahan Stadium in his hometown of Solo, many senior figures of his regime greeted him eagerly. The occasion was the 2023 main parade by the paramilitary youth wing of Muhammadiyah, the country's second-largest Muslim organization. Senior executives in Jokowi's government who belonged to Muhammadiyah had traveled to Solo to be with the president for the event, and other key figures—such as Indonesia's police chief—were there, too. Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son and then the mayor of Solo, shyly stood in the background. As is customary in such ceremonies, Jokowi sat down with the VIP guests prior to entering the actual event arena, with the president positioned at the head of two rows of chairs. I was invited to join the group. Once everyone was in their chairs, I expected a lively chat to ensue. Instead, there was awkward silence. Jokowi seemed uncertain about how to start the conversation, while his guests apparently feared it would be against protocol to begin speaking without a signal from the president. The result was a long pause in which Jokowi looked aimlessly around and his guests stared either at him or at the ground. His eyes finally stopped at me. "What's the latest in politics?" he asked me. I responded that he knew better than me, which triggered a laugh. The ice had been broken. From then on, the exchange was animated, with many guests contributing. Jokowi loved good gossip, and once in his element, he could be engaging. But, as this example showed, it often took him an agonizingly long time before he felt comfortable in a group.

Unlike many other popular leaders around the world, Jokowi did not

draw his core strength from a charismatic personality (Shamir 1991). A lanky man with thin hair and stern facial features, Jokowi did not naturally fill a room. His speeches were mostly stiff and halting, only coming to life when he talked about things that he was passionate about, such as details of infrastructure-building. As noted above, he could be odd in social interactions, both in small settings and with larger crowds. Jokowi was aware of these limitations, and so were his closest aides. Pratikno, his state secretary and most trusted confidant, reported that he often joined the president's formal meetings to kickstart them with a joke or two. "After that, he took charge of the discussion and I could withdraw," Pratikno explained.[17] Pramono Anung, Jokowi's cabinet secretary for much of his rule, had a similar function. "The president was mostly uncomfortable in events with lots of people, so he asked me or Pratikno to come along. We then did the necessary chitchat to smoothen the conversations," Pramono said.[18] Thus, behind Jokowi's public "man-of-the-people" profile sat a personal disposition that couldn't have been more different. The bread and butter of politicians, and especially of outsiders with a populist flair like Jokowi, is communicating with the masses. This did not come easy to him. Over time, he developed techniques with his inner circle that helped him to manage this deficit. But even with this support system, he did not become a larger-than-life charmer, or even just a good speaker. His personality remained strangely antithetic to the projection of a crowd-loving operator that was so crucial to his rise and continued to be promoted when in power.

Compensating for his own social uneasiness, Jokowi surrounded himself with colorful characters of the opposite orientation. The longer he ruled, the more he made an intriguing personality one of the key criteria for senior appointments. Outside of Pratikno and Pramono, who were trained in easing the president's way into challenging social contexts, Jokowi sought the company of loud, extroverted figures. For instance, one of the most important appointments of his second term was Bahlil Lahadalia as minister of investment. Having grown up in Papua, Bahlil had no time for the reservedness that was expected of ethnic Javanese. Telling crude jokes and blasting cheesy songs during evening gatherings, Bahlil became a frequent member of the presidential entourage when visiting the countryside. Sukardi Rinakit, Jokowi's speechwriter, confirmed that "Bahlil made the president at ease. He kept him in a good mood."[19] Similarly, Erick Thohir—Jokowi's 2019 campaign manager and afterward minister for state-owned enterprises—was not only a problem fixer of the kind Jokowi appreciated, but also a bon vivant whose presence he enjoyed. In the same vein, Basuki Hadimuljono, Jokowi's infrastructure minister, was a drummer—a skill he at times demon-

strated in front of the president. By contrast, as Jokowi grew older, the less patient he became with nerds and academics. Tellingly, Bahlil's predecessor had been Tom Lembong, a well-known expert in his field but too bookish for Jokowi's taste: the president was famously impatient with people presenting too much detail to him. Bahllil, Erick, Basuki, and others knew how to take him, but those who didn't were slowly but steadily shown their way out of the president's orbit.

While Jokowi mitigated his social anxiety by seeking companions who he liked and trusted, he was a lone decision-maker. Andi Widjajanto, Jokowi's first cabinet secretary, recalled that Jokowi tended to listen to many voices before making a decision, but rarely discussed an issue in a group by jointly weighing the various options. "He called in a lot of people and asked for input, without telling them that he also talked to others," Widjajanto said.[20] "Once a decision had been made, he mostly did not inform the persons he consulted. Even I would often find out in the news." This approach kept his aides on their toes and Jokowi at the center of the political process—his closeness to some of his ministers and other associates notwithstanding. The exclusiveness of his decision-making, which reflected the natural constitution of his character better than the choreographed interactions with the many, also accentuated his infamous ruthlessness. Jokowi had the ability to make major decisions with a coldness that some lauded as necessary presidential utilitarianism, while others saw it as evidence of him lacking empathy (Hernawan 2022). Whatever it was, Jokowi lost no sleep over sidelining allies, punishing foes, or making calls that affected the lives of millions. His predisposition for social detachment helped him to arrive at decisions in isolation and live with them comfortably. As the book will show, he had no hesitations to defend his economy-first strategy in managing COVID-19, even as Indonesia briefly became the global epicenter of the pandemic and thousands died each day. If he had any regrets, he never showed them, either publicly or internally. As he saw it, he had saved the greater good by accepting some losses.

Religion was an important yet not dominant feature of Jokowi's personality. He was brought up as a Muslim, but like many other Indonesians, he was pragmatic about his faith. Once in politics, however, his religiosity became a matter of controversy. As noted, his vice mayor in Solo was a non-Muslim, as was his vice governor in Jakarta (Hosen 2016). This made Jokowi a target of Islamist groups, who accused him of defending non-Muslim interests. Moreover, Jokowi's wife Iriana was at that time not wearing the Muslim headscarf, which in the eyes of his Islamist critics highlighted a lack of devoutness in his family. The 2014 elections then saw smear campaigns

against Jokowi that insinuated that he was, in fact, secretly a Christian. The trauma of this campaign convinced Jokowi and his team that his Islamic faith, and the way he practiced it, needed to be displayed more systematically. During my trip with Jokowi to Lampung in March 2014, I followed him into a mosque during a prayer stop. Unsure whether I could take pictures of him praying, I asked Widjajanto—then his campaign manager—for permission. "Of course, that's the whole point, we want people to take pictures of him praying," Widjajanto responded with a laugh.[21] A minor pilgrimage was also organized for him during the campaign. As president, he felt that there was additional pressure on him to be seen as religiously devout. In 2016 and 2017, for instance, he faced Islamist street demonstrations (Osman and Waikar 2018), and while he responded partially with coercion, his inner circle also took steps to bolster his Muslim credentials. Among others, his wife started wearing the head scarf, and his visits to Muslim groups increased. Overall, however, the impact of religion on Jokowi's worldview remained limited.

Similarly, while Jokowi was embedded in Javanese culture, it is important not to overstate the influence it had on him. To be sure, Jokowi followed numerous Javanese traditions. For instance, his cabinet reshuffles were typically announced on what the Javanese calendar considers special Wednesdays, or Rabu Pon (Khaerudin 2024). Moreover, many of Jokowi's contemporaries likened him to a Javanese king who believed in his spiritual right to rule, gave indirect instructions that aides and the public had to decipher, and punished opponents patiently but decisively. Luhut Pandjaitan, one of his most senior aides and an ethnic Batak from North Sumatra, was among those who claimed that Jokowi was best understood as a Javanese king.[22] Prabowo Subianto, for his part, also thought that Jokowi had to be read through a Javanese lens. Asked how his discussions with Jokowi on becoming his heir were conducted, Prabowo said: "Well, you know, he's Javanese, so there are a lot of indirect hints. It is hard to draw him into a direct chat on that."[23] It is also true, of course, that Jokowi viewed Javanese ceremonies as vital when marking key milestones in his life. The weddings of his children, for example, were elaborate events scripted around Javanese traditions. But none of this should lead us to culturally essentialize Jokowi's presidency and his practice of power. There was little in his conduct as president that was inconsistent with that of other leaders around the world who executed effective strategies of power maintenance. In other words, Jokowi's Machiavellianism might have had Javanese nuances, but its core consisted of a will to power that could be found in his peers across times and regions.

Family was a crucial part of Jokowi's personal life and value system.

But as with many other leaders, it also became his greatest liability. Nepotism and dynasty-building have been common features in autocracies and democracies alike (Thompson 2012), and Indonesia has had its fair share of such practices. Thus, when Jokowi came to power, he promised that he would stay away from family cronyism, and he warned his children that they should not count on any state contracts when going into business. Initially, it seemed as if Jokowi was true to his word: his two sons ran low-end restaurants catering to ordinary citizens. As time went by, however, these enterprises outgrew their initial parameters, and by Jokowi's second term, his sons had developed a web of business interests with some of the country's leading oligarchs (Salam 2020). The family entered politics, too: Gibran became mayor of Solo in 2020, while Jokowi's son-in-law Bobby Nasution took the position of mayor in Medan, Sumatra's largest city. The president's second son, Kaesang Pangarep, was made the chair of a party in 2023. Jokowi's dismissal of objections to this obvious favoritism sounded painfully familiar to those studying political dynasties around the world: he claimed that he had nothing to do with their activities, and that anything his relatives achieved was obtained through merit. The fact that his wife Iriana also gradually expanded her role in palace politics was not new to comparative dynasty watchers, either. At the end, Jokowi maneuvered Gibran into the position of vice president of the post-2024 government. Many of his 2014 supporters shook their heads in despair: Jokowi had shown himself to be as vulnerable to the temptations of power as others before him.

But even as Jokowi's rule adopted many of the troublesome features of other long-term regimes, his persona stayed tuned in to the country's mainstream. His social and political centrism made him acceptable to the majority, and his occasional discomfort in public settings only appeared to consolidate the "he-is-one-of-us" narrative of his brand. Above all, there was a simplicity to him that the public was magically attracted to and that he wholeheartedly embraced. This was not only a simplicity in terms of appearance and dress. It was also a simplicity of mind: cutting through convoluted and—in his view—unnecessary layers of complexity, he was able to focus on the practical essence of a problem and the solutions to it. As this book argues, his capacity to focus on the nucleus of an issue was both one of his greatest strengths and a weakness at the same time. For while this approach allowed him to deal with obstacles faster and with greater determination than others, he also missed aspects that were key to a more comprehensive resolution. He was, then, uniquely driven to get things done, but he also overlooked facets of governance that he viewed as too complicated to tackle. In running the day-to-day affairs of government, Jokowi's inclina-

tion toward practical simplicity led him to deal with the tangible and visible over the abstract and complex. This, in turn, made him a good builder of infrastructure and a poor manager of Indonesia's political institutions. In Jokowi's order of priorities, this was probably an acceptable outcome—but those interested in the country's democratic trajectory loudly disagreed.

The Book: An Overview

This chapter has laid the initial foundations for a detailed examination of Jokowi's presidency. Critically reviewing Jokowi's decade in power, this book explains how he maintained and expanded political power; how he used this power to pursue his development agenda; how he divided international actors into those who supported his development plans and those who didn't; and how he subordinated the institutions and practice of democracy to his economic goals and succession plans. In all these arenas of investigation, we find Jokowi driven by a single idea: that the purpose of governance is to enhance the material prosperity of citizens. Over time, this thinking blended with the notion that only he could guarantee that government stayed on course to lead Indonesia into a more modern, industrialized future. His belief in his own irreplaceability opened the most controversial chapter of his presidency: much of his second term was spent trying to prolong his stay in power or to engineer a succession palatable to him. The fact that he simultaneously fought a historic pandemic further convinced him that he deserved at least a term extension. While he ultimately had to make compromises in his game of succession, he left office as Indonesia's first president to have selected his successor. Out of his six predecessors, two were toppled, one was impeached, one was rejected by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR),[24] one lost reelection, and one retired into relative obscurity. By this token, he was not only the most dominant Indonesian president in the democratic era, but also the only one in the country's entire post-independence history who was still massively popular when relinquishing his position.

This book unpacks the dynamics of Jokowi's presidency in six main chapters—all of which are framed by the all-encompassing theme of his prioritization of development over everything else. In chapter 2, we study Jokowi's system of power maintenance. It traces his transformation from an early minority president into the unchallenged ruler of later years who commanded a legislative supermajority. Key to this evolution was his ability to build and sustain a broad coalition of parties and other actors that he held together through offering rewards and dispensing punishments. The chap-

ter introduces the main troubleshooters and fixers of Jokowi's inner circle, and investigates the mechanisms through which he appointed loyalists to top police and military positions. Presenting examples of how Jokowi used his coercive authority to keep elites in line, the chapter paints the picture of a clever Machiavellian operator who progressively moved away from his benign political origins. Chapter 3 shows us what Jokowi used his accumulated power for: that is, to implement his goal of development in broad terms and that of infrastructure-building more specifically. The chapter explains how infrastructure emerged as the core of his program—it was set as the government's priority only after Jokowi had taken office and sought international advice, including from President Xi Jinping of China. The discussion focuses on two aspects of his infrastructure drive in particular: the building of the new capital, Nusantara, and his policy of industrial downstreaming. The chapter also delivers an assessment of his overall economic performance, showing that while he was a trailblazer in some areas, in others he oversaw continuity rather than change.

Chapter 4 focuses on Jokowi's approach to international affairs and the most pressing geopolitical challenge of his age: that is, the Sino-American rivalry. It counters widespread perceptions that Jokowi was uninterested in foreign affairs. Indeed, he made crucial decisions that shaped Indonesia's relations with the world for a decade. Once again, his guiding principle for such decisions was his fixation on development. This led him, for example, to reject an increase to military spending—proposed by his defense minister, Prabowo—as a waste of money. Instead, he was a principled hedger, hoping to gain economic support from both China and the United States. The fact that he got more funds from the former than the latter was, in his view, America's fault, not his. Jokowi also remodeled the foreign ministry into a trade- and investment-oriented body. While this exposed him to accusations of stripping all nontransactional dimensions from Indonesia's foreign policy, there was no doubt that he personally tailored it to his needs. In chapter 5, we look at Jokowi's management of COVID-19. The crisis hit Jokowi exactly at the halfway point of his presidency, and he viewed it as a major watershed. Following the same instincts that prefigured his thinking and action in other policy arenas, Jokowi was convinced that it was primarily the economy that needed saving. The chapter details how Jokowi tried to do this: he first seemed to downplay the magnitude of the catastrophe, but later changed course and promoted vaccines as the best way out. While up to one million people were estimated to have died, he presented his handling of the crisis as a great success. Jokowi's narrative prevailed, and he emerged from the pandemic stronger than ever before.

In chapter 6, the discussion assesses Jokowi's troubled relationship with democracy. Weighing the nominal survival of democracy in the Jokowi years against the gradual deterioration of its quality, the chapter argues that this mixed record was rooted in the president's instrumentalist understanding of the concept itself. For him, democracy was simply a means to achieve development outcomes, and as the majority wanted these outcomes, pursuing them was—in his logic—intrinsically democratic. In addition, he believed that democracy needed to be "polite"—meaning that robust and potentially offensive discourses were improper for an "Eastern" culture such as Indonesia. As a result of these views, he paid little attention to Indonesia's democratic development, and reversed some of its achievements when this served his economic goals. Nevertheless, he insisted that core elements of democracy—such as direct elections—needed to be retained. Jokowi's democratic ambivalence came to the fore in his quest to arrange his succession, which is the subject of chapter 7. In this saga, Jokowi repeatedly tested democratic boundaries. He refrained from crossing some of them: for instance, he abandoned plans for a third term and an election delay after facing elite and public opposition. But he subsequently pulled out all the stops, democratic and otherwise, to get Prabowo and his own son Gibran elected in 2024. This was what motivated *The Economist* to decry the "rotten smell" that Jokowi created, and his domestic critics concurred. The conclusion, then, situates Jokowi's legacy in historical and comparative terms, noting his exceptional power while in office but questioning what, if anything, he leaves behind.

CHAPTER 2

"I Take Them One by One"

Managing Power in a Grand Coalition

When Megawati Sukarnoputri took the stage in a packed ballroom of the run-down but still charming Grand Bali Beach Hotel in April 2015, everybody in attendance felt that she was in a terrible mood. The occasion was a congress of her party, the PDI-P. Such congresses occur only every five years, bringing together thousands of party delegates. Jokowi, then president for just half a year, was there, too. As noted, he was a member of the party, but his relationship with it was loose. Moreover, it had worsened considerably over recent months, with some party officials even calling for his impeachment. When Jokowi had entered the congress arena, there was only polite applause, and some boos could be heard. Sitting in the first row, the president now watched Megawati as she relentlessly, and with increasing anger, ripped into him. Like a mother admonishing her misbehaving child, she reminded him that it was his job to carry out the directives of the party that nominated him—which essentially meant that he was, in Megawati's view, her subordinate.[1] Suggesting that he thus far had ruled as an independent rather than a party cadre, Megawati scolded him for bringing numerous people into government she did not approve of: "stowaways" and "backstabbers," in her language. Jokowi listened stoically, trying to smile it all away. After Megawati finished her address to thundering applause, she had one final humiliation in store for him. Although Jokowi had a speech prepared, Megawati did not allow him to deliver it (Gammon 2015). It was an extraordinary takedown of a president by his own party, and the Indonesian media treated it as such.

Four years later, at exactly the same spot, things played out in a very different manner. Megawati had brought the congress of her party forward by one year, following Jokowi's convincing reelection victory a few months earlier. This time, a humorous and lighthearted Megawati delivered a speech in which she proudly displayed her closeness with Jokowi.[2] By her standards, it was almost flirtatious. Jokowi, who was not only given the opportunity to speak but was introduced with much pomp and fanfare, responded in kind. He announced that "of course" he would give PDI-P the largest number of cabinet seats among all of his nominating parties. What PDI-P cadres would have seen a few years earlier as an unnecessary confirmation of their natural right to control government was now greeted with great relief and joy. To both PDI-P insiders and external observers, it was clear in 2019 that the power constellation had shifted since the last congress in 2015. Megawati's dramatically changed attitude toward Jokowi was not the result of a sudden brightening of her frame of mind on that day. Rather, it was a systematic—and for Megawati surely painful—acknowledgment that the tables in their relationship had turned, and that there was little that she could do about that. Jokowi was now in the driver's seat, and Megawati had to pretend that she didn't mind.

But what exactly had changed in those four years? To answer this question, we must explore the ways through which Jokowi gradually but forcefully consolidated power during his presidency. Most importantly, he emancipated himself from PDI-P, brought more parties into his coalition, and then played the various competing actors off against each other. As he diluted the influence of individual players, his own grew in parallel. This approach went hand in hand with the strengthening of his control over the coercive arms of government: that is, the military, the police, and the attorney-general's office. Having domesticated these agencies, he used them to discipline all other members of the broad presidential alliance: he protected loyalists and threatened to punish those crossing him. To run this system, he relied on a number of key operators close to him. And while he put much trust in these political executors, they too were only pawns in the grand set of actors holding his regime together. As a virtuoso of maximizing the state's power to his benefit, Jokowi became Indonesia's supreme political actor, eclipsing all of his post-1998 predecessors. This was the president who showed up at the 2019 congress of PDI-P, when the party's reception of him turned into a reluctant homage to the man he had become. Now a second-term ruler who had tamed his own party and others, he governed on his own terms and relegated other actors to petitioners for presidential favors.

Analyzing his transformation from a cornered novice to a shrewd Machi-

avellian, this chapter is about Jokowi's mechanics of power-building and maintenance. First, it focuses on how Jokowi turned his minority status in parliament into a supermajority, and how he kept this oversized coalition under control. Key to these successes were his nonchalant use of the state apparatus to intervene in the internal affairs of parties, and his idea of dealing with each coalition member on a "one-on-one" basis rather than through a collective consultation mechanism. In the second section, we look at his control of security and law enforcement bodies. As we will see, their loyalty was not only coerced through the use of the president's appointment powers in these agencies, but also purchased through the granting of privileges to their leaders. Subsequently, the discussion introduces the main operators of Jokowi's power system. These were people who executed orders to uphold discipline in the coalition and oversaw the implementation of key policies. The three leading figures in this regard were Pratikno, Pramono Anung, and Luhut Pandjaitan. The last section then gives us an insight into how Jokowi's power machine worked in practice, highlighting examples of how disloyalty was disincentivized and continued support rewarded. The picture that emerges from this discussion is one of Jokowi patiently but ruthlessly pursuing power in the name of a larger political agenda while obliviously damaging the health of the institutional environment he operated in.

From Minority to Supermajority

Sometime before the 2019 elections, Jokowi called a senior minister into his office for a chat. The minister belonged to the Golkar party, which had been Suharto's electoral machine and had made a fairly successful transition into the democratic era. While it had not held the presidency after 1999, it was part of every subsequent government, including—since 2016—Jokowi's. In the 2014 elections, Golkar finished second behind PDI-P, but at the time of Jokowi's meeting with the minister, it was performing poorly in the polls. "I was surprised," the minister recalled, "when the president said to me that he wanted Golkar to do well in the 2019 elections, and that he would like the electoral gap between PDI-P and Golkar to shrink."[3] In effect, Jokowi told the minister that he wished to see the electoral power of his own party reduced to the advantage of its main competitor: "He asked me to use my ministry to help Golkar in this regard." Many political scientists would scratch their heads about the scenario of a ruling president trying to weaken the position of his party in order to bolster others. In much of the presidentialism literature—especially in the school of coalitional presidentialism—

the strength of a president's party is seen as one of his or her biggest assets (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 2017). But Jokowi's case was different, of course: he had no control over the party that nominated him, and its chair tried to regularly interfere with his government. Undermining that party and its leader was therefore in his interest, and boosting its rivals promised to give him more chances to apply divide-and-rule techniques to his coalition. To be sure, Golkar eventually did not improve its result in 2019, but at least it did better than the polls had suggested.

While the calculating approach to multiparty coalition-building that Jokowi displayed in this episode appeared to come naturally to him, it was in fact an acquired skill forged through a series of hard experiences. In the 2014 campaign, he had told voters that he did not care how many parties in parliament would support him as president (Mietzner 2015). Criticizing outgoing president Yudhoyono for being "held hostage" by his oversized coalition, he pledged to do things differently. His 2014 nominating coalition only controlled 37 percent of the seats in parliament, and far from expressing concern about this weakness, he proudly paraded it. When I interviewed him in September 2014, after his victory but before his inauguration, he insisted that as president, he did not rely on a majority in parliament: "As mayor of Solo or governor of Jakarta, my party had no majority in the local legislatures. There was no problem, and neither will there be a problem now."[4] He trusted that his main political capital—that is, his popularity with voters—would be enough to carry him through any political crisis. "If the parliament blocks my policies, I will turn to the people and tell them who is responsible for the crisis," he said, filled with self-confidence. He seemed to have an answer for everything: asked, for instance, what he would do if parliament refused to pass his budgets, he said, "besides talking to the people, I will simply use the budget envelope of the previous year. Just watch me." In short, his initial plan was to rule on top of a minority coalition in parliament and mobilize his appeal to the populace as leverage against any legislative opposition he might face.

But once in office, he found that it wasn't that easy. He quickly ran into stiff resistance not only from the elite, but—to this surprise—from the populace, too (Muhtadi 2015). Ultimately, this combined opposition forced him to change course. Widjajanto, Jokowi's first cabinet secretary, summarized best the challenges the president confronted and the conclusions he drew from them. According to Widjajanto, the first lesson Jokowi learned related to his decision to reduce fuel subsidies early in his term. We will discuss this in more detail in chapter 3, but it suffices to say here that the new president's move produced a massive drop in his popularity ratings. Said Widjajanto,

"this showed to Jokowi that he couldn't make tough decisions and hope that the populace would still support him. He had to consolidate power in the elite, and he had to do so quickly."[5] The second experience that led him to alter his approach was that of the botched appointment of Budi Gunawan as new police chief in February 2015. A confidant of Megawati, Gunawan had been appointed at her recommendation, but Jokowi canceled the promotion after the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) charged the police general over an old case (Baker 2015; Duile 2015). Megawati was furious, and PDI-P became openly hostile to Jokowi. Widjajanto, who had the unfortunate task of communicating Jokowi's decision to Megawati and enduring her icy response, identified this incident as a watershed: "That was the lowest point of his presidency, and it demonstrated his vulnerability to him." After two major pillars of his plans for the presidency—to rule through popularity alone and to ignore his minority status in parliament—had collapsed, he had to take action.

In many ways, Jokowi returned to the formula Yudhoyono had used to secure the stability of his two-term rule. Having started as a minority president as well, Yudhoyono gradually built a large coalition that controlled more than two-thirds of parliamentary seats (Aspinall, Mietzner, and Tomsa 2015). This constellation, which Jokowi had attacked earlier, now appeared to him as the only solution to his problems. "Therefore, when internal tensions in two opposition parties offered him the chance to recruit them into his coalition, Jokowi took it," Widjajanto explained.[6] These two parties were Golkar and the Islamic-leaning Party of Unity and Development (PPP). Their leaders had supported Jokowi's rival in the 2014 elections, Prabowo Subianto, and they showed no signs of wanting to join the government after their defeat. But pro-Jokowi factions in both parties challenged their respective chairmen and claimed the leadership for themselves. As Indonesian presidents hold the authority to recognize or reject the legitimacy of party boards, Jokowi threw the weight of his government behind the factions that supported him. Tired by lengthy legal proceedings and increasing political pressure, the anti-Jokowi leaders in PPP capitulated in 2015 and those in Golkar surrendered in 2016 (Noor 2016). Both parties then formally endorsed Jokowi and were rewarded with cabinet seats. Another opposition party, the National Mandate Party (PAN), also changed its stance in 2016 and entered the cabinet. This brought Jokowi to a supermajority of 69 percent in parliament (Dressel and Susilo 2023), resembling Yudhoyono's level of political control.

Although Jokowi adopted some of Yudhoyono's thinking when assembling his coalition, he used different methods to hold it together and over time expand it to the largest alliance in Indonesia's democratic history. Yud-

hoyono had established a "joint secretariat" of his coalition partners to collectively discuss government matters and impose discipline on each member (Mahi and Nazara 2012). But this mechanism was widely viewed as ineffective, and what's more, Jokowi believed that it gave Yudhoyono's coalition parties a chance to "extort" him. "If you have a joint secretariat," Jokowi insisted, "then the president is only one actor among many. As president, you are not in charge."[7] He was convinced that facing his coalition as a collective was akin to handing its individual members a chance to unite against him—a scenario he was keen to avoid. "Thus, I decided to not have a joint secretariat, and instead of frequently meeting the coalition parties together, I opted to take them one by one. In this way, I remained in control." Conceptually speaking, he used divisions among his partners to rule as the coalition's highest authority. Indeed, in his "one-by-one" meetings, he often asked one coalition member to take a public stance against the demands of another, allowing him to reject the latter.[8] This strategy was most effectively deployed against his own party, PDI-P, whose influence was watered down as the size of the coalition grew. Exceptions to Jokowi's "one-by-one" rule were very rare: in 2018, his coalition partners teamed up to force him to drop his choice of vice-presidential nominee, former Constitutional Court Justice Mahfud MD. Following this, he further reduced the occurrence of collective coalition gatherings.

For his system to work most effectively, Jokowi needed a broad distribution of power among his coalition parties, with none of them emerging as a dominant player. This is why, as we noted earlier, he tried in 2019 to reduce PDI-P's vote share and increase Golkar's, narrowing the gap between the two parties. Having honed this balancing practice as the organizational principle of his regime during the first term, he took another major step in the second: he invited his opponent in the 2014 and 2019 elections, Prabowo, to join the government, too (Lane 2022). Both Jokowi and Prabowo cited an incident in May 2019 as the main trigger for their alliance. In that event, Prabowo supporters clashed with police while protesting against their patron's electoral defeat. The police killed eight people. "That was the moment I realized that we couldn't go on like this, with all the tensions in society," Prabowo claimed.[9] Jokowi offered the same narrative, saying "I took the initiative for reconciliation after this tragedy. I asked my chief of intelligence to reach out to him."[10] But it is likely that larger strategic considerations were the strongest driver behind their joint initiative: for Jokowi, the entry of Prabowo into government brought the size of his coalition to 74 percent of parliamentary seats—a number that in 2022 increased to a post-2004 record of 82 percent, and to 91 percent in

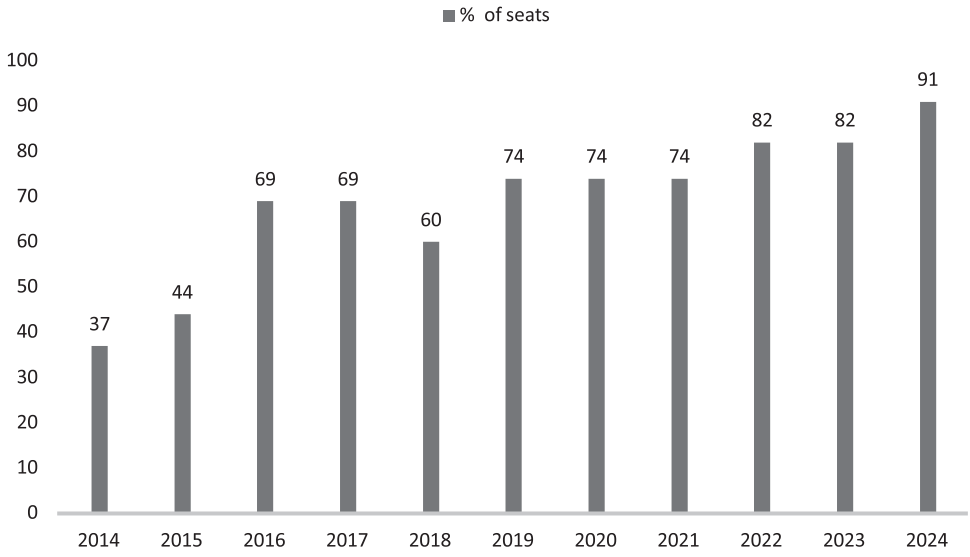

Fig. 1. Size of the Jokowi Coalition, 2014–2024 (in % of legislative seats)
(*Note:* Years mark the time a party officially declared support for Jokowi; ministers in the cabinet without their party's approval are not considered.)

2024 (see fig. 1). From Prabowo's perspective, on the other hand, accepting the president's invitation to join the cabinet allowed him to abandon his twice-failed strategy of oppositional populism and instead gain executive experience in preparation of another presidential run.

This is not to say that the negotiations between Jokowi and Prabowo were easy—far from it. According to Sandiaga Uno, Prabowo's 2019 running mate, "the discussions were very protracted, there was a lot of back and forth, and at one point it wasn't clear whether they would succeed."[11] The main sticking point was finding the right spot for Prabowo. "I initially did not want to be in [the] cabinet," said the proud and flamboyant ex-general. "Instead, I requested to be the head of the Presidential Advisory Council, a very honourable position. It wouldn't have involved many meetings, and I could have used a diplomatic passport to just travel around. Great idea, right?" he asked with a roaring laugh.[12] But the Jokowi side ultimately insisted that he be in the cabinet, and offered the position of coordinating minister of politics, law, and security. Again, Prabowo cited his aversion to too much bureaucracy to reject the offer. "As the term suggests, coordinating ministers hold meetings, without having resources. I am not a guy for long meetings. Military people are people of the night, we hide during the day." The only ministry he had interest in was defense—"that's what

I know doing." Jokowi, too, recalled that when he asked Prabowo what he really wanted, "he said he requested the defense ministry. And that's what we settled on."[13] At the end, there was a deal both men could be satisfied with: Jokowi had an even larger alliance to further reduce PDI-P's influence, and Prabowo could portray himself as a patriot open to compromise and ready to govern in the future.

Prabowo's integration into the cabinet not only marked the expansion of the coalition—it also highlighted the increasing role of oligarchs in it (Tomsa 2022). Together with Prabowo, several other oligarchs—defined here as actors whose primary political resource is the direct control of large amounts of capital—entered the cabinet. Some belonged to parties, like Prabowo, while others did not. Erick Thohir, for instance, the owner of a large business empire, became minister for state-owned enterprises; Sandiaga Uno, worth US$460 million, was appointed tourism minister; Sakti Wahyu Trenggono, a known Jokowi campaign sponsor, became fisheries minister; Nadiem Makarim, a young start-up multimillionaire, was made minister of education; and Bahlil Lahadalia, the head of the young entrepreneurs association, rose to the position of investment minister. In the cabinet, they joined a number of long-time oligarchic members: for example, Luhut Pandjaitan, Jokowi's main troubleshooter; Airlangga Hartarto, the chair of the Golkar party; and Agus Gumiwang Kartasasmita, also a Golkar functionary. As a businessman himself, Jokowi had always been comfortable with being around people of great wealth. But as he consolidated power, he increasingly gave key positions to them, believing that their success in business qualified them for running government portfolios. Their wealth also meant that as ministers, they could privately fund many of their own staff and operations, and could be called upon to chip in for activities that the state budget could not cover. Oligarchs, then, became major operators in the president's management of his political alliance.

From Jokowi's perspective, the growing prominence and visibility of oligarchs in his coalition was also expedient because they naturally supported the president's main policy priorities (Fukuoka and Djani 2016). Jokowi's focus on infrastructure-building and related industrialization policies—covered in detail in chapter 3—found the approval of oligarchs, and therefore led to little friction within the alliance. Hence, in addition to his Machiavellian techniques of balancing the various forces in his coalition, he could also rely on joint interests among its most influential leaders to push his agenda. The cross-party backing for the advancement of infrastructure allowed for smooth passing of budgets and related laws, with many party politicians—and not only oligarchs—owning businesses that would profit from them. It

is important to note in this context, however, that Jokowi was *not* a puppet of the oligarchs, as some analysts suggested (Winters 2014). His agenda was *not* dictated to him by the oligarchs; in fact, many of them had opposed his rise and only grudgingly surrendered to the sheer power of his popularity. Jokowi often highlighted the power he held over them: "I possess something that they don't. I am popular, and they are not. And popularity can't be bought."[14] His relationship with the oligarchs, therefore, was one of mutually beneficial dependence: Jokowi relied on their resources and control over private business to advance the causes of his government, while the oligarchs latched on to his popularity to gain a place close to power and resources.

But in order to impose his authority over his coalition, whether oligarchs or otherwise, Jokowi also had other instruments available. As we will see below, he did not hesitate to deploy the coercive tools at his disposal to keep everyone in line. Before we discuss how he utilized these "weapons," however, we need to understand how Jokowi learned to control them.

Controlling the Guns and Sheriffs

As the first Indonesian president not originating from a military or other elite background, Jokowi faced particular challenges to bring the armed forces, the police, and other security agencies under his control. Indeed, he stumbled a few times at the beginning of his presidency, with the debacle over the appointment of Budi Gunawan as police chief being only one example. But, as with his general control over the political system, he eventually found his feet in the security and law enforcement realm, too. During his second term, his control over the state's main coercive forces became so institutionalized that observers could easily predict upcoming senior promotions in the military and police. For instance, when the post of armed forces commander became vacant in October 2023, the media responded with a big yawn. To them, it was clear that the new military chief would be Agus Subiyanto. All that military analysts had to do was looking at the curriculum vitae of the candidates. Among those, Agus stood out through two particular entries: first, Agus had been the commander of the local military unit in Solo between 2009 and 2011, when Jokowi was mayor there; and second, he had been the commander of the Presidential Guard from 2020 to 2021. That was his knockout advantage. By then, the fast rise of officers who had served in Solo with Jokowi, had been presidential adjutants, or were members of the Guard had become routine. Prior personal proximity, which in Jokowi's understanding translated into loyalty, was the president's main criterion for

picking top leaders in the security agencies (Supriatma 2019; Haripin and Priamarizki 2023). Without that, an officer's chances of promotion to the very top of the military and police were small.

To be sure, previous Indonesian presidents had also placed people close to them in the leadership of their security forces to prevent insubordination or encourage loyalist support. Scholars of comparative civil-military relations in young democracies would find such practices unsurprising, too, with many presidents resorting to this approach to keep military and police forces from sabotaging their regime (Croissant and Kuehn 2017). Yudhoyono had even appointed his brother-in-law as army chief of staff. In this sense, Jokowi learned from prior Indonesian and international experiences. However, as in the case of Jokowi's adoption of Yudhoyono's model of coalition-building and maintenance, Jokowi took a previous set of norms and raised it to another level. What was an ad hoc practice of occasionally appointing personal loyalists under Yudhoyono turned into a systematic mechanism during the Jokowi presidency. This applied not only to the military, but to the police as well: in both forces, officers with a history of service in Solo during Jokowi's mayorship were rapidly promoted through the ranks, as were ex-adjutants. If they were military officers, they often made their way into the high echelons of the Presidential Guard, which exclusively consists of soldiers of the armed forces. Police officers, on the other hand, would be promoted through regional commands and other senior posts. When Agus became military commander in November 2023, he followed in the footsteps of Listyo Sigit Prabowo, the police chief, who had been Jokowi's adjutant from 2014 to 2016—and who had been appointed as the country's top cop in January 2021.

As with his approach to managing his party coalition, too, Jokowi arrived at his scheme of controlling the security forces through a steep learning curve. After the Budi Gunawan case and the subsequent crisis in his relationship with Megawati threatened his presidency in its infancy, Jokowi felt the urgent need to maneuver people into the police leadership who he could trust. One of his key picks in this regard was Tito Karnavian, an officer with a stellar reputation in counterterrorism (Haripin, Anindya, and Priamarizki 2020). Tito had become increasingly close to Jokowi since their first meeting during the 2014 campaign. "I was police chief in Papua then," Tito recalled, "and Jokowi's team called me and asked whether it was safe for him to campaign there. Many recommended otherwise, but I guaranteed his safety, and I accompanied him non-stop."[15] It also later emerged that Jokowi and Tito were distant relatives. After Luhut Pandjaitan—then coordinating minister for politics, law, and security—tested his suitability during a series of inter-

national trips together, Tito was made police chief in July 2016. In his new position, he faced the fallout from the Budi Gunawan affair and other frictions in the police. "Actually, the issues in the police not only related to Budi Gunawan," Tito told me. "Gunawan was moved on to become intelligence chief [in September 2016], and he seemed happy with that. But there were generational fissures and other personalist networks I had to deal with. It took a while to sort this out, but I did."[16] Having settled in, Tito served as police chief for the remainder of Jokowi's first term.

Tito demonstrated his importance to Jokowi during the largest anti-government demonstrations of his presidency. In late 2016, Islamists mobilized against the Christian-Chinese governor of Jakarta, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Setijadi 2017). Purnama had been deputy governor to Jokowi between 2012 and 2014, and replaced him when the latter became president. Many Islamists were incensed that a non-Muslim ruled the capital, and thus waited for an opportunity to remove him. This chance came in late 2016, when Purnama ran for reelection. During the campaign, Islamists accused Purnama of having made a blasphemous remark and called for mass protests. Significantly, as Jokowi's former deputy, Purnama was not the only target—most Islamists opposed the government as a whole. As hundreds of thousands of demonstrators filled the streets of Jakarta in November and December 2016, Tito was the main manager of security and negotiator with the protesters. Tito knew Rizieq Shihab, the movement's leader and patron of the Front of the Defenders of Islam (FPI):[17] "I told Rizieq that 'you are my friend, but Jokowi is my boss. He is the president. If you try to topple him, I will come after you.'"[18] But Tito also convinced Jokowi that he had to give the protesters something for the crisis to end: "I said to Jokowi that the protest's goal was to remove him, and that saving his presidency was more important than [Purnama's] case. And so, I proposed to process [Purnama's] blasphemy case."[19] Jokowi agreed: Purnama was tried and sentenced to two years in prison (Peterson 2020). Tito pursued Rizieq as well, however: threatened with a number of cases, Rizieq went into exile to Saudi Arabia in 2017. The crisis de-escalated, and Jokowi recovered.

In the military, Jokowi's establishment of dominance was laborious, too (Laksmana 2019). Initially, he was uncertain of how to project authority, and by his own admission, he made mistakes. When the armed forces commander, an army officer, retired in mid-2015, Jokowi asked his cabinet secretary, Andi Widjajanto, for advice. Andi was the son of a military general, and well connected in the force. Widjajanto recommended to give the post to a non-army commander in order to uphold the routine rotation of the commandership between the various services. But Jokowi decided other-

wise, and according to Widjajanto, "he never told me why."[20] Jokowi handed the top post in the armed forces to Gatot Nurmantyo, the army chief. It later emerged that Megawati, too, had strongly advised Jokowi against appointing Gatot, and that Jokowi regretted ignoring her input. Gatot, known for his archconservative views, became a headache for Jokowi. Once consolidated in his position, Gatot warned of the possible reemergence of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI)—a party that had been brutally extinguished half a century earlier (Wadipalapa 2023). In the 2014 campaign, Jokowi's adversaries had accused him of being a communist, and so Gatot's warnings revived an issue that was both sensitive and painful for him. Gatot also became uncomfortably close to the anti-Purnama movement. In December 2017, Jokowi had had enough: he abruptly replaced Gatot, and in his stead appointed the air force chief—who had been commander of Solo's military airport when Jokowi was mayor and had also served as the president's military secretary. Jokowi's system of appointing personal loyalists to senior military posts had been born.

As difficult as the process of subordinating the military and police was for him, Jokowi understood very early on that there were opportunities to apply his "one-by-one," divide-and-rule principle to the security agencies, too. The military and police were institutional rivals, notoriously competing for budget allocations, the authority to handle certain security problems, and other institutional privileges. During the Suharto regime, the police had been placed under the armed forces commander and thus forced to play second fiddle to the military services. After his fall, however, the police were separated from the military and became an independent force (Baker 2012). The police now reported directly to the president—as did the armed forces chief. From then on, the two agencies engaged in a fierce contest for the incumbent president's attention and resources. Jokowi first made use of this constellation during the Budi Gunawan affair. Threatened with turmoil in the police, Jokowi turned to the military for support. Indeed, it is likely that the president appointed Gatot as a counterweight to the unruly police force. Later, when Gatot became a problem, Jokowi could rely on Tito to take the lead in controlling the anti-Purnama protests. As rumors of a military coup spread at the height of the protests, Tito's maneuvering for the president allowed the latter to come out on top. Jokowi learned then that while he had to give concessions to one force to turn against the other, these transactional costs were worthwhile to maintain the overall balance in his regime. In the case of the police, he doubled its budget in his first three years in office (Mietzner 2023, 128).

Jokowi also continued, and intensified, the habit of previous presidents

to integrate retired military and police officers into government (Laksmana 2019). Even in the 2014 elections, Jokowi loaded his campaign team with former officers, hoping to counter the military clout of his rival, the ex-general Prabowo. Once inaugurated, he gave many of them senior positions, and he invited more whenever he thought that the situation required it. In January 2018, as he dismissed Gatot and feared a backlash from the latter's supporters, he appointed Moeldoko, Gatot's predecessor, as presidential chief of staff. Teten Masduki, a civilian Jokowi ally who had been chief of staff since 2016, had to relinquish his post to make way for Moeldoko. Reflecting on his dismissal, Teten said that "Moeldoko was recruited as a military man who had the necessary influence to take on the Gatot elements in the army."[21] Teten, like Jokowi himself, was often slandered as a supporter of communism, and "so I understood that removing me and bringing in Moeldoko was key to neutralizing the discourse Gatot had started." Similarly, Jokowi appointed Tito as minister of home affairs in October 2019—the first time that a former police officer held that position, which oversees the country's governors, district heads, and mayors, as well as their attached bureaucratic apparatuses. Tito had asked for this shift into a ministry: "After the 2019 election, Jokowi's team told me that it was discussed whether I stay on as police chief or move into the home affairs portfolio. I replied that I preferred the ministry."[22] Tito had grown tired of the pressure he felt as police chief, which also included terrorist threats. In his new ministry, he became one of Jokowi's political lieutenants.

Having established control over the military and police, Jokowi dominated the country's most important coercive forces. The military, which had been the backbone of Suharto's regime and retained the aura of deeply engrained power, held the monopoly on mobilizing the state's defense capacity. The police, emerging confidently from their previous role as a stepchild of the armed forces, oversaw security and law enforcement. By consolidating his position over both, Jokowi not only prevented them from turning against him, but also opened up opportunities to use their power to his political benefit. Traces of this could be seen in the 2019 elections, when Jokowi was concerned that some of his 2014 voters could abstain because they were disappointed with his failure to deliver on the reformist initiatives he had promised. Therefore, the military and police initiated a get-out-the-vote campaign, putting "voting is cool" posters up across the country and quietly making the rounds in villages to encourage participation. At the end, voter turnout was up, and Jokowi won with an increased margin.

In addition to the military and police, Jokowi also firmed his grip over another crucial coercive agency: the attorney-general's office. In charge of

bringing criminal investigations to court, that body held the power of either going harshly or softly on defendants—and was hence of great importance to elites. The fact that it was directly placed under the president, and that the attorney general was a member of the cabinet, gave Jokowi the chance of institutionalized intervention (Power 2020). In his first term, Jokowi gave the job to a politician of the Nasdem party, which was part of his coalition. While Nasdem exploited the post for its own gains, the party also ensured that the president remained content with his overall control over the office. In Jokowi's second term, Jokowi handed the portfolio to the brother of a PDI-P politician—again following his strategy of preventing power concentration in particular parties and keeping the balance between coalition members fluid. All the while, he was determined not to give the post to somebody who was too clean and courageous to be controlled. Mahfud MD, who was known for his integrity and courage, told Jokowi's assistants in 2019 that he was interested in the position. As noted, his vice-presidential nomination had fallen through in the previous year as Jokowi gave in to his coalition's pressure. According to Mahfud, "I was briefly held in the belief that I would be attorney-general, but then I was told it was off."[23] Mahfud was instead kicked upstairs to the post of coordinating minister for politics, law, and security—a "non-executorial" portfolio, as Mahfud formulated with some disappointment.

With Jokowi sitting on top of a carefully balanced multiparty coalition and an apparatus of loyal coercive agencies beside him, he had found an effective formula for sustaining and expanding power. But for this system to work, Jokowi needed a clique of operators he could trust to secure its smooth running. We will now turn to introducing this cast of actors. Without them, Jokowi's presidency would not have functioned the way it did, and yet Jokowi watched scrupulously to ensure that each of them remained aware of their replaceability.

Three Rival Musketeers

On what seemed like a normal day at the office in July 2016, Jokowi got into a car with his three closest aides at Jakarta's Halim Perdanakusumah airport. Returning from a work trip, Jokowi invited state secretary Pratikno, cabinet secretary Pramono Anung, and coordinating minister for politics, law, and security Luhut Pandjaitan to join him in his limousine for the ride back to the Jakarta palace. The atmosphere was relaxed, jokes were made, and gossip was exchanged. When they reached the palace, Luhut excused

himself and entered his private car to go home. Waving Luhut goodbye, Jokowi turned to Pratikno and Pramono and told them to stay for another meeting. "I want to reshuffle the cabinet," the president told his surprised assistants.[24] Even more mind-boggling to them was the news that Jokowi wished to move Luhut to another portfolio—and one with lesser prestige at that. According to Pramono, who retold the story with some glee, "nobody saw that one coming." After the reshuffle was announced, Luhut confronted Pramono and asked why he didn't tell him about his imminent removal. "I really did not know," was the answer. Evidently, Jokowi applied his "one-by-one" strategy to the chief operators of his power system in the same way that he used it to keep parties and security agencies in check. Doing so ensured that his three "musketeers" scrutinized each other while serving him loyally, and prevented them from uniting against him. Reshuffling Luhut also sent a clear message that although important to him, they were disposable actors.

Among the three presidential chief lieutenants, Pratikno was the most trusted and influential. This was largely because, unlike the other two, he had no obvious political or commercial interests. While we noted that Jokowi felt comfortable with oligarchs in his cabinet, he was convinced that the position of state secretary—which runs the administration of government—needed to be held by someone without vested material interests or party affiliation. Soft-spoken but humorous, Pratikno had trained as a political scientist, and during the 2014 campaign was rector of the prestigious Gadjah Mada university in Yogyakarta. Both Jokowi and Pratikno were former students of that university, too: they had studied at the same time. But while they knew each other, they were not close. Years later, Pratikno visited Jokowi in Solo and wrote—together with a colleague—an academic article about the then-mayor's increasing popularity (Pratikno and Lay 2013). As Jokowi ran for president, Pratikno gave behind-the-scenes advice, and after the elections, commented on drafts on the planned structure of the incoming government. In passing, he mentioned to Jokowi that his university team had once developed a draft bill on the institution of the presidency. "Little did I know that this would seal my fate," Pratikno recalled with a sigh.[25] "Jokowi got interested in that bill, and said that it qualified me to become state secretary." Pratikno initially refused, suggesting that if the president wanted him to join the cabinet, it should be as education minister. But Jokowi insisted: "He told me that the competition among parties over this position was so fierce that he had to make a quick decision, and it needed to be someone not affiliated with party or other interests." Pratikno finally agreed.

Like Jokowi, Pratikno struggled for a while to find his feet, but by the

middle of the first term, he was fully established as the president's main advisor, messenger, and executor. Indeed, he became so central to Jokowi's regime that the magazine *Tempo* (2024b) devoted an entire cover story to him. When Pratikno called, the person on the other end of the line knew that he channeled Jokowi's wishes in an unfiltered manner—no other person in the president's entourage had this level of authority. Pratikno informed people of their hiring or firing, conveyed the president's instructions to ministers and other actors, and served as a "clearinghouse" for policy problems. All the while, however, it remained obvious that Pratikno's power was borrowed from the president. He had no network of his own that could have sustained him in case of a falling-out with Jokowi. This was exactly how the latter wanted it, and Pratikno was happy to serve under these terms. This remained the case even as Pratikno was more and more dragged into overseeing Jokowi's dirtier political operations, such as the engineering of the president's succession and the appointment of Gibran as vice-presidential candidate. Over time, the resentment of many political actors toward Pratikno grew as a result of these events. "Pratikno became used to interfering in our affairs," said Ace Hasan, a senior Golkar legislator.[26] "That shouldn't have been his role." Pratikno was aware of the increasing dislike of him in elite circles, but he decided to stand by Jokowi to the end: "We have had many debates, and I often disagreed with him," Pratikno said about Jokowi. "But once the president made a decision, he signalled that he didn't want to hear more, and I accepted that."[27]

Jokowi's cabinet secretary, Pramono Anung, came on board in 2015 for one main purpose: that is, to smoothen relations with Megawati (Mietzner 2016). As noted, these relations had soured over the Budi Gunawan case, and the PDI-P chairwoman disliked Andi Widjajanto, who held the position of cabinet secretary during that affair. Prior to his appointment, Pramono had been secretary-general of PDI-P between 2005 and 2010—a role that required him not only to be Megawati's right-hand man, but also to mediate between her and her husband, Taufik Kiemas, over their political disagreements. He was widely seen as having succeeded in that endeavor. As a result, when Megawati asked Jokowi to find somebody "more senior" to replace Widjajanto,[28] Pramono was the obvious choice for the president. Recall that Jokowi in parallel broadened the coalition to make himself less dependent on PDI-P—but he still thought it prudent at that time to maintain a cordial relationship with Megawati's party. For much of the remainder of Jokowi's term, Pramono was busy with this tricky assignment. He became Jokowi's messenger to Megawati, and vice versa. He knew how to package unhappy news in front of Megawati, much to Pratikno's relief. Pratikno recalled that

"before Pramono came on, I was one of those who had to deliver bad news to Megawati. Once I had to inform her about the president's dissatisfaction with a poorly performing PDI-P minister; I sat through two hours of her angry response."[29] Bubbly, eloquent, and familiar with Megawati's personality, Pramono dispensed the duty of dealing with her more effectively than Pratikno. Pramono, then, brought stability to a crucial aspect of Jokowi's operations.

But while Pramono's PDI-P links made him a major operator of the presidential coalition, they also led Jokowi to keep him away from key political decisions. In contrast to Pratikno, Jokowi viewed Pramono as having biased party interests, and being a multimillionaire businessman, he did not have the same claim to economic disinterest as the state secretary either. Consequently, although Jokowi allowed him to manage relations with Megawati and oversee day-to-day cabinet affairs, the president didn't involve Pramono in political strategy discussions in the way that he consulted Pratikno. Jokowi's reservations vis-à-vis Pramono intensified as the president planned his post-2024 future. When Jokowi prepared to support Prabowo and pair him with his son Gibran, Pramono instead worked on building an alliance around PDI-P's candidate, Ganjar Pranowo. In September 2023—five weeks before the Prabowo-Gibran ticket was announced—Pramono negotiated with former president Yudhoyono's party to "join PDI-P's coalition. That would make it a lot stronger."[30] Still believing that Jokowi would eventually back Ganjar, he attempted to serve the president and PDI-P at the same time. But not only did Pramono's plans of bringing Yudhoyono into the Ganjar alliance fall through, the president also openly broke with PDI-P and endorsed the candidacy of his son, against the explicit wishes of the party (more about this in chapter 7). Pramono tried to save face by declaring that the relationship between Jokowi and Megawati remained "fine," but the public knew—as did the cabinet secretary, too—that this was not true.[31]

Unlike Pratikno and Pramono, who stayed in their respective posts to the end of the Jokowi presidency,[32] Luhut Pandjaitan was moved around several times. An oligarch with a larger-than-life personality, Luhut was a military officer before venturing into business and politics (Syailendra 2016). He met Jokowi during his time as Solo mayor and decided to invest in the latter's furniture business, but their relationship initially remained limited to this cooperation. In 2013, however, Luhut became an early financier of Jokowi's campaign. Loud, blunt, and self-confident, Luhut was feared by opponents but also had a reputation for being a quick problem-solver. Both of these qualities made him interesting to Jokowi after his election victory; as a presidential novice, he needed an experienced fixer who could bulldoze

through the existing bureaucracy and get things done for him. Therefore, in December 2014 he appointed Luhut as chief of staff—a position that Jokowi specifically created for him. Setting the office up from scratch, Luhut developed it into an influential actor in the presidential infrastructure. Half a year later, Jokowi made Luhut coordinating minister for politics, law, and security, marking his formal entry into the cabinet. From the start, Luhut acted like a prime minister, often calling other cabinet members not under his coordination, giving them orders on personnel and policy issues.[33] Most ministers complied because of Luhut's forcefulness and close relationship with the president, but there was also widespread discontent. Apparently, Jokowi himself felt uneasy, and as we noted above, Luhut was reshuffled in 2016. Without much fanfare, he was shifted into the much less important post of coordinating minister of maritime affairs.

Jokowi's frequent rotation of Luhut, while keeping him in the cabinet, pointed to his simultaneous suspicion of and dependence on the political entrepreneur. On the one hand, he was weary of Luhut's background as a natural-resource oligarch with a host of vested interests. On the other hand, Jokowi appreciated Luhut's use of his funds and skills in defense of his presidency (Ellis 2021). Luhut was well aware of the volatility of his position. "At the beginning of Jokowi's presidency," Luhut recalled, "I told him the story of the relationship between Suharto and Benny Moerdani, my mentor in the military."[34] Moerdani had been Suharto's most trusted aide and military commander, but their relationship fell apart in the late 1980s as the autocrat felt that his protégé was becoming too powerful—and disrespectful, too. "Their partnership collapsed because they stopped communicating, making room for rumours instead," Luhut concluded. "So I asked Jokowi that we should never allow this to happen, and that we should meet at least once a week to talk. Jokowi agreed." Nevertheless, the president decided that he had to keep Luhut on his toes, and he never informed him before rotating him elsewhere. Luhut was deeply hurt by his 2016 reshuffle, but he eventually swallowed his disappointment. According to Luhut, "I told the president that I was surprised, and asked for an explanation."[35] Jokowi replied that he needed him in his new post to produce a maritime policy blueprint, the development of which had stalled since the beginning of his rule. Luhut accepted this explanation, and in typical fashion, quickly expanded the powers of his new ministry. In 2019, investment was added to his portfolio, making him de facto responsible for the economy, too.

The relationship between Jokowi's three closest aides was polite at the surface but defined by nuanced tensions underneath. Pramono, to begin with, thought that Luhut's role in government was overrated. "Yes, he was given

specific assignments, and his title of 'Mister Bottleneck' might be deserved. But he did not control things in the way it was often reported," Pramono claimed.[36] What is more, he believed that Luhut frequently "messed up" political issues. Pramono cited the attempt to get Jokowi a third term as an example—a topic we will discuss in detail later. Pratikno tended to agree with Pramono's assessment of Luhut. He asserted that Luhut—an ethnic Batak from Sumatra—often misunderstood Jokowi's instructions because he did not grasp their Javanese connotations: "Sometimes, Luhut talked to the media about something that the president allegedly said, and Jokowi then came to me and complained that he did not say that. Thus, I had to clarify to Luhut what the president actually meant."[37] Pratikno, an ethnic Javanese like Jokowi, recalled that this happened "a lot." Luhut, for his part, conceded that his role was largely project-focused, and that he did not have the kind of physical everyday proximity to the president that Pratikno and Pramono experienced.[38] But while they were divided—in exactly the way Jokowi wanted—all three played a crucial role in operating the rewards-and-punishments system that the president relied on to control both allies and adversaries. How this system worked in practice, and how it succeeded, is the focus of the next section.

Reward and Punishment

In July 2023, Golkar chairman and coordinating minister for the economy Airlangga Hartarto left the attorney general's office after having been interrogated for twelve hours. Investigators had asked Airlangga, who was visibly exhausted, forty-six questions about his role in the corrupt allocation of palm-oil export licenses to entrepreneurs. But the media, and Airlangga himself, understood that the context in which the interrogation took place was much broader. Airlangga, handpicked by Jokowi to become Golkar chair in 2017, had on several occasions not followed the palace's instructions, or had done so only belatedly. The latest such case concerned Golkar's position toward the nomination of presidential candidates for the 2024 elections. Airlangga and his party were wavering, while it was obvious at that stage that Jokowi leaned toward Prabowo, who was to be paired with Gibran. One of Airlangga's closest aides was clear about how his investigation at the attorney general's office had to be interpreted: "This was a power demonstration by Jokowi, not an interview. Even the investigators didn't seem to know why they had to question him. Most played with their phones."[39] As in previous instances, the threat of legal action did the trick. A month after his date with

the attorney general's investigators, Airlangga declared Golkar's support for Prabowo, and it was later the first party to nominate Gibran as his running mate. Asked about his interrogation at that time, Airlangga was tight-lipped: "Those are the challenges in life."[40] His Golkar colleague in cabinet, industry minister Agus Guwimang Kartasasmita, was more forthcoming: "It is evident that law enforcement agencies have been used to pressure politicians. But as you can see, in this case and others, it works."[41]

The threats, and the palace's expectations linked to them, were often conveyed in a blunt and unambiguous way. To pressure Airlangga, Luhut was deployed. "I told Airlangga that he had to be careful about his legal cases, and that there were problems about his leadership in Golkar, too," Jokowi's top minister disclosed.[42] The message was unmistakable: Airlangga was at risk of going to jail, and he could lose his Golkar chairmanship as well. As noted, Airlangga grasped what was expected of him, and he delivered. Once Airlangga acted in a manner that was satisfactory to the palace, the case at the attorney general's office was "paused." Luhut volunteered that "I spoke to the attorney-general and suggested that the case not move forward at this time."[43] In other words, the threats were effectively coupled with offers of protection. Which of the two menus was offered depended on the compliance of the actor involved. In Airlangga's case, another messenger was also used: Bahlil Lahadalia, Jokowi's investment minister, talked publicly about potentially challenging Airlangga for the Golkar chairmanship. However, Bahlil temporarily stopped talking about this scenario after Airlangga endorsed Prabowo. Bahlil proudly shared that he informed Airlangga that everything was "fine now," but that he would "tighten the strings" again if necessary.[44] Bahlil's threats became reality a year later: in August 2024, Airlangga was once again called in by the attorney general's office. As previously, Jokowi had been unhappy with some of Airlangga's moves as Golkar chair. This time, Airlangga resigned abruptly as party leader, and Bahlil took his place.

To fully comprehend Jokowi's system of reward and punishment, we need to first explore how he viewed his place among all other political actors. As indicated earlier, from his perspective he was not simply the president—he was a clean, popular leader in the midst of a corrupt, publicly loathed crowd of politicians. "If you ask why I stayed in control without having a party, and much less a majority party, the answer is easy: it's due to my high popularity, while trust in the legislature and parties is low," Jokowi explained.[45] "Both are seen as centres of corruption. This means that if we are clean, if we deliver, we get the support of the people against them."[46] This view was at the heart of his decision to not found his own party throughout his

presidency, despite having had many opportunities to do so. For him, establishing a party would have destroyed his brand: "Parties are so unpopular, why would I associate with them?" he asked me, shrugging his shoulders. Hence, as discussed before, he had a typical populist's perception of the world: he, the carrier of the people's mandate, stood against "them," a circus of greedy, self-interested actors (Singh 2021). And not unlike other populists, he decided that rather than trying to eradicate the corruption around him, it was more advantageous to exploit it to his benefit. Corruption was the big weakness in the armor of his friends and foes. Reminding them of that weakness was his best weapon in his fight to establish authority. Indeed, he found that putting actors vulnerable to corruption allegations in places of authority was the perfect way to control them. He isolated some positions from this pattern—such as that of state secretary and minister of finance—but applied it to many others.

Golkar was a particularly easy target for Jokowi's system of imposing his will on corruption-cloaked elites. Rent-seeking was rife in Suharto's former regime party, and no dominant figure had emerged from its ranks after his fall (Tomsa 2008). This meant that the party chairmanship typically went to men who either had enough money to pay off other cadres or held a position with access to government resources. The ideal candidate for the top job had both. Recall that Jokowi established control over the party in 2016 by installing a loyalist faction in its leadership board. His choice of party chairman at the time was Setya Novanto.[47] The wealthy businessman had a long history of being investigated over corruption allegations, but his close links to the police ensured that he remained untouched for a long time (Mann 2020). In 2014, he had been elected speaker of the legislature, and during his tenure, helped Jokowi to pass his budgets. A year into the job, however, Novanto resigned after a leaked recording showed him asking for bribes from a mining company. Thus, when Jokowi subsequently selected Novanto to lead Golkar,[48] he knew exactly who he was getting: a politician who had proven his usefulness before, and whose infamy made him susceptible to pressure. Having helped him to become Golkar chair, Jokowi also endorsed his comeback as speaker in the same year. When Novanto was finally arrested for corruption in 2017, Jokowi simply replaced him with Airlangga.[49] The son of a former Suharto minister and a fertilizer entrepreneur without charisma, Airlangga was as malleable to presidential directives as his predecessor.

Other parties had similar experiences. In PAN, Jokowi twice supported its chairman, Zulkifli Hasan, to win internal party contests against politicians critical of the government. In 2015, Hasan advanced against the incumbent, a former Prabowo ally, and in 2020 against an anti-government-faction leader.

"Especially in 2020, Hasan would not have won without government intervention," said Bima Arya Sugiarto, the party's deputy chair.[50] Again, Jokowi knew very well who he was supporting. Under the Yudhoyono government, Hasan had been minister of forestry, which led him to be investigated for corruption allegations (Rahayu 2014). In 2018, he was also questioned over his role in a corruption case involving his brother, a local official in Sumatra. In 2020, then still formally in opposition, Hasan was once more interrogated over a corruption case. Fully aware of Hasan's background, and knowing that it made him legally and politically vulnerable, Jokowi appointed him minister of trade in 2022—a position that offered significant patronage opportunities because of its oversight of import and export licenses. A year later, Hasan received the same instruction from the palace as Airlangga—he was asked to support Prabowo's presidential bid. Many in the party wanted to wait longer to make an informed decision, but the president's aides were clear that they wanted a fast endorsement. Like Airlangga, Zulkifli Hasan gave in, and threw his party's support behind Prabowo. A source in the party acknowledged that "we did not want to suffer the same fate as Golkar with Airlangga"[51]—meaning that they did not want to see their chairman interrogated by authorities again. Preempting that threat, PAN leaders gave the president what he wanted.

Jokowi's comfort with using the legal apparatus against Indonesia's corruption-prone elite also allowed him to tighten his grip over the country's media conglomerates (Tapsell 2020). In the 2014 campaign, the majority of Indonesia's private TV stations had supported his opponent Prabowo, but once in office, Jokowi sought to change that constellation. In this spirit, he began a campaign to bring previously hostile media owners into the fold of his government. The first target in this effort was Hary Tanoesoedibjo, whose business conglomerate included, in 2017, "three free-to-air national television networks that [commanded] some 40 percent of prime-time audience share" (Suzuki 2017). Importantly, Tanoesoedibjo's stations belonged to those that had backed Prabowo in 2014. But in early 2017, investigators opened a case against Tanoesoedibjo for threatening a prosecutor with text messages in a separate legal matter. Shortly afterward, Tanoesoedibjo—who also chaired a small party called Perindo—announced that he would abandon Prabowo and endorse Jokowi for reelection in 2019. Given the temporal "coincidence" of the legal threats and Tanoesoedibjo's declaration, his move was widely interpreted as an attempt to stop the investigation (Retaduari 2017). If that was indeed his intention, it worked—the case did not make it to court. Tanoesoedibjo's stations, for their part, shifted to friendly coverage of the president, cementing his high approval ratings.

But it is important to note that Jokowi's system of power maintenance did not only rely on threats. Just as important as coercion was the offer of rewards—and this applied to both parties and state bodies under his control (Mietzner 2023). While fearing Jokowi's tools of intimidation, most members of the president's alliance offered loyalty because doing so gave them access to power and resources. Controlling ministries and other portfolios with massive budgetary means below them, party politicians and leaders of state agencies helped themselves to considerable privileges and riches, with Jokowi's active acquiescence. The president was happy to give them what they requested in exchange for their support, as long as the concessions he made did not seriously curtail his presidential autonomy and undermine his own policy priorities. "Of course, politicians and others can make requests to me, and it is normal in a coalition to grant some of them. But there are limits, and they have to understand where those limits are," Jokowi asserted.[52] For him, those limits were the parameters of his (economy-focused) agenda. Outside of this focus, Jokowi surrendered many areas of governance to the elites in his coalition because, to put it bluntly, he did not care much about them. Giving away these areas, in turn, helped him to satisfy his partners and stabilize his rule. In consequence, while generally Jokowi was reluctant to give in to pressure from his allies because he was afraid that this would make him look weak, he was rather generous on policy items that were unimportant to him. What mattered to Jokowi, after all, was his core development program.

In short, Jokowi gained and sustained power through a careful calibration of threats and rewards (Baker 2023). His camp understood the use of threats mostly as a measure to show Indonesia's elites that the president was not afraid of them. "The more we are afraid," Pratikno explained, "the more they will make us afraid."[53] Using instruments of coercion, then, was a way of demonstrating that not only was the president not afraid, but he was in a position to *make* adversaries afraid if he chose to. However, Jokowi was aware of the limitations of this approach, and he therefore balanced the use of sticks with that of carrots. Again, calibration was key. "You can't give them too much, because if you do, they will always ask for more," Jokowi said.[54] In his mind, he didn't concede too much because his core agenda remained intact—the fact that he gave control over many other policy fields to self-interested elites did not concern him. And even in instances when he deployed coercive tools, he often followed up with rewards. In the case of Tanoesoedibjo, he made his daughter a deputy minister in 2019. Zulkifli Hasan, too, experienced this dual strategy. While he decided to support Prabowo under the threat of legal action, he was also told that compliance

would earn him the president's favor and, crucially, a seat in the post-Jokowi government. Said Hasan, "yes, the president suggested that we support Prabowo, but he asked us to back someone who was likely to be the next president, so that was fine. I want to be on the winning side—I have lost too many times before."[55] And indeed, after the 2024 elections, Hasan and his party found themselves in government again.

Stability and Regression

If we stand back, as we must, to consider the main features of Jokowi's system of power, one is struck by its stability. Throughout his decade in office, he faced no formal impeachment proceedings; there was no serious threat of a military coup; and his approval ratings reached levels that put him, together with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, at the top of international standards. This was not necessarily the expected outcome. During his time in power, there were successful impeachments of presidents in Brazil, South Korea, and Peru, and impeachment attempts in the United States, Chile, and Albania. Military juntas ruled in Indonesia's neighborhood in Thailand and Myanmar, and coups occurred in several African states. Many incumbent presidents and prime ministers struggled with low popularity ratings and political crises, both in Asia and around the world. Having a long history of presidents being toppled, including by the military, Indonesia's journey under Jokowi was, therefore, in many ways exceptional.

What were the ingredients of Jokowi's recipe for stability? At the heart of his concept was the defense of his popularity, which he rightly viewed as his core political capital (Muhtadi 2023c). His approval ratings were what separated him from his allies and opponents. Nevertheless, he had to change his perception of the role that this popularity played in maintaining power. Initially, he believed that it would make building a large government coalition unnecessary. Disabused of that notion quickly at the beginning of his term, he used his popularity as the main instrument to expand his coalition. Once he got a taste for coalition expansion, he kept going—until he had built a massive alliance that exceeded the size of Yudhoyono's and that of almost any other president in the democratic world. Subsequently, he became a master practitioner of coalitional presidentialism and its methods typically used by minority presidents to stabilize their rule (Chaisty, Cheeseman, and Power 2017). As I discussed elsewhere (Mietzner 2023), his coalition was not only a coalition of parties—it included the military, the police, and other key societal actors as well. "Indonesia is a diverse country, so of course these

forces have to be accommodated when the cabinet is put together," Jokowi concluded.[56] In Jokowi's world, everyone became, in one way or another, a part of the system that worked toward the consolidation of his power and the delivery of his agenda. In this system, however, he was the only one who knew how all the dots connected—his method of meeting with the key actors separately rather than as a collective made sure of that.

In presiding over his coalition, Jokowi did not hesitate to use coercion—and he displayed a growing predilection for it (Fealy 2020b). After he gained firm control over his security and law enforcement agencies, he deployed them to pressure both opponents and members of his coalition. While he relied on a small team of operators to do the dirty work for him to uphold deniability, by the end of his term few people in the elite and the broader population doubted that it was him pulling the strings in most of these operations. What is more, ordinary citizens did not seem to mind. As Jokowi's role in a series of coercive measures—such as the use of legal threats to pressure Airlangga and Hasan into compliance—became transparent, the electorate remained indifferent. Indeed, Jokowi's approval ratings consolidated further. It was this element of coercion that gave Jokowi's form of coalitional presidentialism a neo-authoritarian touch, and distinguished it from that in many other democracies. Coercion was also what put Jokowi in the driver's seat of his coalition—adding a Machiavellian tool to the instrumental use of his popularity. Hence, when Dan Slater (2018) described Jokowi's coalition as a case of "promiscuous power-sharing" among actors of a politico-economic cartel, that was true only insofar as the president determined the terms of *how* power was shared.

What, if anything, did Jokowi intend to do with the power that his coalition-based regime allowed him to wield? In his mind, it put him into a position of pursuing his policy agenda, which was centered around infrastructure and the economy. The successful implementation of this agenda, in turn, would further increase his popularity, giving him even more powers over the elite. While much of his economic agenda was uncontroversial to the elite, certain aspects of it met with resistance, and Jokowi needed—in his view—ever-increasing powers to overcome it. The best example of this was the relocation of the capital, which we discuss in detail in the next chapter. This was a project only Jokowi really believed in, and would not have gone ahead without the president having amassed sufficient power to push it forward. Power, then, was both a means and an end in Jokowi's conceptualization of his presidency. But the price for purchasing it was high. On the one hand, the use of law enforcement agencies to impose his will on reluctant elite players undermined those bodies' functionality (Power 2020). On the

other hand, his concessions to those same players—offered in a system that strategically balanced rewards and punishments—handed key arenas of governance to predatory actors. These arenas were not of great importance to Jokowi, as they were marginal to his agenda. But they were of tremendous significance to Indonesia's institutional maturity, the regression of which Jokowi accepted as a tolerable side effect of his rule.

CHAPTER 3

"He's a Hardware Guy"

Jokowi's Infrastructure Drive

On a dark and wet morning in September 2023, I was in a car that followed Jokowi's limousine as he inspected the construction sites of the new capital Nusantara in the east of Borneo. In the car, which I shared with several cabinet ministers, Pratikno looked meditatively out of the window and took in the view of the new buildings being erected in the muddy landscape in front of him. "This is a crazy project," he said quietly, "a truly crazy project."[1] His fellow ministers nodded. Indeed, this was an assessment both Jokowi's admirers and critics could easily endorse, albeit for different reasons. To his supporters, the building of Nusantara in thus far mostly uninhabited areas of Borneo was a symbol of the president's out-of-the box thinking and courage. Only he, they proclaimed, had the guts to do what many of his predecessors had just talked about: that is, to take on the massive project of moving Indonesia's capital from the overcrowded megacity of Jakarta on Java to the archipelago's neglected Outer Islands. For his critics, by contrast, Jokowi's initiative reflected his recklessness, tendency to waste state funds on ambitious pet projects, and disregard for environmental concerns. They claimed that by ignoring due process, Jokowi did more harm than good, and that the end result was likely to be a white elephant that Indonesia would be saddled with for generations to come (Amir 2023). Despite the concerns, Jokowi ploughed ahead: in July 2024, he spent his first night in Nusantara's new presidential palace, and a few weeks later, the first Independence Day ceremony outside of Jakarta in the nation's history was held there.

Whatever side one takes in this debate, it is hard to overstate the importance of the creation of the new capital for Jokowi's presidency (Rapha and

Amedi 2022). No other of his initiatives brought the essence of his government so sharply into focus—both in its day-to-day reality and in the promotional videos of the capital's imagined future (Kammen 2023). The fight for Nusantara highlighted his obsession with building infrastructure as the core of his presidential agenda; it demonstrated his willingness to consider Indonesia's international alliance-building based on the support he received from specific countries for his plans; it proved that he was willing to reach deeply into the coercive toolbox to "encourage" companies to invest in the project; and more so than anything else, it fed his desire to stay in office beyond the constitutionally prescribed two terms or, alternatively, to engineer the appointment of a successor who would complete Nusantara. In other words, Nusantara became a kaleidoscope through which the various facets of Jokowi's rule and political character could be viewed both individually and in their entirety. Through this, both his strengths—expressed in the absolute will to pursue his goals—and his weaknesses—evident in the preparedness to accept collateral damage to the economy and democracy—became abundantly clear. At the same time, the fact that the long-term fate of Nusantara was not known at the end of Jokowi's rule—its future depends on what his successors plan to do with it—severely complicated the weighing up of these strengths and weaknesses in historical terms.

For Jokowi, too, Nusantara constituted the nucleus of his presidency and the politico-economic thinking that underpinned it. Asked about his greatest achievements, he did not hesitate to list Nusantara first.[2] For him, the new capital was the climax of his attempt to modernize Indonesia's infrastructure as the precondition for joining the ranks of industrialized nations. Having found a severely underdeveloped infrastructure network when taking office in 2014 (Ray and Ing 2016), he decided to make its strengthening the priority of his government (Guild 2019). Afterward, he stuck to this goal throughout his two terms. He focused on classic infrastructure projects in his first term—such as rail, roads, and ports—and subsequently felt that he had accumulated enough political capital to launch the idea of Nusantara at the beginning of his second. Parallel to this, he started another economic policy initiative that was just as controversial: that is, industrial down-streaming. He hoped that this approach would turn Indonesia from a resource-exporting country into one focused on producing added value in its economic output (Lu 2024). Like Nusantara, the down-streaming idea was attacked by Jokowi's critics as simplistic and economically harmful. But for him, it was only natural that an Indonesia with a new capital and better infrastructure should stop exporting raw materials and instead force producers to offer processed goods, even if the cost of this process was high and its

eventual success uncertain. In fact, infrastructure building and industrial down-streaming were inseparably linked for him: the former was the first step to engage in the latter, and together they held the key to the qualitative upgrading of the economy.

This chapter discusses the evolution of Jokowi's infrastructure policy framework, explores how it produced Nusantara as its ultimate manifestation, and assesses the ways through which it led the president into risky economic experiments. These analyses reveal that Jokowi invested much of his political fortune and circumvented democratic norms to meet his development ambitions. We first look at how Jokowi arrived at his programmatic focus on infrastructure—this process was by no means straightforward, as his 2014 campaign had not emphasized it in a meaningful way. After discussing the extent and repercussions of his infrastructure projects—in terms of both the impulses for the economy and the burden they imposed on the state budget—we turn to the building of Nusantara as the symbolic highlight of Jokowi's presidency. The chapter's subsequent section addresses the issue of industrial down-streaming—partly because, as noted, Jokowi viewed it as part and parcel of his infrastructure drive, but also because it became, for his allies and critics, the central economic theme of his second term. Finally, the chapter evaluates the impact Jokowi's infrastructure-focused policies have had on Indonesia's overall industrialization and economic standing. Once again, the verdicts by his supporters and adversaries vary widely in this regard, but it is clear that the record is more mixed than the former would admit and more decent than the latter are prepared to recognize. Overall, his narrow focus on the hardware dimensions of the economy delivered solid results in that arena, but led him to neglect the more multilayered facets of economic modernization.

Infrastructure as Nation-Building

Being in charge of delivering Jokowi's infrastructure agenda was no laughing matter. Throughout his time as president, Jokowi wanted to get things done across the vast archipelago—and he wanted to get them done quickly. His transport minister, Budi Karya Sumadi, recalled how Jokowi repeatedly pressured him to finish Jakarta's Light Rail Transit (LRT) before the country's 78th Independence Day on August 17, 2023. Sumadi was concerned about safety, and after the president continued to insist, he decided to demonstrate the problems to Jokowi on the site of an LRT stop. "I showed him that the doors weren't closing properly yet, and that we needed more

time," Sumadi said.[3] Jokowi eventually relented, accepting Sumadi's advice that a premature opening was risky. But the president was also swayed by another of Sumadi's arguments: Jokowi had initially pushed for the LRT and a high-speed train between Jakarta and Bandung to be launched together, with the aim of sending a powerful message of his government's progress in completing major infrastructure projects. However, Sumadi—who had worked under Jokowi when he was governor of Jakarta and thus knew how to handle him—advised to slightly delay the opening of the two projects and to launch them separately (the high-speed train had safety issues, too). With launches on two different days, Sumadi argued, Jokowi could gain media attention not once, but twice. Appealing to Jokowi's well-known public relations savvy, Sumadi had hit the president's sweet spot: the LRT was opened on August 28, 2023, and the high-speed train on October 2, both with much celebration and media coverage.

Given Jokowi's notorious obsession with infrastructure while in office, it is easy to forget that it actually played only a minor role in his pre-presidential political persona. When he started to give talks to national audiences as mayor of Solo in the late 2000s and early 2010s, his pitch was centered around his ability to communicate effectively with various segments of the community. Specifically, he promoted his success in negotiating the relocation of street vendors in Solo who had previously opposed being moved from their traditional spaces.[4] To be sure, as governor of Jakarta, he revived the capital's much-delayed subway project and presided over its groundbreaking ceremony in October 2013—but in the creation of his public image, he prioritized other policy achievements. During the 2014 presidential campaign, he showed off membership cards for health and education support schemes that he had introduced for Jakartans, and that he now promised to every Indonesian. Remarkably, in his nine-point election agenda, called Nawa Cita, infrastructure was relegated to a sub-item of the last point, which focused on increasing productivity and competitiveness (Soleman and Noer 2017). Jokowi later acknowledged that infrastructure only emerged as his priority after he took office. One of the triggers for his shift was a conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping in the early days of his presidency: "I asked him what his advice would be in terms of advancing my development agenda; he replied that the way to industrialization leads through the building of infrastructure."[5] Jokowi had similar conversations with other Asian and European leaders—among them German Chancellor Angela Merkel—who suggested the same thing.

Other factors shaping Jokowi's definition of infrastructure as his government's key priority were his experiences during the 2014 campaign and the

input by economists. It was only during his extensive travel during the elections that the poor state of infrastructure became apparent to him, and he was particularly concerned about the economic disparities this created. Yudhoyono had famously remarked that roads and other infrastructure items were the domain of local governments, and the resulting disregard of that sector under his presidency showed (Hill 2015, 298). Looking back at his campaign travels in 2014, Jokowi recalled his surprise: "Imagine, a sack of cement could cost up to US$133 in Papua, while it was only US$4.70 in Java—all due to poor infrastructure."[6] His anecdotal evidence collected during the campaign was confirmed by the world's leading financial institutions—indeed, they painted a picture of appalling decline and neglect. For instance, the World Bank wrote in the mid-2010s that "total annual infrastructure investment [in Indonesia] declined from an average 7 percent during 1995–97 to around 3–4 percent of GDP in recent years, compared with over 7 percent in Thailand and Vietnam, and 10 percent in China over the past decade" (World Bank 2016). Based on these assessments, economists in Indonesia and overseas suggested to Jokowi, as incoming president, that he radically accelerate infrastructure development. One of them was Chatib Basri, then still the finance minister of outgoing president Yudhoyono. According to Basri, "there was no doubt that infrastructure required more attention than previously, and I let the new president know when I was asked for advice."[7]

Jokowi also realized that focusing on infrastructure suited his natural attraction to simplicity and tangibility. It was an area in which progress could be measured easily and presented to the public in the form of concrete structures. As such, infrastructure was a better way to relatively quick wins than more long-term development agendas such as improvements in the human development index or complex institutional reforms. His high approval ratings later demonstrated that his instincts were right, but as we will see in a later section, his fixation on infrastructure came at a price.

After a decade in power, even Jokowi's harshest critics conceded that he made significant advances in the infrastructure arena (Salim and Negara 2018; Guild 2019). In 2014, Yudhoyono's last year in office, infrastructure spending stood at US$10.3 billion. By 2017, Jokowi had more than doubled that spending to US$25.4 billion (see fig. 2). The COVID-19 crisis and its massive spending on social assistance put a break on that level of growth, but Jokowi ensured that infrastructure spending remained high: for his last year as president in 2024, he budgeted US$28.1 billion. Overall, he expanded the toll road network from Yudhoyono's 850 kilometers to more than 2,700 kilometers; he built 53 new dams, compared to Yudhoyono's 16, with more under development when he left office; his government built 50 new ports and

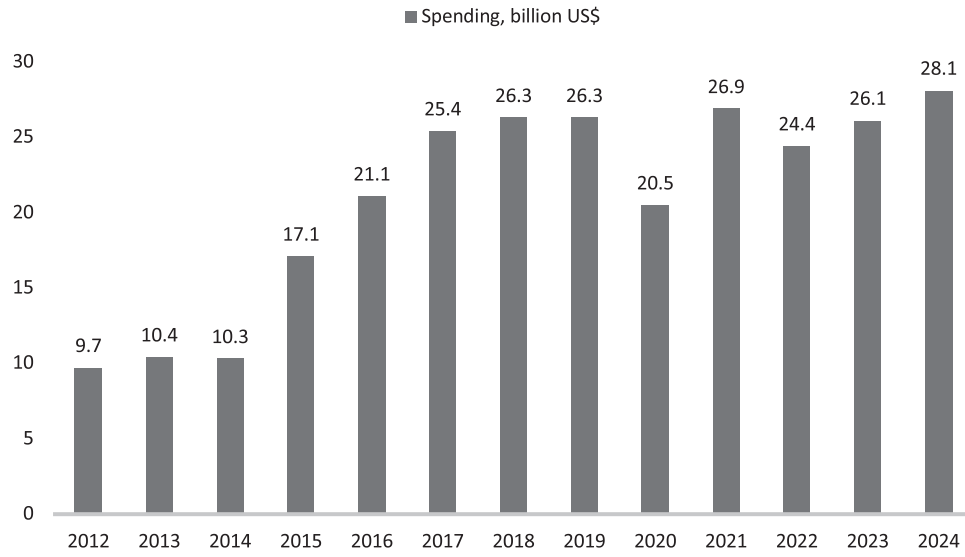

Fig. 2. Infrastructure Spending, 2012–2024
(*Source:* Data from the Ministry of Finance.)

airports and modernized old ones; and he opened Southeast Asia's first high-speed train. The progress in infrastructure development helped Indonesia to improve its standing in the Institute for Management Development's World Competitiveness Rankings, climbing from 43rd in 2018 to 27th in 2024. Jokowi was proud of these boosted index numbers, often citing them to visitors. Importantly, citizens felt the impact: residents of Jakarta, for instance, could for the first time enjoy a public transportation system that began to resemble that of its peers Kuala Lumpur or Bangkok. By the end of Jokowi's rule, Jakartans could pick from a subway, an LRT, and a massively improved commuter rail system. Other urban areas experienced similar upgrades. As noted earlier, Indonesians were appreciative: a quarter of those who liked their president's job performance did so because of advances in infrastructure development.

But for all the hype both domestic and international observers cultivated about Jokowi's infrastructure drive (Davidson 2019), it is important to keep its dimensions in perspective. By 2019, Indonesia's overall infrastructure spending to GDP ratio reached 5 percent, and while that was an uptick from the 2000s, it was still below the levels of Suharto's New Order regime and those of many international competitors. India and Vietnam, for instance, continued to spend significantly more on infrastructure than Jokowi's Indonesia (Asian Development Bank 2017). Jokowi and his ministers acknowl-

edged this. Basuki Hadimuljono, the minister for public works and people's housing, who was responsible for many of Jokowi's infrastructure projects, reported with some dismay about a conversation he had with his Chinese counterpart: "I thought we had done extraordinarily well, so I told him with pride that we soon will have 61 dams. He just smiled at me and said that China had 98,000. That's when I understood how much work we still have ahead of us."[8] In the same vein, Jokowi reminded audiences both publicly and privately that Indonesia's 2,700 kilometers of toll roads were nothing compared to China's 280,000 kilometers[9] (in fact, Jokowi might have exaggerated the latter number, given that official statistics showed China having 170,000 kilometers of expressways in 2021). While Jokowi's comparisons with China were clearly designed to underline the importance of continuing, and even accelerating, his infrastructure push, they also question the transformative impact his initiatives have had on Indonesia's overall economy.

Moreover, there were sharp criticisms of the way Jokowi organized and financed his infrastructure projects. One of these critiques focused on poor planning and execution, leading to underused and faulty structures (Bland 2020b). For instance, media reports in 2022 and 2023 listed a number of "ghost airports"—that is, airports that had been completed during Jokowi's presidency but had no or only a few flights several years later (Yanwardhana 2022). Among them were airports in Kertajati (West Java), Purbalingga (Central Java), Blora (Central Java), and Tasikmalaya (West Java). In fact, one of Jokowi's fiercest critics in this regard was Jusuf Kalla, his vice president in the first term. Kalla had been instrumental in launching the government's economic programs after 2014, but he grew increasingly critical of Jokowi and his projects after leaving office in 2019. On the Kertajati airport in West Java, for instance, Kalla did not hold back: "Perhaps there was not enough research. [. . .] People have to drive 100 kilometres from Bandung to reach it. [. . .] We shouldn't do that again" (Asmara 2019). Kalla was equally damning about the Jakarta LRT and a railway project in Sulawesi, his home island. Jokowi's pressure to open projects quickly—which his transport minister referred to above—also led to construction faults being openly exposed rather than resolved internally. For instance, when Jakarta airport's new Terminal 3 opened in 2016, it flooded only days later, and water-ingression issues continued for more than a year. These faults grabbed international headlines, undermining the government's plans to establish Terminal 3 as the "face of the new Indonesia," as Sumadi had envisioned it.[10] The issues were resolved, but the reputational impact remained.

The most stinging criticism, however, was reserved for the funding model Jokowi used to finance his infrastructure ambitions. Roughly fol-

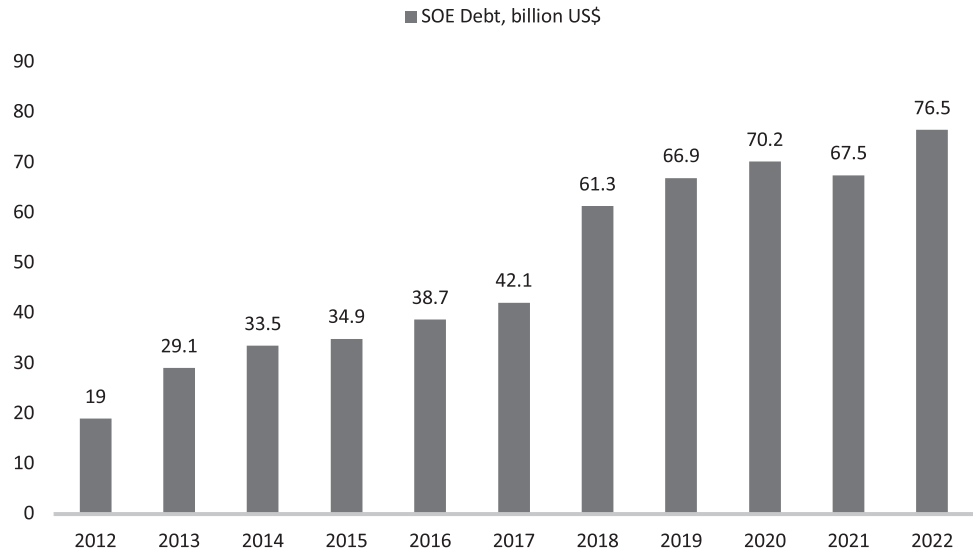

Fig. 3. State-Owned Enterprises Debt, 2012–2022
(*Source:* Data from Bank Indonesia, published in Mirsan [2022].)

lowing China's model, Jokowi paid for most of the projects by involving state-owned enterprises (SOEs) as both financiers and contractors (Prabowo 2019; Bloomberg 2019). Private investors, if interested at all, mostly picked out the few profitable projects on offer. The SOEs, for their part, either turned to banks for loans or asked the state for cash injections. As a result of this approach, the debt of SOEs ballooned from US$33.5 billion in 2014 to US$76.5 billion in 2022 (see fig. 3). Based on SOE ministry data, the consolidated debt even stood at US$106.7 billion in 2023, and economic observers warned that more SOE debts were hidden in the labyrinth of the state budget. Said Basri, the former finance minister, "the problem with SOE-based funding is that if SOEs borrow money and the loans turn into bad debt, the impact hits the entire financial sector."[11] Therefore, Basri and others suggested that large infrastructure projects should instead be directly financed through the state budget, where the repercussions could be managed better without undermining the credibility of the financial sector. In fact, at the end of Jokowi's second term, that criticism was taken on board. Erick Thohir, the minister for state-owned enterprises, said in 2023 that infrastructure projects with low projected profits—that is, with an expected internal rate of return (IRR) of under 12 percent—would from now on be directly funded by the state budget.[12] But by that time, the financial damage was already

visible: under Jokowi, Indonesia's debt-to-GDP ratio had increased from 25 percent in 2014 to about 39 percent in 2023.

Jokowi was unfazed by suggestions that his infrastructure plans had driven some Indonesian SOEs close to technical bankruptcy and the country's debt to levels not seen since 2005. In his view, building infrastructure was not only a matter of economic calculation, but a necessity of nation-building. "It's about keeping this archipelago together, connecting it, making it work—and so we can't just view this task from a narrow perspective of profitability," Jokowi asserted.[13] Specifically to the critics of his high-speed train from Jakarta to Bandung, which cost more than US$7 billion and was widely slammed as not possessing a sound business case (Intan 2022; Lim, Li, and Syailendra 2021), he retorted that "public transport will always be expensive, it will always need government subsidies. But it is worth it, as we have to start moving people, not cars."[14] These were remarkable protestations from a man who, as noted earlier, claimed to run the country based on business principles—indeed, he viewed his entire political career as being inspired by his origins as a furniture entrepreneur.[15] The fact that he insulated his infrastructure projects from economic cost considerations, and by doing so went against some of his own commercial instincts, suggested that he saw himself on a broader mission that transcended normal politics and economics. This missionary impetus gave him the energy to push the infrastructure agenda forward relentlessly, but it also fed his own sense of indispensability and, eventually, irreplaceability. In no other project was this growing self-perception of historic uniqueness more manifest than in the building of Nusantara.

A New Capital, at All Cost

As workers constructing his new capital could be heard from a distance, Jokowi addressed an illustrious group of high-value investors during a visit to the site in September 2023. With few exceptions, they were Indonesian entrepreneurs of ethnic Chinese origin. As in other Southeast Asian countries, Indonesia's ethnic Chinese have traditionally held disproportionate amounts of the country's private capital, but are politically and socially vulnerable (Chong 2018; Borsuk and Chng 2019). Speaking to the group—which included some of Indonesia's richest men—Jokowi thanked its members for their collective investment of around US$1.3 billion for a new hotel complex to be built in Nusantara. The event held on that day marked the groundbreaking for this project. Concurrently, the hotel was Nusantara's

first major private investment, with the ongoing construction almost exclusively government-funded. "This proves that the new capital is attractive to private investors," the president claimed, "otherwise they wouldn't invest here; they are businesspeople, they are not charities."[16] The entrepreneurs, most in their customary long-sleeved batik shirts, nodded politely. But the reality was that they had been pressured, even coerced, to get involved in Nusantara. Like many other private investors, they had been skeptical about the project, and did not want to put their money into the new capital until it was clear that Jokowi's successor would continue it, and until a better business case was presented. However, desperate to get private investment rolling, Jokowi twisted the arms of the ethnic Chinese tycoons into assisting his government. About a year later, Jokowi would inspect the hotel prior to its opening, displaying visible relief.

The methods used to convince the big-shot financiers were as crude as they were effective. According to Bahlil, Jokowi's famously determined minister of investment, "I used both usual and unusual ways."[17] We already noted Bahlili's propensity for non-Javanese directness in his interpersonal dealings, and that Jokowi both felt attracted to this style and made use of the skills that it fed. A former bus conductor in a small Papuan town, Bahlil had climbed up the social ladder to significant riches, further contributing to his lack of patience and straight-to-the-point bluntness: "I said to them that this was a matter of national interest, not just an issue of their IRR; then I warned them that if they continued to insist on their IRR, I would find a way to hurt their profits in other projects." In other words, he threatened to block their larger business ventures if they didn't put some of their money into Nusantara, and he reminded them not to expect a profit from this short-term investment. This threat was effective: faced with the prospect of the government obstructing their core business ventures (including property deals that required cooperation from the state's land agencies), the tycoons relented. Basuki, the infrastructure minister, confirmed that coercion had been the decisive factor in getting the group of ethnic Chinese investors to commit to Nusantara. Shortly after Jokowi's speech, I asked Basuki how the tycoons had been persuaded. Basuki—otherwise a friendly, grandfatherly figure—stepped toward me, stood forcefully on my left foot, applied his full weight, and said: "That's how it was done."[18] The episode highlighted just how crucial Nusantara was to the president's legacy, and how far he was prepared to go to pursue and protect it.

The idea to move Indonesia's capital from the chaotic megacity of Jakarta to a more remote and manageable location was not new. Sukarno had thought about shifting the capital to Palangkaraya in Central Kalimantan

on Borneo in the 1950s, and Suharto is thought to have considered the West Java sub-district of Jonggol, near Bogor, as the site for a new capital in the 1990s (Nugroho et al. 2023). But none of these initiatives came to fruition. Jokowi, for his part, approved the development of initial ideas of moving the capital in 2015, but no concrete action was taken until 2018, when he asked Basuki to come up with more concrete concepts. "This was a very secret affair," Basuki recalled, "even my own senior staff were not supposed to know. Jokowi wanted to keep it under wraps until after his re-election [in April 2019]."[19] Jokowi later explained his silence on the issue throughout the 2019 campaign with his intention to prevent land speculation. "Had I mentioned it then, investors would have bought up land cheaply, and it would have made things much more expensive for us," Jokowi insisted.[20] But it is equally plausible that the president was aware of the controversial nature of the topic and did not want it to become a burden for his electoral prospects. Therefore, he waited until his reelection was secured, made his decision to relocate the capital in late April 2019, started to explore sites in May, and announced the location—in the districts of Panajam Paser Utara and Kutai Kartanegara in East Kalimantan on Borneo—in August. The necessary law was passed and the name Nusantara (Indonesia's term for its archipelago) revealed in 2022. Construction began in 2023.

Jokowi's rationale for moving the capital focused on two main themes: the ungovernability of Jakarta and the need to decenter Indonesia's Java-based economy. "The idea to create a new capital first came to me when I was governor of Jakarta; the traffic, the sinking of the city, the planning failures over decades—it simply was no longer manageable," Jokowi said about the city he once ran.[21] But an even more fundamental motivation was his desire to address the economic disparity between Java and the Outer Islands (Hill, Resosudarmo, and Vidyattama 2008). This, he insisted, was both about burden-sharing and creating equal opportunities: at the time of his decision to relocate the capital, Java covered only 7 percent of Indonesia's territory, but had 60 percent of its population and 58 percent of its GDP. According to Jokowi, "we needed to rebalance, relieving Java of its environmental burden, and shifting economic activity to the other areas." The choice of Nusantara's location was the product of Jokowi's ambition to create a capital that was truly in the center of Indonesia (see fig. 4), and he was attracted to the ethnic diversity of the province in which it was located: 30 percent Javanese, 20 percent Bugis (from Sulawesi), 12 percent Banjar, and 10 percent Dayak. With the chosen spot largely uninhabited, it also provided an empty canvas to Jokowi to fulfill his ambitions: he wanted a green, modern, smart city, unburdened by mistakes made in the past. Waving his

Fig. 4. Location of Nusantara
(Courtesy of CartoGIS Services, Scholarly Information Services, Australian National University.)

hands dismissively, he recounted that "when people came to me and said 'you should do it this way because this is how it was done in Jakarta,' I said 'then this is precisely why we shouldn't do it in our new capital.'"[22]

But as with his infrastructure drive more generally, skeptics questioned the practicality and financial viability of this project (Hudalah 2023). Indeed, for both Jokowi and his critics, Nusantara became the symbol of what was right or wrong—depending on the perspective—with the president's approach. There was much commentary that called the move a waste of resources, a public relations project, and environmentally damaging (CNN Indonesia 2019; BBC Indonesia 2022). But even within the government, not everyone was convinced. The no-nonsense finance minister, Sri Mulyani Indrawati, was a skeptic, and she made those views known to the president. "I think the president's conceptual reasons for moving the capital were sound," she insisted.[23] "But I told him that I was doubtful about his budget projection, which assumed that only a small part would be taken from the state budget." Budget numbers released in 2022 indicated that the total multiyear expenditure would be US$32.4 billion, with 80 percent to be contributed by private investors. "But even with private investment, we have to provide tax breaks, and that will affect the state budget, too." Sri Mulyani's strategy to reconcile her reservations with the agenda of the president was twofold: first, she set milestones for a staggered release of state funds—only if certain expenditure goals were met would more money be made available.[24] And second, she wanted much of the money to flow into infrastructure projects that could be used even if the new capital stalled or foundered: "East Kalimantan needs more roads and airports anyway, regardless of the new capital. Let's focus on that."

For Jokowi, the funding challenges surrounding the new capital brought his foreign policy thinking into focus, too. As chapter 4 will discuss in more detail, the main premise of his foreign-relations philosophy was that Indonesia needed to reap economic benefits from its engagement with the world. In principle, Indonesia was friendly with all nations, regardless of size or ideological orientation, but it would have to be particularly close to those that offered assistance with its internal development agenda (Wicaksana 2023). "We are open to do business with everyone," Jokowi said. "But China, for instance, is sending one investment delegation every two weeks. The Americans—maybe one a year."[25] In short, Indonesia was seeking friendly equidistance from other nations, including the great powers, but it took note of who was helping economically and who wasn't. The same was true in the case of Nusantara. Foreign leaders knew that this was a project of great importance to the president, but only very few offered help. China and

the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were the most active in exploring ways in which they could contribute to Nusantara—even if they did not think it was a good idea (Suhenda 2024). Chinese President Xi Jinping was open to discussions, and the city of Shenzen signed an agreement with the administrator of Nusantara in July 2023 to help develop it as a smart city. The UAE committed US$10 billion to Indonesia's Investment Authority (INA) for projects in Nusantara, and while the country still insisted on due diligence checks for each project, its proactive initiative was well received in Jakarta.

European and American investors, by contrast, were nowhere to be seen, and their respective governments showed little interest in Nusantara either. After a long period of silence on the new capital, the United States felt in 2024 that it needed to demonstrate some level of engagement with Jokowi's favorite project. Accordingly, the United States Trade and Development Agency—which has the mission of advancing US commercial interests in developing and middle-income countries—committed in March 2024 to granting Indonesia an amount of US$2 million to help develop Nusantara as a smart city (Anisah 2024). But this was almost a year after Shenzen had promised similar support, and so America's gesture came across as too little, too late. Similarly, the European Union (EU) only sent careful signals that it might consider investments in Nusantara in May 2024 (Rahayu 2024). Moreover, little concrete came out of the EU's visit to the new capital in that month, consolidating the (correct) view within the Jakarta government that Europe had no interest in spending any meaningful funds on or in Nusantara. This fit into Jokowi's wider view of who was willing to stand up for Indonesia and who was reluctant to do so. Asked about the world leaders he felt closest to, and who would always take his call, he swiftly pointed to the UAE's Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (or MBZ) first and China's Xi Jinping second.[26] Even when encouraged to provide an extended list, Jokowi did not mention US President Joe Biden or European leaders. Nusantara, then, was not only the pinnacle of Jokowi's domestic infrastructure agenda, but also a mirror of Indonesia's relations in the international arena under his rule.

Most importantly, however, the herculean task of completing the new capital cemented Jokowi's belief that only he was up to the job. Growing the city to a population size of 1.9 million by 2045, literally out of nothing; fighting a host of geological and technical issues at the construction site, from the softness of the soil to water scarcity[27]; connecting the new capital to the existing local hubs Samarinda and Balikpapan; convincing hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats to make the move to Borneo; establishing the capital as a symbol of modernity and sustainability, as Jokowi had promised—all

this seemed so overwhelming to others, and so attached to him personally as the initiator of the project, that he exceedingly convinced himself of his own indispensability. Tellingly, the two people Jokowi had chosen to lead the Capital Nusantara Authority both had repeatedly declined their appointments before being talked into them.[28] Unimpressed by their performance, he asked for their resignations in June 2024. Likewise, the commitment to Nusantara of other political leaders was lukewarm at best. Hence, as Jokowi pushed to have Nusantara's presidential palace and other key structures completed by Indonesia's 79th Independence Day ceremony in August 2024, he began to consider ways to stay influential enough to protect the project after the end of his second term. According to the president's speech writer, Sukardi Rinakit, Jokowi's attraction to the idea of a third term or a delay of the 2024 elections—which he encouraged behind the scenes—was to no small extent related to his concern over the future of Nusantara. "That was the one thing that really made him look interested when the third period idea was discussed," Sukardi recalled.[29]

After the term extension and election delay initiatives fizzled out (more about that in chapter 7), Jokowi ultimately decided to support the nomination of his son Gibran as running mate to Prabowo Subianto, who was then the front-runner in the polls. Again, the main motivation behind this idea was to ensure that his main legacy agendas would be protected after leaving office in 2024. To achieve this goal, Jokowi heavily intervened in the electoral process—from removing legal hurdles to his son's nomination to boosting Prabowo's electability—so that his chosen pair would win comfortably. In combination, Jokowi's widely criticized actions to preserve his post-2024 influence demonstrated the missionary compulsion he felt over his development plans in general and Nusantara in particular. Democratic niceties and etiquette, as far as they stood in the way of his agenda, were an acceptable political sacrifice to him. After all, as he put it, the ultimate goal of democracy was prosperity of the broader population.[30] In his mind, there was no doubt that his infrastructure initiatives and the creation of Nusantara as the nation's new modern center would bring Indonesia to that destination.

Down-Streaming Indonesia

If Jokowi displayed Machiavellian resolve in defending the new capital, he did the same to protect another—and in his view, closely related—policy: that is, the down-streaming of Indonesia's natural resource industry. Econo-

mist Faisal Basri experienced this resoluteness firsthand. In August 2023, he received an abusive text message from Jokowi's minister of maritime affairs and investment, Luhut Pandjaitan. "Look at this language," Faisal said with a grim face while showing me the text on his phone. "That is coming from a minister of the Indonesian government."[31] Luhut took issue with a seminar presentation that Faisal—a mild-mannered but sharp-tongued critic of the rich and powerful—had given on the down-streaming of the Indonesian nickel industry. According to Faisal, this policy—which in 2020 banned the export of raw nickel ore to force investors to build smelters and produce higher-quality nickel in Indonesia—mostly benefitted Chinese investors. Faisal's argument was built on the fact that most of the smelters and other down-streaming facilities were developed with the help of Chinese companies that teamed up with local entrepreneurs. In these joint ventures, the Indonesian partners were typically the minority shareholders. Therefore, Faisal insisted, much of the profit went back to China, undermining the government's claim of how beneficial the policy was to Indonesian society. In his text to Faisal, Luhut accused him of insulting the president—potentially a punishable offense under Indonesian law. Unwavering, Faisal responded to Luhut with equally unflattering words, and the exchange with the minister ended there.[32]

For Jokowi, Faisal's attack was personal, and he took the rare step of responding directly to him in public. "Where is the logic in [what Faisal said]?" the president asked, clearly unnerved. He pointed to government statistics showing that the value of nickel exports—which now consisted of already-processed, higher-quality ores—had increased from US$3.3 million in 2018 to nearly US$30 billion in 2022. "We get tax from that, royalties, export duties, and so forth," Jokowi asserted (CNN Indonesia 2023b). One of Luhut's assistants, the well-connected Septian Hario Seto, subsequently responded with a barrage of statistics to substantiate the president's claims (CNBC Indonesia 2023). Faisal remained unconvinced. Questioning where the government was getting its figures from—given that many of the available data on tax and other revenue income were not specific enough—Faisal maintained the core of his criticism. Similarly, Luhut dug in and defended his stance: "Faisal doesn't know what he's talking about. It's all humbug. But Seto put him back into his box, he did a great job on that. Basically, the down-streaming policy of Jokowi's government is a huge success, and we want people to appreciate that fact."[33] For the public, however, this was now a convoluted numbers game that only a handful of experts could grasp, and the general audience therefore quickly lost interest in the debate. From the government's perspective, Faisal's most explosive claim—that China was the

main financial beneficiary of Indonesia's nickel down-streaming strategy—had been successfully neutralized.

Jokowi had been so incensed about Faisal's critique because it went to the heart of his overall economic approach. In Jokowi's mind, the upgrading of infrastructure and the building of the new capital were mere stepping stones to his end goal of full industrialization—just as Xi Jinping had advised him at the beginning of his presidency. "The building of infrastructure in the Outer Islands is crucial because without that, we can't open down-streaming industries there," the president explained, connecting his infrastructure push and the new capital on Borneo to his down-streaming strategy.[34] That strategy, while hinted at in the first term, became a signature policy in his second: "If we don't have reliable electricity supply, for instance, how can we talk about industrialization, how can we build smelters? Because of the power plants built under my watch, electricity supply is no longer a problem." Thus, when Faisal questioned the usefulness of the down-streaming of the nickel industry for Indonesia, he didn't just interrogate a minor detail of government policy. Rather, he brought the economic rationale of Jokowi's presidency into the spotlight (Konewka, Bednarz, and Czuba 2021). In fact, one of the broader points of Faisal's criticism was that the president mistook down-streaming for industrialization. In Faisal's view, industrialization required a much more comprehensive approach than banning the export of raw materials and requiring companies to build down-streaming industries. Some of Faisal's colleagues agreed, with one warning that "relying on export bans is no magical solution in framing Indonesia's industrial policy" (Gupta 2023).

The idea of industrial down-streaming was of course not new, neither in Indonesia nor elsewhere (Low and Tijaja 2014). In general, it describes the policy of promoting an industry that refines and processes raw natural resources.[35] The establishment of such an industry, so its advocates argue, makes a developing country less dependent on exporting upstream raw materials, and allows it to produce value-added goods instead. While the basic concept of down-streaming is simple and its potential benefits self-evident, the strategy to achieve this goal is much less obvious. In a market in which its actors gain more benefit from exporting raw materials for processing abroad, heavy-handed interventions such as export bans or legal stipulations to establish down-streaming facilities might seem to be the only option to policymakers. However, such approaches lead to market distortions, a decline in export income from raw materials, and legal challenges from importing countries and international trade organizations. In addition, they can produce the outcome that Faisal alleged—that is, dominance

of the down-stream industry by foreign investors. Despite these concerns, the Yudhoyono government had begun issuing export bans in 2012, based on a mandate included in the 2009 mining law. In January 2014—before Jokowi came to power—the first concrete ban on exporting nickel was decreed, but not consistently enforced. It was only in 2020 that the government shut down nickel ore exports for good. To Jokowi's supporters, this was another case of the president having the guts to do what Yudhoyono only half-heartedly contemplated.

The down-streaming of the nickel industry in particular was of such importance to Jokowi because it played a key role in realizing his long-term dream of making Indonesia the center of electric vehicle (EV) production (Schröder and Iwasaki 2023). Nickel is used in EV batteries to obtain better performance and a longer range at lower weights compared to other battery types. In 2023, the International Energy Agency (IEA) predicted that global demand for nickel would grow at least 65 percent by 2030, and EVs and battery storage were set to replace stainless steel as the biggest end user of nickel by 2040 (Souisa 2023). For Jokowi, then, processing nickel in Indonesia was an integral part of his plan to stop its export to the country's potential competitors in the EV production market. To that end, Indonesia announced in August 2022 that it would tax the export of nickel pig iron and ferronickel—the main products of its nickel-processing smelters. This, in turn, would make it cheaper for EV producers to build their plants in Indonesia, where nickel was being mined and processed, and where they would not be hit with an export tax for higher-grade nickel. But these calculations did not materialize in the way that Jokowi had envisioned them: in a big disappointment to the president, Elon Musk—the extravagant owner of the world's most valuable EV producer, Tesla—let it be known in August 2023 that he planned to build his regional headquarters near Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, not in Indonesia. Even when he subsequently visited Indonesia in May 2024, he made no concrete investment commitments (Strangio 2024).

Elon Musk's snub of Indonesia highlighted some of the limits of Jokowi's down-streaming approach. Evidently, investors were considering a wide range of factors when making calls on where to establish production venues. Indeed, many were reluctant to be coerced by export bans and taxes, given that these were generally a sign of market-distorting strategies of the host government. Investors were, on the contrary, much more likely to be swayed by tax holidays and similar incentives—of the kind Malaysia had offered when persuading Musk to invest there.[36] Indonesia's failure to lure Musk was especially significant because Jakarta had been unable to leverage its hegemonic position in the nickel industry. Indonesia was, as noted, by far

the largest producer of nickel in the world, holding around half of the market share in 2022. According to Chatib Basri, the former finance minister, "down-streaming might be a good temporary strategy if you are the market leader in a specific commodity, like Indonesia is in nickel. But if you are just one of the players, buyers will turn to another producer, and you'll lose out."[37] In this broader context, Indonesia's plan to ban the export of *all* metal ore by June 2023 led to skepticism among experts. In addition to Indonesia not being the market leader in most other metals, the institutionalization of down-streaming regulations in the longer term could prove unsustainable. Said Basri, "in the long haul, producers might look for different 'ingredients' for their products if the ones they were previously using become too expensive or difficult to get." As a matter of fact, by 2023, China's production of EV batteries containing no nickel was already booming (Azhar, Uzair, and Arafat 2024).

Further complicating the down-streaming issue were the tensions in the trade relationship with other countries, especially in the West. In November 2019, the European Union filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) against Indonesia over its nickel ore export ban, and it won the case in December 2022. The WTO found that the ban of nickel ore exports broke world trade rules—as did the requirement that all nickel ore be refined in Indonesia. Jokowi pledged to appeal this verdict, and he packaged his resolve as an act of nationalist resistance to foreign interference. In a speech in May 2023, he asked a loyalist crowd, "do we want to stop just because we have been sued by the European Union? If [Indonesia's] leader is not brave, he will retreat and ask for mercy. But if we retreat and ask for mercy, don't dream that we can become an advanced nation" (Setiawan 2023).[38] To this author, Jokowi nominated the WTO case as one of the most serious foreign policy challenges he was facing.[39] Like in the case of Jokowi's assessment of who invested in Indonesia's new capital and who didn't, the EU's petition at the WTO hardened the president's views on his foreign partners' reliability, or the lack thereof. China, for instance, decided not to formally protest, although the export ban on nickel initially had major consequences for its steel industry; instead, Chinese companies massively invested in Indonesia's nickel down-streaming facilities. The European Union, by contrast, seemed determined to throw a spanner in the works of one of the defining projects of Jokowi's presidency. The president took note, and adjusted his foreign policy accordingly.

The nationalist rhetoric that Jokowi inserted into the down-streaming debate also characterized his government's dismissal of reports about the environmental and social damage done by some of the projects. As the

nickel down-streaming industry grew, so did Western media coverage of its side effects for local communities, mostly in Sulawesi and Maluku (Souisa 2023; CRI 2024; Baraputri 2023). With the high-pressure acid leach process used to extract high-grade nickel from lower-grade ores leaving behind tailings, or waste, numerous fishing and farmer communities asserted that their livelihoods were harmed. The coal-fired power plants built to deliver the electricity necessary to keep the smelters running led to additional pollution. Furthermore, the presence of a significant number of foreign Chinese workers at the processing sites (the exact number remains unknown) created social tensions, both in the locations of the various nickel companies and in the surrounding environments. For example, two people (one Indonesian and one Chinese) were killed in January 2023 at a nickel processing plant in North Morowali in Sulawesi. The conflict had begun as a dispute over working conditions but soon escalated into racially charged unrest. The Chinese embassy expressed its deep concern over the incident. In his own critique of the government's down-streaming policy, Faisal Basri claimed that based on internal company reports that he had analyzed, the number of foreign Chinese workers in such plants was much higher than the Indonesian government officially acknowledged.[40]

The seriousness of these problems notwithstanding, the Jokowi government mostly downplayed them as Western attempts to discredit Indonesia's accelerated industrialization drive. Luhut Pandjaitan, who claimed that he had promoted the idea of industrial down-streaming during the first Jokowi term but only found the idea taken up systematically in the second, interpreted the reports within the context of the EU's protest against Indonesia's overall nickel policy. "This is not difficult to comprehend," Luhut said. "Yes, there are some problems, we admit that. But it is clear that there are numerous countries who don't want us to succeed, and that's where these reports come from."[41] Investment minister Bahlil Lahadalia echoed this suspicion—he even speculated that foreign entities tried to interfere with the 2024 elections to stop Indonesia's down-streaming campaign. "There are countries that don't want Indonesia to advance. For instance, the IMF [International Monetary Fund]," he told the press (CNN Indonesia 2023a). This was despite the fact that criticism of the damaging impacts of the nickel industry had long taken hold in Indonesian academia and NGOs as well. One report from Lampung University researchers concluded in 2024 that the increased nickel production had been "detrimental to forests and the environment, leading to deforestation, degradation of habitats, and contamination of the air and soil" (Nasution et al. 2024). Still, the nationalist tones of Jokowi, Luhut, and Bahlil drowned out such local warnings, rel-

egating them to the niches of scholarly and liberal critiques in Jakarta and other urban centers.

Overall, there is little doubt that the main planks of Jokowi's economic policy—the building of infrastructure and a new capital, to eventually boost industrial down-streaming in the Outer Islands—brought benefits in the form of jobs and increased connectivity. Building infrastructure made it easier for businesses to operate, and the down-streaming policies flushed cash into the economy, as Jokowi had pointed out. But this strategy also attracted controversy among economic policymakers and left a questionable record for the environment and marginal communities. Thus, it is imperative to review the impact of the Jokowi government's approaches on the economy as a whole. Did Jokowi's hyperactivity in the areas discussed above lift Indonesia to a new level of economic productivity? Or did they leave Indonesia on the economic path laid by Jokowi's predecessors, with only some differences in nuance?

A Hardware Economy?

Few people had a better front-row seat in the Jokowi government to observe and assess its economic performance than Tom Lembong. After being Jokowi's main economic adviser in the 2014 campaign, Lembong served him in two cabinet-level positions in the 2014–2019 term: first as trade minister, and then as head of the investment board. Throughout his time in the Jokowi orbit, he wrote about 600 economic speeches and briefs for the candidate and president. A Harvard-educated investment banker and private equity fund manager with a sharp wit, Lembong was more at home in the financial centers of the world than in the political labyrinths of Jakarta. His English was better than his Indonesian. Yet he felt he had built a connection with Jokowi, who came from a universe very different from his own. In many ways, Jokowi's inexperience in elite-level politics and big business was an advantage—or so it seemed to Lembong. "I liked him in those early days," Lembong recalled. "He was like a sponge, eager to absorb information, open-minded, and humble. And as a grassroots businessman, he was concise and punchy."[42] Toward the end of Jokowi's first term, however, their relationship cooled: "His big re-election victory went to his head. He started to cut people off and became dismissive. I didn't join into the flattery he now got used to, and so I was out of tune." When the president interviewed and appointed his second-term cabinet in 2019, Lembong waited in vain for a call from the palace—he then found out in the news that he had been

replaced. In his stead, Jokowi appointed Bahlil, a man closer to his own origins: a "guy from the village," as Bahlil put it, who had made it in the business world, but still spoke no English.[43]

Years after his falling out with Jokowi, Lembong pulled no punches when evaluating him as an economic manager. Some of his analyses might have been motived by bitterness, but they fit surprisingly well with some of the president's own observations. "Jokowi is a hardware guy," Lembong formulated. "He doesn't relate to software because you can't touch it, feel it, or record it for public relations purposes."[44] Thus, Lembong corroborated our earlier assertion that Jokowi's overemphasis on infrastructure stemmed from a predilection for simplicity. Adding to this preference for simplicity was, in Lembong's view, the president's tendency to do "things in extremes." As a result, he delivered excessive amounts of infrastructure while ignoring other important aspects of the economy. "Water is important," Lembong said, "but too much of it leads to drowning." Although Jokowi disagreed with the notion that he neglected other economic areas while overdelivering on infrastructure, he confirmed some of Lembong's instincts as to why he focused so heavily on it. "Infrastructure can be easily controlled, it can be easily checked, it is visible, and it's not fragmented," Jokowi explained—illustrating why infrastructure projects perfectly suited his famous impromptu visits to the countryside, or *blusukan*. As hinted earlier, Jokowi also conceded that he had an aversion against multitasking; in fact, he presented it as a strength. "I need to focus," he maintained.[45] He often repeated this sentiment to local governments who he asked to concentrate on "one, two, or three" projects instead of trying to do too much (Saputri 2023a). In Jokowi's mind, having many priorities meant having no priorities at all, and without pursuing these carefully selected priorities, governance was ineffective.

In order to assess how Indonesia's economy fared with Jokowi's prioritization of specific sectors, it is necessary to consult GDP growth figures (Hill and Negara 2019). This is not only because GDP growth is a general but very powerful indicator of an economy's cross-sectoral strength, but because Jokowi had set himself a benchmark in this regard when he ascended to the presidency in 2014. In his campaign, Jokowi had promised to lift Indonesia's GDP growth to 7 percent, from the average 5 to 6 percent range under Yudhoyono (Hill 2015, 286). That would have brought Indonesia closer to high-growth economies such as China or India, which grew at rates well above Indonesia's during their boom years. But for much of Jokowi's rule, GDP growth hovered around the 5 percent mark, and while Indonesia recovered better from the COVID-19 pandemic than others, growth remained moderate (see fig. 5). Overall, GDP growth under Jokowi's rule averaged 4.2

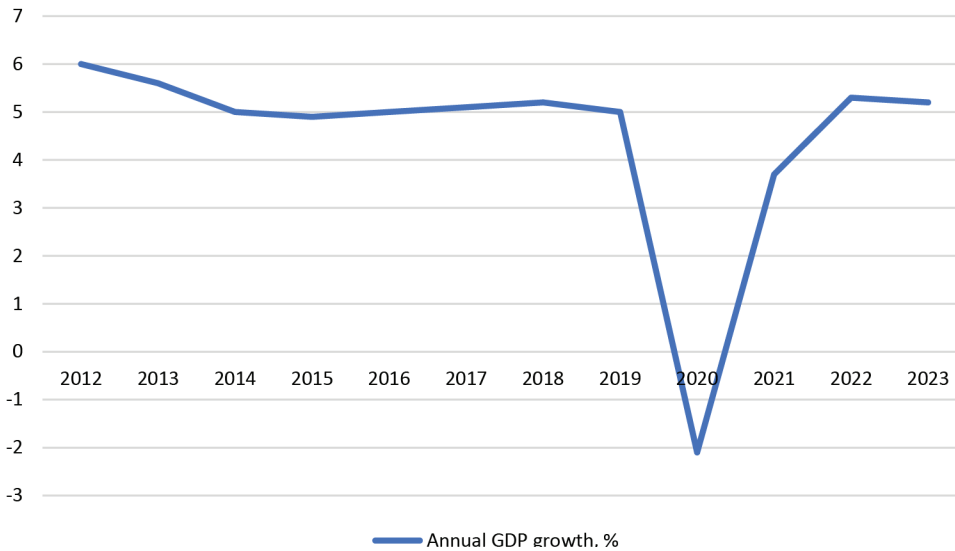

Fig. 5. Annual GDP Growth, Indonesia (%)
(*Source:* Data from World Bank.)

percent (Guild 2024). Even the Philippines, often belittled as the "sick man of Asia" in the 1980s and 1990s, grew faster than Indonesia in the 2010s and 2020s; in 2022, Manila recorded 7.5 percent growth. Jokowi blamed his failure to reach the 7-percent target on the COVID-19 pandemic. But there are few indications that the Indonesian economy in his time—before, during, or after the pandemic—developed the kind of dynamism that would have allowed it to break out of its moderate growth path. From this perspective, Jokowi's economy continued the legacy of his post-1998 predecessors.

The Jokowi government also left the main fiscal and macroeconomic settings of previous administrations in place. According to Australian economist Hal Hill, who has studied the Indonesian economy since the 1970s, "there was much continuity under Jokowi with fiscal policy. He used pretty much the same people, most notably in the finance ministry and the central bank."[46] As a result, Indonesia's long-standing reputation for fiscal prudence was maintained—notwithstanding the increase in the debt-to-GDP ratio we mentioned earlier. Importantly, however, Jokowi did not immediately settle on this continuity approach—he had initially tried to challenge it, and was forced to back down. According to a ministry of finance official, Jokowi asked his first finance minister, Bambang Brodjonegoro, to double Indonesia's tax income within one year. "Bambang negotiated this down

to a 30 percent increase, but that was still impossible to achieve," said the official.[47] All the budget projections for 2015 were therefore based on tax income that was never collected, and the budget fell into disarray as a result (Hamilton-Hart and Schulze 2016). In despair, Jokowi turned to Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Yudhoyono's former finance minister, who was known for her belief in responsible budget management. She was working at the World Bank at that time. Sri Mulyani recalled that "when the president asked me to be finance minister again [in 2016], I inquired about the reasons. He said that when trying to fix the budget, everyone had told him: 'ask Sri Mulyani.'"[48] Under Sri Mulyani, Indonesia returned to stable budget planning procedures, and she managed to establish effective mechanisms to discipline Jokowi in his fiscal demands—as we noted in the case of Nusantara.

We discussed inflation control earlier as a main source of Jokowi's popularity, but it is also a key macroeconomic indicator. Many of Indonesia's peers—such as Türkiye, Argentina, or Nigeria—performed poorly in this regard during the 2010s and 2020s (Libman and Palazzo 2020). Post-pandemic supply chain problems and the impact of the Ukraine war put particular pressure on them. Indonesia, by contrast, kept inflation remarkably low during much of Jokowi's rule, even compared to some industrialized nations in the West (Anas et al. 2022). Between 2016 and 2022, inflation was below 4 percent, and in some periods significantly so. As noted, Jokowi was aware of the importance of low inflation rates for political stability and, even more crucially, for the approval ratings of presidents. "The numbers of the pollsters are clear," Jokowi said, "presidential approval levels rise and fall with the extent of inflation."[49] Even before becoming president, Jokowi paid particular attention to inflation: "As mayor of Solo, I got awards for low inflation—I maintained it at 1.3 percent, well below the national average." Both as mayor and as president, Jokowi relied on systematic market interventions through the state's logistic board—which is responsible for maintaining a reliable stock of basic food supplies—to achieve his inflation goals. These interventions had an additional political benefit: they allowed him to show presence at the grassroots, with Jokowi's market visits to check on prices and assess the necessity of interventions becoming legendary. "You have to check these things yourself," he proudly told me during a market visit in Samarinda on Borneo in 2023. "The local officials need to know that they can't fool me."[50]

However, the control of inflation became so crucial to Jokowi that it undermined the impact of one of the president's other key economic initiatives: the reduction in fuel subsidies (Jazuli, Steenmans, and Mulugetta 2021). In the 2014 campaign, Jokowi had promised to cut government sub-

sidies for fuel. Economists had criticized such subsidies for decades because they were a heavy burden on the state budget and mostly benefitted the car-owning middle and upper classes. In 2014, the government spent around US$20 billion a year on these subsidies. Shortly after coming into office, Jokowi increased fuel prices by a third, and reformed the pricing system in a way that radically brought down subsidies. But the subsidy cut led to a temporary spike in inflation and a drastic slide in Jokowi's approval ratings—the latter dropped from 62 percent in January 2015 to just 41 percent a month later. "After that, I didn't dare to continue with the cuts in that manner," he conceded.[51] In fact, the subsidies crept up again over time, and the government hid some of that increase by charging it to the state oil company Pertamina (Maulia 2022). By 2022, the subsidy budget had reached US$31 billion, and Sri Mulyani warned that without intervention, it could grow to US$43 billion (Ministry of Finance 2022). She recalled, "I put several options to the president on cutting subsidies again. He chose a cut of about 30 percent that came with a lot of compensation payments to the poor."[52] Thus, learning from the 2015 experience, Jokowi slowed down his reform drive on reducing wasteful fuel subsidies, and only agreed to another cut in 2022 after the impact was carefully considered. Unlike in 2015, the drop in his popularity was modest, and he recovered quickly.

Jokowi's effective inflation control and provision of financial compensation to the poor also helped to reduce Indonesia's poverty rate—but this decrease was in line with trends under previous governments, and comparable to many of the country's peers, too (Hill 2021). In 2022, 9.5 percent of the population were considered poor by national poverty standards—a drop from 11.25 percent in 2014. Against this background, Jokowi told his aides in 2023 that he wanted extreme poverty to be eradicated by the time he left office—no doubt inspired by Xi Jinping's declaration in February 2021 that China had achieved this "miracle" and "complete victory" (BBC 2021a). Arif Budimanta, Jokowi's special staff on economic affairs, explained in August 2023 that "we still have around 4 million people stuck in extreme poverty."[53] Asked how these could be lifted out of poverty within a year, he pointed to income-generation programs and the special assistance payments mentioned above: "We can get this done." The World Bank, however, wanted Indonesia to adopt higher ambitions. It informed the country in May 2023 of its opinion that "extreme poverty [in Indonesia is] basically eradicated. Now, [it can] turn to broadening its definition of poverty to [become] commensurate with its middle-income status" (World Bank 2023). Indeed, with the Bank's poverty line of US$5.50 per day for upper-middle-income countries (a group Indonesia had nominally belonged to since 2020), 60 percent of the

population were poor in 2022. While this statistic was unkind to Indonesia's anti-poverty record as it used Western standards, it was a reminder of the country's still-formidable challenges.

Some of the loudest praise for Jokowi's economic management came from specific segments of the investor community, both domestic and foreign. These were mostly larger actors in the market and associated advisory firms. For them, Jokowi's infrastructure projects reduced logistics costs, and they appreciated his second-term deregulation packages that lowered red tape and wage expenses. The so-called omnibus law of 2020, a massive deregulation initiative that changed seventy-nine laws through one piece of legislation, was particularly popular with these commercial players. "Jokowi has single-handedly changed the investment climate in Indonesia for the better," said Douglas Ramage, head of BowerGroupAsia Indonesia, a business and government affairs advisory firm.[54] "Official data shows that annual foreign direct investment surged in dollar terms in his second term—but beyond the numbers, the shift [was] clear in how the ministries and bureaucracy [treated] investors." According to one private capital law firm, the "Omnibus Law represents a remarkable departure from the hitherto entrenched mindset of the Indonesian government, and suggests [. . .] a willingness [. . .] to listen, and respond to, grievances from foreign investors" (Withersworldwide 2020). Jeffrie Geovanie, an Indonesian entrepreneur with large business interests in Singapore, and also the financier of the pro-Jokowi Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), agreed. "Only Jokowi brought certainty to our business regulations. Our investments are now safer," Geovanie insisted.[55] Many of the oligarchs represented in Jokowi's ruling coalition felt the same way. Their support—which, as shown in chapter 2, was instrumental for his regime's stability—allowed him to push the omnibus law through parliament without much opposition.

In the eyes of Jokowi's critics, however, the oligarchs' support for the president's deregulation measures was evidence that his economic policies were more pro-oligarchic than pro-business. For Tom Lembong, "the omnibus law should have been both pro-business and pro-labour, but it wasn't. Instead, it served the interests of the oligarchs and of the government."[56] Similarly, Wijaya and Nursamsu (2020) criticized Jokowi's "obsession" with infrastructure as being stuck in the vocabulary of traditional business. They highlighted that "productivity should not be equated simply with a call to fill in infrastructure gaps." Rather, "to upgrade the economy [. . .], extensive efforts should include increasing the efficiency of existing facilities and moving up the product cycle." Pointing to other sectors that are just as important to the economy as infrastructure and deregulation, they emphasized

that an economic "upgrade requires human capital development, [. . .] an endogenous cumulative learning process, [and] a complex combination between sound market regulations and supportive bureaucracies and political institutions." Indeed, one strong indication of this lack of sophistication in the Indonesian economy was the stubbornly high percentage of informal workers—in Jokowi's decade, it only decreased marginally from the 60 percent recorded at the end of Yudhoyono's term to 59 percent in 2023. This, in turn, cemented the country's traditionally low tax-revenue-to-GDP ratio, which hurt the state's capacity to invest.[57] In sum, then, Jokowi's infrastructure drive and deregulation initiatives were important parts of the economic puzzle—but still only fragments of a much larger picture that the president struggled to view in its entirety.

Determination and Simplification

What does Jokowi's approach to the economy, and the building of infrastructure in particular, tell us about his presidency and the personality traits that shaped it? The first thing that stands out is his stiff-necked determination. Once he settled on infrastructure as the core of his development agenda, he remained focused on it and rejected all attempts to convince him of a more multisectoral strategy. Believing that he was on the right path, he was uncompromising: the way he coerced investors of ethnic Chinese origin to commit to Nusantara illustrated that he was happy to use autocratic methods to achieve his goals. In order to execute this ruthlessness, he used people with a reputation of having no qualms about getting their hands muddy. Actors such as investment minister Bahlil were key to implementing this technique. "I often said to the president: 'don't ask about the process, just ask about the results,'" Bahlil stated with some pride.[58] Jokowi then usually responded that everything should remain within the corridor of the law. In this way, Jokowi knew that things would get done, but could plead ignorance should there be unwanted publicity. Luhut had a similar role, and he, too, often told the president not to ask for too many details about how he executed tasks given to him.[59] Jokowi also knew that building infrastructure fast came with illicit transaction costs: "The corruption involved in these projects is significant, I know that. But things need to be built."[60] For Jokowi, this was all part of the collateral damage he was willing to tolerate to realize his vision of bringing Indonesia's infrastructure into the 21st century.

Jokowi's determination was coupled with a strong predisposition for risk-taking. "Jokowi is a gambler," Bahlil observed,[61] and former finance minister

Chatib Basri agreed: "Yudhoyono was a perfectionist—he wanted plans to be discussed over and over again, until he became doubtful. Jokowi, on the other hand, just did things—he was open to trying new stuff, not knowing whether they will work."[62] The building of Nusantara was the main product of this willingness to take risks. While Jokowi publicly expressed great confidence about the prospects of the new capital, and never allowed any doubts about its completion, his actions demonstrated his awareness that the project could founder. He knowingly confronted two very different versions of his potential legacy: one in which he would be celebrated as a pioneer who had the courage to build a new capital from scratch and recenter Indonesia's politics and economy, and another in which he delivered a white elephant to a nation struggling with increased debt. To prevent that second scenario from materializing, he took more risks: he entered into a shaky political alliance with his former rival Prabowo Subianto, extracted promises from him that he would continue the building of Nusantara, and engineered the nomination of his son Gibran as Prabowo's running mate for the 2024 elections. All of these actions carried the possibility of a major public backlash, but Jokowi pushed on. As a result, he left the presidency in 2024 without knowing whether his gambles would pay off, or whether Prabowo would just quietly bring the building of Nusantara to a halt.

However, while Jokowi's singlemindedness in pursuing his goals gave his government direction and energetic drive, it also revealed a tendency toward conceptual and intellectual simplification. Jokowi's admission of his need to focus on very few priorities, and his belief that this was a strength rather than a weakness, betrayed an inability to fully grasp the multilayered complexity of not only the economy, but political and social affairs as well. "Jokowi has a very short attention span," his former minister Tom Lembong stated.[63] With this, Lembong referred to the president's well-known loathing for long, academic, and complex presentations and explanations. If exposed to such scholastic oratory, he would quickly show signs of being bored and ask for things to be conveyed with more brevity and simplicity. To be sure, this helped with achieving focus, but it also led him to ignore or underappreciate many other aspects of economic, political, and social life that did not fit into his requirement for succinctness. As Wijaya and Nursamsu (2020) wrote, "the [Jokowi] government has been too quick to content itself with a gross simplification of development. [. . .] Large-scale infrastructure and economies of scale, complex value chains, and long-distance trade have been greatly simplified and made 'legible' [for] the government." Thus, where Yudhoyono over-intellectualized and procrastinated, Jokowi under-intellectualized and rushed. Going for the easily presentable, he stayed away

from the abstract and intangible. As former finance minister Basri put it: "Many structural reforms are difficult to achieve and too abstract to sell to the public. For instance, you can't cut ribbons on a long-term increase in the quality of education."[64]

We also noted the extent to which Jokowi's fixation on infrastructure and his related development plans shaped his foreign policy priorities. He retained in broad policy terms Indonesia's traditional premise of nonalignment and equidistance to great powers. But within that paradigm, he built special relationships to the countries he viewed as helpful to Indonesia's development, and became critical of those who were inactive or even erected hurdles. China was important to Jokowi not for reasons of ideological or geopolitical sympathy; it simply assisted him in the form of infrastructure cooperation, loans, and investment. The same was true for the UAE—a country of little political significance to Indonesia, but with large resources that its leader made available to Jokowi. His relationship with the United States and the EU, on the other hand, waned; in the case of the former, because it was reluctant to deepen its economic engagement with Indonesia or to help with Jokowi's Nusantara plans, and in the case of the latter, because the EU sued him at the WTO over his down-streaming of the nickel industry. Hence, in his mind, resolutely pursuing Indonesia's development through infrastructure-building not only justified using democratically questionable techniques in the domestic arena, it served as a yardstick to identify the country's friends and foes in an exceedingly complicated world. In the following chapter, then, we discuss how exactly he merged his development agenda with Indonesia's classic foreign policy to produce his own approach and navigate the growing Sino-American rivalry.

CHAPTER 4

"China Is Here, Where Are You?"

Navigating the Sino-American Cliff

During the 2014 campaign, Megawati sat down with Jokowi for an extended chat. Megawati shared the concern of many in the Jokowi team about his lack of foreign policy experience—and interest, too. His challenger, Prabowo, was a worldly former general and businessman, fluent in English and conversant in German. Jokowi, on the other hand, had created his political brand around his origins in "the village"—and while that attracted many ordinary voters, it made it difficult to present him as ready for international challenges. He spoke only rudimentary English, and unlike Prabowo, he had decided not to give talks abroad during the campaign. "That was the reason Megawati wanted to introduce him to the big foreign policy issues," said Rizal Sukma, Jokowi's foreign policy adviser in the campaign and in his early presidency.[1] In simple language, Megawati walked Jokowi through the origins of Indonesian external affairs strategies, and especially the principle of nonalignment: "It was a superb, two-hour tutorial on Indonesian foreign policy. It was relatable for Jokowi because Megawati told stories from personal experience."[2] Megawati, as daughter of founding president Sukarno, had grown up in the palace and thus knew the main domestic and international actors of that time. As president in the early 2000s, she could also provide insights into more recent international affairs. Of course, Megawati viewed this "tutorial" as a way of demonstrating her self-perceived superiority over Jokowi, hoping to use him as her executing agent once elected. Nevertheless, according to Sukma, "Jokowi looked interested and took notes."

In Megawati's lesson to Jokowi, a 1948 speech by then vice president Mohammad Hatta played a key role. In that speech, Hatta described Indo-

nesia's position as being trapped in the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. Indonesia was still involved in an armed conflict with the Dutch at home, and needed international recognition from the world's main powers in order to prevail. Both sides in the Cold War offered Indonesia protection if it pledged support to their respective causes in return. Hatta, in despair, formulated: "Have the Indonesian people fighting for their freedom no other course of action open to them than to choose between being pro-Russian or pro-American? Is there no other position that can be taken in the pursuit of our national ideals?" (Agung 1973, 27). In response to his own question, Hatta laid down the "free and active" doctrine that has since become the mantra of foreign policy for all Indonesian administrations: "The [. . .] government is of the opinion that the position to be taken is that Indonesia should not be a passive party in the area of international politics but should be an active agent entitled to decide its own standpoint" (Agung 1973, 27). Following from that, Hatta insisted, was that Indonesia must define and articulate its own interests in the international system: "[Indonesia's policy] must be resolved in the light of its vested interests and should be executed in consonance with the situations [it faces. It] cannot be determined by the bent of the policy of some other country which has its own interests to service" (Agung 1973, 27). In sum, Indonesia had to play its own cards.

Megawati's recounting of how Indonesia learned to avoid taking sides in great power conflicts prepared Jokowi for the biggest foreign policy challenge of his presidency: that is, the Sino-American rivalry. Like Hatta before him, Jokowi was under pressure by two great powers to join them against the other. And like Hatta, he felt no inclination to give in to that pressure. But while Hatta presented nonalignment as a strategic, ideational, and nationalist choice, Jokowi found equidistance to the great powers attractive because it fit with his broader pragmatic thinking on being open for business with everyone. Indeed, understanding the "free and active" paradigm in this way helped him to situate foreign policy per se as an integral part of his development agenda, rather than just a diplomatic exercise. Seen through this economic foreign policy lens, siding with one power would have meant foregoing material offers made by the other, and was therefore an unwise commercial option. The policy implications of Hatta's and Jokowi's paradigms were the same, however: in both scenarios, Indonesia sought to extract benefits from two great powers rather than tying itself to just one. Another aspect of the "free and active" tradition that Jokowi liked was its conceptual broadness: as he learned from Megawati, too, past presidents had taken liberties in interpreting nonalignment. Sukarno, for instance, had moved

closer to Beijing in his later years, while Suharto cooperated with the West to defeat communism. Yet, both remained formally in nonaligned territory. Megawati's monologue, then, suggested to Jokowi that he could blend his economic utilitarianism with Indonesia's nonalignment traditions, and that the resulting flexibility would allow for being slightly closer to one great power if it offered more benefits than the other.

However, it would be wrong to assume that nonalignment was a choice that Jokowi, or Indonesian presidents before him, picked from a large menu of other options. In reality, it was the *only* alternative. Jokowi and his predecessors hedged because other possibilities were not available—or they felt that they did not have the resources to make them available. Evelyn Goh defined hedging as "a set of strategies aimed at avoiding (or planning for contingencies) in a situation in which states cannot decide upon more straightforward alternatives such as balancing [or] bandwagoning" (Goh 2005, viii). Balancing, for example, is an option that countries can choose if they have the military resources to project power against the state viewed as a threat, or if they can enter alliances with others threatened by the same actor. Indonesia, with its weak military apparatus and deeply engrained aversion against formal security pacts, did not possess this alternative. Similarly, bandwagoning—in which a nation aligns with the power it views as a threat—was not possible either. In Indonesia, domestic sensitivities made siding with China a toxic choice for any incumbent. (Aligning with the United States was equally unpalatable in the world's largest Muslim-majority country, although few viewed Washington as a direct military threat). Hence, in discussing the ways through which Jokowi tried to manage the Sino-American conundrum, this chapter must embed the actions the president took within a larger context of what was possible and what wasn't. We will find that Jokowi embraced the constraints he faced, and understood them as further confirmation of his economy-first approach.

Given the importance of understanding the limited resources available to him, this chapter first explains how Jokowi came to endorse Indonesia's status as a militarily underdeveloped middle power. Confronted with demands to significantly increase defense spending to expand Indonesia's geostrategic options, Jokowi decided against such a move. This further narrowed Jakarta's choices in responding to the Sino-American challenge, but also freed Jokowi in his endeavor to use all available resources on economic development. Subsequently, the chapter explores the dynamics of Jokowi's relations with China. He welcomed Beijing's investment drive in Indonesia—which was more extensive than that of the United States. At the same time, he was aware of the risk to his political standing—both internationally and at

home—if he were to be perceived as siding with China. Thus, he anxiously ensured that Indonesia benefitted from, but did not become dependent on, China's economic power. Accordingly, as the chapter argues next, Jokowi used the United States as useful geopolitical ballast. While disappointed that Washington did not invest more in his country, Jokowi maintained cordial relations with the United States, sending signals to China, domestic voters, and the world that Indonesia remained nonaligned and open for economic engagement with all sides. Lastly, the discussion reviews Indonesia's place in the world under Jokowi. It concludes that although he steered Indonesia through the cliffs of Sino-American temptations, Jokowi did not produce a more substantive narrative for Indonesia's role on the global stage.

Hedging as Necessity: Indonesia's Military Limitations

In June 2021, a document leaked that outlined plans of the Indonesian government to spend US$125 billion on modernizing its armed forces before President Jokowi left office in 2024. In the detailed budget attached to the draft of a government regulation, the plans envisaged expenditure of US$79.1 billion on military equipment, US$13.4 billion in interest on 25-year loans from foreign sources, and US$32.5 billion on contingencies and maintenance (Nirmala 2021). For a country that had thus far spent less than 1 percent of its GDP on the military in every year since the regime change of the late 1990s, and only had a total defense budget of US$9 billion in 2021, the news was nothing but sensational. Was Indonesia aiming to radically change its defense posture and possibly seek to balance against China's growing assertiveness? Was it trying to become a serious security actor in the Asia-Pacific? Observers had little trouble to identify defense minister Prabowo, who viewed China's growing ambitions with concern, as the source of the leak.[3] His spokesman confirmed the authenticity of the document and, importantly, the reported time frame of the plans: "Because the investment is made in a relatively short time, it can be ascertained that all equipment purchased will be interoperable" (Nirmala 2021).[4] Subsequently, the figure of US$125 billion popped up in almost every intelligence report on Indonesia's extant and future military trajectory. Prabowo, it seemed, had taken ownership of the notion of a hugely increased military budget under his watch, potentially repositioning Indonesia amid the Sino-American conflict and in the region more generally.

But the reality was much less spectacular. Jokowi's government had no intention to spend this much of Indonesia's development budget on defense.

Leaning back in the seat of a private plane two years after Prabowo's media splash, Luhut dismissed the figures included in the plan outright. "I told Prabowo that we can't have such increases to the military budget," Luhut revealed.[5] As a former general, Luhut had a remarkable explanation for his stance: "There is no investment return from defense spending; if, on the other hand, we put money into other areas, it will help us grow." To be sure, Luhut was by then a businessman-cum-politician, but his notion that military expenditure essentially constituted wasteful spending was astonishing nonetheless. He followed up on this statement with an equally noteworthy threat assessment: "I also said to Prabowo that there is no serious threat. Who is threatening us, really?" In short, Luhut systematically dismantled the thinking behind Prabowo's initiative by pointing out four major pillars of the Jokowi government's outlook on the world: first, the state's budget had to be used for important long-term development goals; second, while some military spending was evidently necessary to secure the nation's defenses, such expenditure did not deliver concrete monetary returns; third, therefore, other areas that delivered such returns needed to be prioritized; and fourth, the overall risk of Indonesia being invaded by a foreign aggressor, such as China, was considered low, justifying only moderate defense costs. Analysts had long captured this thinking. Sulaiman (2019), for instance, chose a telling headline for his publication discussing Indonesia's contemporary strategic culture: "What Threat?"

Hence, Jokowi put Prabowo back into his box, too. "The US$125 billion figure was not official policy," Jokowi clarified to me in September 2023.[6] "The focus remains on the economy. As a result, we calculated how much we can spend on military modernization: it is about US$4 billion a year for equipment."[7] Jokowi also explicitly agreed with Luhut's threat assessment: "That's right, who is going to attack us?" For Jokowi, Indonesia's role as a middle power with low military capacity was satisfactory—"we have no ambitions to become one of the great military forces." Faced with Jokowi's and Luhut's resistance, Prabowo accepted that he needed to lower his expectations. He clearly believed that Indonesia needed to do more to bolster its defenses and have more strategic options to deal with the Sino-American dilemma. "But I stayed within the budget envelope given to me, and that's about 0.9 percent of GDP," Prabowo said, raising his hands in the air in a gesture of despair.[8] He added that "even by the government's own long-term planning, it should have been 1.5 percent by the 2020s." In November 2023—a few months after Prabowo's frustrated admission of the limits put upon him—the government announced a slight increase to the equipment budget. Spending on military equipment purchases was raised by 20 percent

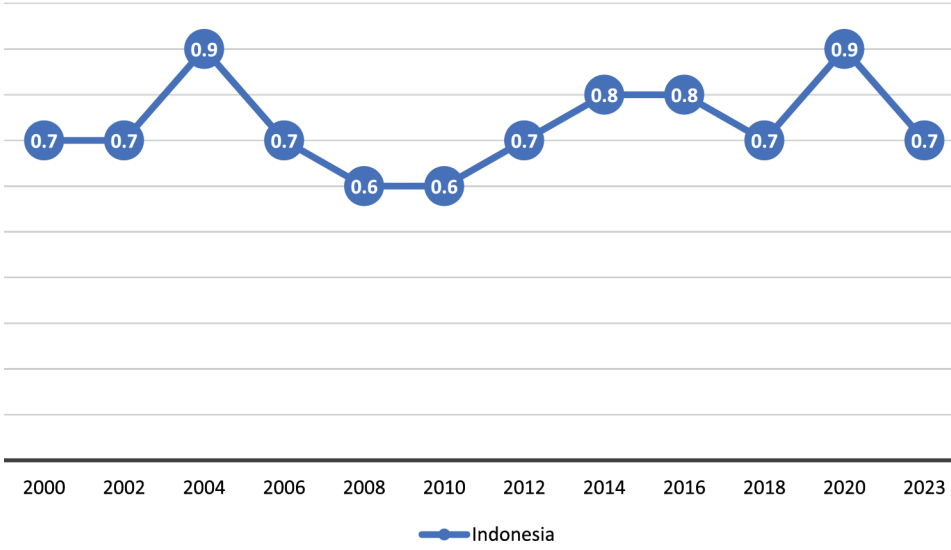

Fig. 6. Indonesia's Military Expenditure to GDP, 2000–2023 (%)
(*Source:* World Bank Open Data chart.)

for the 2020–2024 years, bringing annual allocations for this period to about US$5 billion (Nugraheny and Prabowo 2023). At the same time, however, the government made clear that long-term spending patterns—projected to 2034—would not change. Overall, therefore, Indonesia under Jokowi remained at or around the 1-percent-to-GDP-mark of military spending (see fig. 6). This meant that Jakarta consistently underspent the world's average of 2.2 percent (in 2022) by more than half.

The failure of Prabowo's US$125-billion plan for the modernization of the armed forces fit neatly into the prior history of Indonesia's military funding. Patched together from independent militias during the 1945 independence war against the Dutch, the Indonesian military heavily relied on self-funding for many decades (Sundhaussen 1982; Rieffel and Pramodhawardani 2007). Even Suharto, an ex-general himself, kept official military funding low to preempt a challenge to his presidency from inside the armed forces (Jenkins 1984). Military leaders, for their part, used the minimal levels of state funding to justify extensive rent-seeking and political involvement at all levels of government. External defense, in that concept, was secondary. Indonesia's only foreign military campaigns—outside of United Nations peacekeeping operations—were the confrontation with Malaysia in the mid-1960s and the annexation of East Timor in the mid-1970s, and they both ended in failure (Mackie 1974; Greenlees and Garran 2002). Military modernization

attempts only started in earnest in the post-Suharto era. Significantly, the armed forces were slowly but steadily brought on-budget by the early 2010s. A 2009 decree banned military businesses—which had been at the core of its self-funding since the 1960s (Mietzner and Misol 2013). But the general parameters of military organization remained unchanged: Indonesia's armed forces, with their low-budget and low-technology structure, focused on internal security rather than external defense, putting it out of contention as a leading actor in the Asia-Pacific region's strategic theater (Schreer 2013).

Jokowi's acceptance of Indonesia's traditional position as a middle power with underdeveloped military capacity was, like many other of his views on presidential governance, an acquired taste. Initially, he disliked the notion of Indonesia being a "middle power." According to Sukma, "he couldn't wrap his head around the concept—partly because it contradicted his continued reference to Indonesia as a 'big country,' or *negara besar* in Indonesian. But *negara besar* does not translate into 'great power' in international relations language, so that was confusing for him."[9] Over time, however, he came to endorse the paradigm. In his 2023 Independence Day address, he even proudly embraced it, citing the Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index: "The [institute] mentions Indonesia as a middle power in Asia with a sharply rising diplomatic influence, and Indonesia was one of six countries in Asia that experienced an increase in its comprehensive power" (Safitri 2023). In that 2023 index, Indonesia was ranked 9th overall (out of 26 measured countries), just behind South Korea and Singapore. In the field of military capability, Indonesia was in 13th place, below Pakistan, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Welcoming Indonesia's middle-power reality, however grudgingly, allowed Jokowi to justify his prioritization of the economy over military spending, and to point to other areas in which Jakarta could excel. As Jokowi indicated, Indonesia ranked 7th in diplomatic influence—a field in which its weight as the world's fourth-most-populous country could be leveraged more effectively, and more cheaply, than in the high-cost arena of military excellence.

But the entrenchment of Indonesia's middle-power status, which Jokowi furthered by not measurably lifting defense spending during his decade in power, came at a price. Most importantly, it severely narrowed the country's options in facing the Sino-American rivalry—it essentially maintained hedging as the only viable option (Gindarsah 2016). Despite the increasing focus on trade conflicts in 21st-century international relations, a country's influence in its regional and global strategic theaters remains a function of its ability to project coercive capacity. Economic strength alone does not equip a nation with such strategic weight. China understood this when it raised its military spending in parallel with its economic growth from the

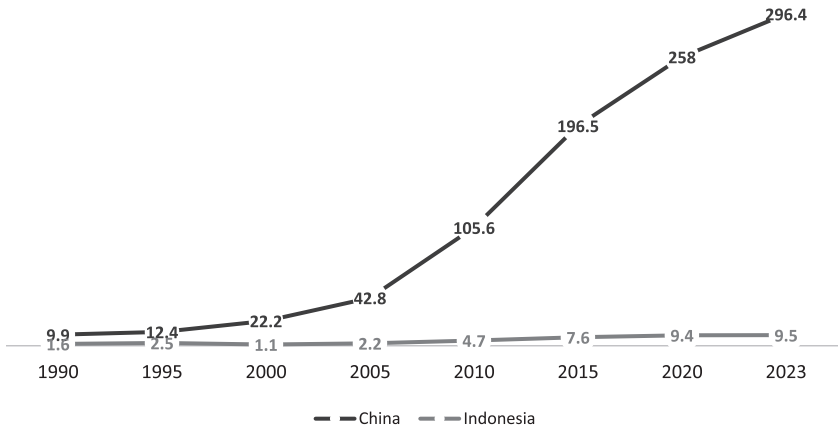

Fig. 7. Military Spending: China and Indonesia, 1990–2023 (in US$)
(*Source:* World Bank Open Data chart.)

mid-1990s onward (Fukuoka, Oishi, and Karim 2014). In 2023, China spent at least US$296 billion on its military. This was thirty-one times more than Indonesia, although its population size was only five times larger. In 1990, when both countries embarked on their industrialization journeys, the gap between them was much smaller: at that time, China spent only six times more on defense than Indonesia (see fig. 7). As this gap expanded—and it continued to do so under Jokowi—Indonesia's opportunity to "balance" against China with its own military projection disappeared. Recall that "balancing" against a great power seen as a threat is one choice available to states; they can do so by building their own coercive capacity and/or forming alliances with like-minded nations. With Indonesia having no significant military power, and unwilling to enter permanent alliances for political and historical reasons, hedging was, as noted, Jakarta's default setting—and Jokowi retained it (Anwar 2023; Priamarizki 2024; Tan 2020).

Indonesia's leverage in the face of superpower competition was undermined further by the fact that its military capacity was low even compared to its much smaller neighbors. We already recognized that Singapore outranked Indonesia in the 2023 Lowy index. In the year before, the city-state spent almost US$12 billion on defense against Indonesia's US$9 billion, despite the latter being forty-eight times bigger in population. In the index, Vietnam also placed above Indonesia in military capacity, largely because of its more experienced armed forces and better strategic posturing. Malaysia, with which Indonesia has territorial disputes, was only three ranks below the world's largest archipelago—a tiny gap, given the big discrepancy in popula-

tion size. The disparity with Australia, Indonesia's southern neighbor, was particularly large. In 2022, Australia spent three times more than Indonesia on defense, with a tenth of the population. At times, Jokowi seemed to forget about these capacity deficits. When told in September 2021 about Australia's plans to build nuclear-powered submarines with the United States and Britain under the AUKUS arrangement, Jokowi's first response was to inquire with his diplomats why Indonesia couldn't do the same.[10] The foreign ministry had to inform him of the costs—Australia agreed to spend about US$240 billion over three decades—and of the fact that Australia only got access to the technology because of its alliance with the United States and Great Britain (Umar and Santoso 2023). Even in its own backyard, then, Indonesia was not a sizeable military force. As far as the great powers were concerned, this opened up opportunities for them to influence the archipelago's strategic behavior through economic and diplomatic means.

But while the story of how Jokowi stalled Prabowo's push for a military upgrade illustrated the president's strategic priorities—in essence, economic development was more important than beefing up Indonesia's external posture—it also showed that there were competing views in his cabinet on what kind of threats the country faced in the medium to long term. As one analyst put it: Indonesia had "no coherent [. . .] policy" on how to deal with China and possible military tensions associated with its rise (Peterson 2024). Prabowo worried about China's intentions and wanted to prepare militarily for conflict in the region. Jokowi and Luhut, on the other hand, played down the likelihood of Indonesia coming under attack. The president and his aide perhaps did so because of their strong focus on development—and because they believed that even a significant increase in defense spending would not close the military gap with China as the only potential aggressor. As we discuss below, Jokowi actually *had* concerns about China's actions in the South China Sea, but he understated them in the public realm and refused to let them influence his thinking on the primacy of economic growth. In the larger scheme of things, then, Jokowi still did not believe that any threat China may pose, in the South China Sea or elsewhere, made an Indonesian military buildup inevitable (Hellendorff 2018). Jokowi issued a captain's call on this issue, and Prabowo relented. The minor adjustment made to this decision in November 2023—not coincidentally, during the presidential campaign in which Prabowo ran with Jokowi's support—was cosmetic in nature. The status quo of Indonesia's military limitations persisted throughout the Jokowi presidency.

Most importantly for our discussion here, Jokowi's cementing of Indonesia's long-term strategic capacity levels created the parameters that, in turn,

shaped his actions toward China and the United States. His decision on defense spending prefigured, and validated, the adoption of a pragmatic attitude in which Hatta's old 1948 premises were repackaged in the vocabulary of 21st-century commercialism. In Jokowi's view, Indonesia's military powerlessness freed it from having to desperately keep up with others in this field. At the same time, he knew that Indonesia's size, location, regional leadership, and future economic trajectory still made it attractive to the great powers, and that this is how Jakarta could gain benefits. It was with these calculations in mind that he developed his relationships with China and the United States.

China: Threat or Benefactor?

When Luhut Pandjaitan welcomed a delegation from China's Tsinghua University in Bali in September 2023, he was as jovial as ever. Serving lunch in an open pavilion facing the sea, Luhut entertained his guests with an anecdote: "You know, I met the US ambassador in Jakarta a few days ago. I told him that China isn't so difficult to understand. All the Chinese want to do is making money."[11] Initially somewhat confused, the delegation members smiled awkwardly. But slowly, the core of Luhut's message became clear to them: he wanted to convey to the United States that China wasn't aiming for world domination; it simply wanted to do business. The delegation, which was visiting to discuss the expansion of the Tsinghua campus in Bali with Luhut, quickly relaxed and nodded politely. The university's president, who headed one of the highest-ranking and fastest-growing universities in the world, knew that China had a friend in Luhut. Some of the minister's Chinese-speaking staff provided instant translation to the Tsinghua guests who didn't speak English, and they engaged in a familiar way that suggested a history of frequent contacts. Indeed, Luhut's office had emerged as the key communication hub for the interaction between Chinese investors and the Indonesian government, and China expertise was one of Luhut's main hiring criteria for expert staff. Since 2017, Jokowi had put Luhut in charge of overseeing investment from China, both informally and formally. In this capacity, Luhut was also Indonesia's main negotiator with China concerning its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing's primary channel to manage its politico-economic outreach to the region and the world.

Luhut was characteristically frank about his attraction to China's economic appeal. When Luhut landed in Bali to meet the Tsinghua team, the island's governor joined him in the car ride to the venue. During the trip,

he presented Luhut with his government's plans for a light-rail project that would connect the airport with Bali's main tourist center of Kuta. Given Bali's increasing traffic problems, this was a badly needed project. "We are talking to the Japanese and Koreans," the governor said, hoping to impress Luhut with his detailed preparations. But Luhut interjected: "Talk to the Chinese, too."[12] Later, during a break in the talks with the Tsinghua delegation, he deliberated further: "China provides good options when it comes to large infrastructure projects. They are fast, cheap, and offer good quality."[13] He volunteered that "I already told the president that if the Japanese don't want to follow through quickly with the second stage of the subway project in Jakarta, the project should go to China." Of course, Luhut also played a leading role in brokering some of the deals between Chinese investors and Indonesia's nickel producers to build multi-billion-dollar smelters—which, as we noted in the previous chapter, were of crucial importance to Jokowi's industrial down-streaming agenda. As in many other policy areas, Luhut was Jokowi's man for the big and difficult tasks related to Indonesia's economic relations with China, too. Needless to say, everyone involved in this field understood that the coordinating minister acted, for the most part, in the president's name.

Luhut, then, was widely seen as the pro-China face of Jokowi's government (Peterson 2023). The president did not mind—in his concept, welcoming Chinese investment was compatible with Indonesia's nonalignment policy. In Jokowi's understanding of a "free and active" posture, Indonesia was open to business with everyone, including both great powers. But if one camp was more active than its rival, this did not—in Jokowi's view—violate the principle of equidistance. Jokowi was well aware that some at home and abroad believed that his government, despite its hedging orientation, tilted toward China: "I know that's what people say. But if I invite both sides, and only one shows up, that's not my fault."[14] As mentioned, China sent far more investment delegations to Indonesia than the United States did: "I talked to [US Secretary of State Anthony] Blinken about that during his visit [in July 2023]. I said to him: 'China is here. Where are you?'"[15] The statistics bore that out: China—already Indonesia's biggest trading partner since 2012—became its second-largest investor in 2022 (after Singapore), while the United States dropped out of the list of top five investors in that year. China's loan offers for development projects were also more interesting to Jokowi than Washington's Indonesian aid program, which was tiny in comparison and often attached to strict conditions. Thus, in Jokowi's business-based mindset, China was more competitive in the market, and the United States had to catch up if it wanted Indonesia's attention. From

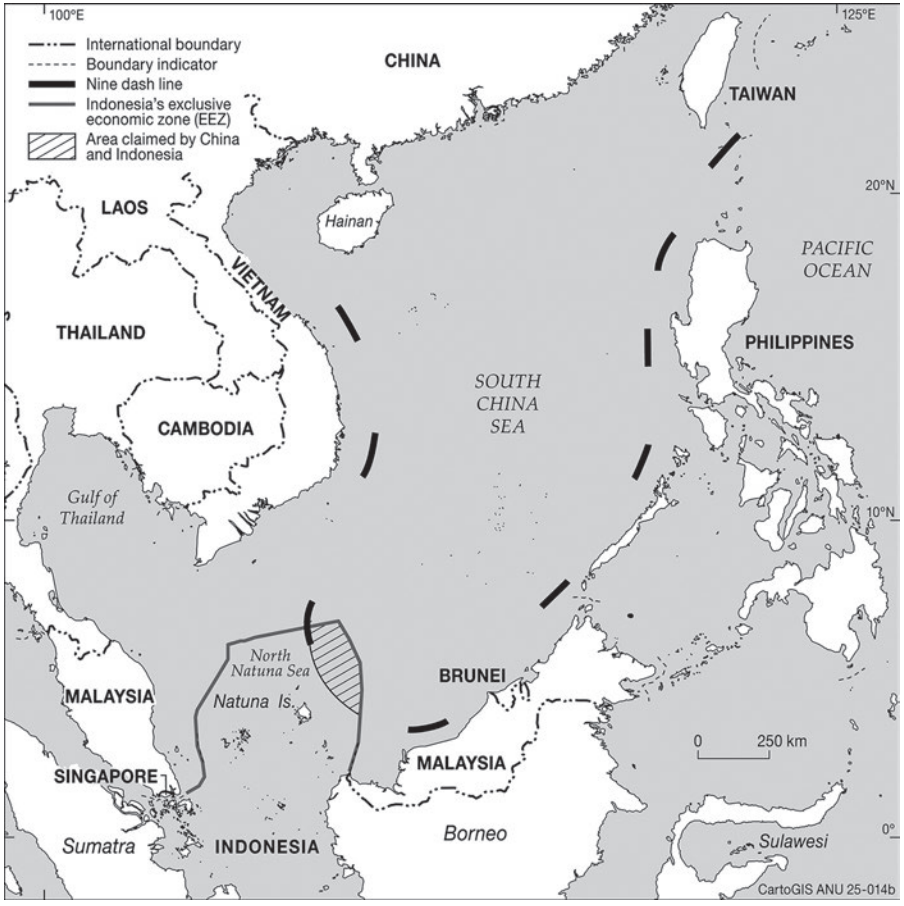

Fig. 8. Map of Natuna, Indonesia's EEZ, and China's Claims in the South China Sea
(Courtesy of CartoGIS Services, Scholarly Information Services, Australian National University.)

the president's perspective, he offered a fair playing field to both, and hence remained nonaligned.

But for all the protestations to the contrary, Jokowi and Luhut knew that China's growing geopolitical assertiveness posed a problem to Indonesia, and that its handling could not simply be detached from Beijing's economic attractiveness. Nowhere was this dilemma more palpable than in the South China Sea. There, Indonesia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) attached to its North Natuna Sea overlapped with China's notorious nine-dotted line demarcating its claims (see fig. 8). Consequently, while Indonesia traditionally insisted that it was not a claimant in the South China Sea dispute, this

was not entirely true—it did have a sharp disagreement with China over economically relevant demarcation lines (Chang 2020). The conflict came into the open in 2016, when the intrusion of Chinese fishing and patrol boats into the disputed area increased abruptly. Jokowi responded by traveling on a warship to Natuna—a not-so-subtle message to Beijing that he would not compromise on Indonesia's sovereignty. He followed up with President Xi Jinping personally, and repeatedly, over the years: "I said that directly to Xi, and he smiled and said 'yes, yes.'"[16] As discussed in the previous section, however, Indonesia was in no position to offer a more credible military reaction to China's aggression in the South China Sea than a symbolic trip on a warship. And while Jokowi mentioned Xi's personal assurances to visitors in order to downplay the risk of conflict, he wasn't entirely convinced by them either. Publicly displayed or not, the South China Sea conflict remained a thorn in China-Indonesia relations and was part of the considerations informing Jokowi's actions vis-à-vis the great powers.

In the eyes of many cabinet ministers, too, the South China Sea tensions counterbalanced the president's otherwise nonchalant attitude to Beijing's use of economic benefits as a tool of foreign policy and military influence. Foreign minister Retno Marsudi, for instance, frequently cited the "we-are-open-for-business" line of her boss, but was always quick to add that "we do not compromise our sovereignty for economic factors."[17] The task of reminding Beijing of the lines it could not cross in the South China Sea mostly fell to Retno. In her decade as foreign minister, she had numerous exchanges with China about the problem, and while China refrained from open escalation, it kept testing the limits (Febrica and Romaniuk 2021). This, in turn, made Jokowi and most of his aides more cautious about engagement with China. As a result, while China's economic ties with Indonesia kept growing, they did not reach the level of dependence. Jokowi was conscious of the "China debt trap" debate, which centered on the fear that Beijing could use infrastructure loans to entangle recipient countries in huge debts and hence make them vulnerable to China's pressure. In order to prevent such a scenario, and to better control his own temptations in regard to China's economic offerings, Jokowi entrusted the task of controlling the volume of debt to the stern finance minister Sri Mulyani. Consequently, the levels of Indonesia's debt to China remained moderate and well below those of other developing countries. In 2023, Indonesia owed about US$27 billion to China, or below 2 percent of its GDP (Puspita 2024). By comparison, Pakistan's China debt stood at 21 percent to GDP, Angola's at 34 percent, Laos's at over 40 percent, and that of the Maldives at a whopping 113 percent.

The second factor that mitigated against a possible overreliance on China

was of a domestic nature—and thus very compelling for Jokowi (Herlijanto 2022). We already touched upon the sensitive role ethnic Chinese play in the Indonesian economy and society, and how Jokowi's opponents in the 2014 campaign spread rumors that he was an ethnic Chinese himself. The anti-Purnama demonstrations of late 2016 revived these themes once more: one of the claims of the Islamists was that Purnama wanted to turn Jakarta into a pilot project for mass migration of mainland Chinese into Indonesia. In this climate, Jokowi had doubts about whether he should attend the first BRI summit in Beijing in May 2017. "Jokowi suggested that it would probably be a bad time for more Chinese projects in Indonesia, given the anti-Purnama protests and all," his minister Tom Lembong recalled.[18] "But I told him that he still needed to go to Beijing as we can't lose out on these opportunities." Lembong also proposed that new Chinese projects should be mostly located in the Outer Islands in order to avoid possible tensions in the Indonesian heartland of Java. Jokowi did go to Beijing, and more Chinese projects rolled in—especially in the Outer Islands, which was central to Jokowi's agenda of decentering the Indonesian economy. But the concern about a possible domestic backlash, which could hurt his popularity as his primary political capital, stayed with him. It meant, in his mind, that he constantly had to balance his strong desire to benefit from China's economic power against the risk of acquiring a potentially ineradicable image as a pro-China stooge.

This balancing act was reflected in the most important and controversial symbol of economic cooperation with China under Jokowi: that is, the high-speed rail line between Jakarta and Bandung. The project had both domestic and international repercussions. The deal, negotiated by Jokowi during his visit to Beijing in March 2015, shocked Japan, which was Indonesia's traditional go-to partner for rail projects—and which had also submitted a bid (Wen 2019). Then Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe expressed his disappointment, given his personal lobbying of Jokowi. The president was, on the surface at least, feisty about it: "I gave the project to China because it was cheaper, and because I didn't want everything [in the rail sector] to go to Japan."[19] In the West, the project raised fears about Indonesia's seemingly pro-Beijing leanings, and domestic critics slammed it as fiscal wastage and debt adventurism. But Jokowi claimed that it was just business: "Those concerns were unfounded. I always work with whoever gives us the best deal."[20] After battling resistance in his own cabinet (he dismissed a transport minister who opposed the project), and overcoming delays as well as a US$1.2 billion cost overrun, the president opened the rail line in October 2023. At US$7.2 billion, it was a major investment, but Jokowi believed that the

criticism of the over-budget expense was due to it being a Chinese-led project: "When costs ran over at the [Japanese-led] subway project in Jakarta, nobody complained."[21] But it was obvious that Jokowi was scarred by the controversy, and when the issue of an extension of the rail line to Surabaya came up, he let it be known that he would only agree to it if China offered better conditions (Idris 2023).[22]

Jokowi's China policy, then, was the product of factors that pulled him both toward and away from Beijing. In combination, these factors led to an approach of friendly nonalignment. Most fundamentally, Jokowi was drawn to Beijing because of the extent, speed, and cost-effectiveness of China's economic offerings. At the same time, his decision to not expand Indonesia's military capacity excluded the possibility of balancing against China's threat in the South China Sea, encouraging cordial relations. In conceptual terms, what Jokowi had learned about the history of Indonesia's "free and active" foreign policy convinced him that disproportionally leaning on one great power for economic assistance was still reconcilable with nonalignment—Sukarno and Suharto had done the same (Anwar 2012). But as strong as these pull factors toward China were, they were moderated by Jokowi's anxiety over the risks of moving too close to Beijing. China's aggressive stance in the South China Sea was, ironically, counterproductive to the great power's strategic ambitions toward Indonesia: it fed, even in a sympathizer like Jokowi, a nagging sense that China couldn't be trusted. Furthermore, the domestic sensitivity of the role of the ethnic Chinese, coupled with the geopolitical rise of China, made an overtly pro-Beijing policy too risky for a popularity-dependent politician of Jokowi's mold. And as Megawati and Retno reminded him, while nonalignment allowed for some flexibility, formal equidistance still needed to be upheld. All of this led Jokowi to take as much as he could from China—but within carefully calibrated limits. In this endeavor, the links with the other great power, the United States, came in very handy.

The United States as Strategic Ballast

When Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States launched their AUKUS initiative in September 2021, Beijing's response was swift and unambiguous. China called the arrangement, under which Australia would develop nuclear-powered submarines with British and American support and technology, "extremely irresponsible" (BBC 2021b). Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said at the time that AUKUS "seriously undermines

regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race" (BBC 2021). China's embassy in Washington, for its part, accused the three countries involved of a "Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice" (BBC 2021). Beijing correctly viewed AUKUS as being directed against its own military buildup and ambitions in the Asia-Pacific. Clearly, Washington's strategic goal was to bolster Australia's maritime military capacity to balance against China's, reducing the burden on the United States to do the latter through its own Hawaii-based Pacific Fleet. As noted earlier, Jokowi's first reaction on hearing the AUKUS news was to ask internally why Indonesia could not acquire nuclear-powered submarines for itself. The foreign ministry, after telling Jokowi why that was not possible, issued Indonesia's official response to AUKUS. Framing their answer within Jakarta's long-standing opposition to nuclear proliferation in the Asia-Pacific region, Jokowi's diplomats raised concerns about "Australia's commitment to continue meeting all of its nuclear non-proliferation obligations" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b). Highlighting another of Indonesia's key diplomatic themes, they also referred to AUKUS as a potential trigger for a regional arms race. Jakarta, judging from the foreign ministry's release, echoed Beijing's critiques.

But a closer look revealed that Jakarta's response was more nuanced. Prabowo, for instance, reacted to AUKUS by stating that "the emphasis of every country is to protect their national interest. If they feel threatened . . . they will do whatever they can to protect themselves [. . .]. We understand that and we respect them" (Lamb 2021b). Experts weren't surprised by Prabowo's balanced statement. They understood that just as Luhut was the China-friendly "frontman" of the Jokowi government, Prabowo was—at least in a very broad reading of the complex positioning of the various political actors—its pro-American equivalent. While Prabowo had a difficult history with the United States—he had been denied a visa for much of the 2000s because of his human rights record as a former Suharto general—his overall leanings were toward the Western bloc.[23] As defense minister, he entered military equipment deals with the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Türkiye, and the United Kingdom—and none with Russia, a traditional supplier to Indonesia, or with China. Having spent some of his youth in Switzerland and London—where he graduated from the American School in 1969—he later received military training in Fort Bragg and Fort Benning as well as in Germany. When Prabowo talked about Indonesia's nonalignment policy, he often did so with a particular emphasis on the relationship with the United States: "We have always done well with nonalignment. Whenever it wasn't fully upheld, like in the period when Sukarno wanted to live his ideological dreams [by leaning toward Beijing], it led to nothing good.

The United States has been very important to us from the beginning—it was one of the earliest supporters of our independence."[24] But, he added quickly, "we also want to be close to China."

Even the foreign ministry, despite being critical of AUKUS, counterbalanced its official statement on the issue with a hidden dig at China. One of the Indonesian diplomats in charge of formulating the department's AUKUS press release recalled that "we knew that we had to offset the criticism of Australia, Britain, and the United States with something that showed we weren't one-sided."[25] Thus, they came up with the following point, placed at the bottom of the release: "Indonesia underscores the respect for international law, including UNCLOS 1982 [United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982], in maintaining peace and security in the region" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021b). The reference to UNCLOS was a taboo for China—it was, as everybody understood, an indirect warning to Beijing to uphold international law in the South China Sea. China, which openly ignores a 2016 ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in Den Haag that declared its nine-dashed line as unlawful under UNCLOS, immediately took offense at Jakarta's reference and complained to the foreign ministry. Said the diplomat who was involved in authoring the release and its UNCLOS stipulation, "the Chinese colleagues asked: 'why did you have to bring UNCLOS into this? It's not relevant.' But for us, it was all about showing that we honour the principle of nonalignment both in theory and practice."[26]

For Jokowi, the display of pro-American sentiments in his government—by Prabowo and others—fulfilled the same function as Luhut's pro-China image. Taken in combination, the two stances conveyed a message of strategic ambiguity through which both great powers felt simultaneously appreciated and shown their limits (Shekhar 2018). This was exactly what Jokowi wanted—despite the fact that he held many grievances against the United States. Unlike China, the United States did not increase its economic engagement with Indonesia in proportionate terms during his presidency. Unlike China, Washington showed not even performative interest in his favorite development project, the building of Nusantara. Unlike China, the United States made no significant contribution to his infrastructure agenda. And unlike China, the Americans put obstacles in the way of his industrial down-streaming plans. While China helped him to build smelters, the United States issued regulations through the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that granted tax credits for imported critical minerals only if they were sourced from either US producers or a country with which Washington had a free trade agreement—a status Indonesia did not hold.[27]

As a result of all these irritations, US President Joe Biden did not make it onto the list of Jokowi's closest contacts among world leaders—while Xi was, as noted, in the top two. And yet, Jokowi understood that maintaining good ties with Washington was crucial for him. Not only did he value the United States as a future key market for electric vehicles, which he wanted Indonesia to dominate—but he also knew that he needed strategic ballast against the impression that the Indonesian government was leaning too closely on China.

In November 2023, therefore, he traveled to Washington to upgrade Indonesia's ties with the United States to a "comprehensive strategic partnership" (Marciel 2023). Usually, Jokowi despised such diplomatic jargon—he preferred simple one-on-one exchanges, mostly by phone. But in this case, he accepted that the elevation in formal nomenclature served a practical purpose: it demonstrated to Beijing that Indonesia was not in its pocket; it lowered anxieties in the West; and it appeased—or so he hoped—domestic skeptics. Jokowi overcame some personal sentiments to reach this goal: he disliked flying to America—it usually caused him lengthy jetlag problems upon return; he felt that his receptions in Washington were often underwhelming for a head of state like him, much in contrast to the pomp with which Beijing welcomed him; and while he respected Biden, there were significant personality differences between him and the US president. Unlike many other world leaders, Jokowi had been quite fond of Biden's predecessor Donald Trump. He liked his brazen and unconventional style of communication: "I got along with him just fine."[28] Biden, on the other hand, represented for him the world of classic, boring, and outdated bilateral diplomacy. Nevertheless, Jokowi decided to make the trip worthwhile, for him and Indonesia. In addition to the broader geopolitical goal of demonstrating Indonesia's evenhandedness, Jokowi wanted to negotiate terms with Biden in regard to the nickel export regulations of the IRA. No concrete agreements were reached on that matter, but Jokowi felt that his overall strategic aim was achieved.

Much to Washington's delight, Jokowi used additional opportunities to showcase his preparedness to reject Beijing's advances. In 2023, there was much speculation that Indonesia could join BRICS, an inter-governmental organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Moscow and Beijing viewed the group as a way of uniting non-Western countries under their leadership. In the Indonesian government, Luhut recommended that Indonesia join the association, and Jokowi subsequently committed to attending the BRICS summit in South Africa in August 2023. But even before departing, Jokowi was skeptical about joining BRICS: "I

don't know what the benefit for us would be," he remarked to me at the time.[29] His cabinet secretary, Pramono Anung, thought that "Luhut miscalculated on this. Jokowi rightly believed that joining BRICS would burden the relationship with America and Australia."[30] Ultimately, Jokowi politely rejected offers to join BRICS at the summit, while others (Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates) received formal invitations. Indonesia's decision against BRICS was noted with much good will in Western capitals. As Rüland (2023) remarked, "joining BRICS would [have been] read in the West as signalling a shift towards the Chinese camp. It would [have been] perceived as a major change in Indonesia's hedging and issue balancing policy, under which Jakarta tilts more towards the United States in security affairs and more towards China on economic issues." While Jokowi did not subscribe to Rüland's distinction between the security and economic spheres, he certainly agreed that joining BRICS had the potential to disturb his equidistance to the great powers.[31]

In many ways, Jokowi's approach to the Sino-American rivalry—offering utilitarian equivocation while happily accepting Chinese benefits within the frame of Indonesia's open-for-business policy—reflected the president's multifaceted political views more generally. While he was fixated on boosting national development, he was less certain about how to achieve this goal. He found positive aspects in both China's autocratic, centralistic, and prosperity-oriented development model *and* America's democratic, multilayered, and freedom-focused way of doing things. We will return to this subject in chapter 6 (which discusses Jokowi's troubled relationship with democracy), but it is important to note here that his economic and foreign policy pragmatism was mirrored in his fundamental worldviews, too. While Jokowi followed many of his Global South peers in admiring China's development and the institutional framework that enabled it (Duggan 2020), Jokowi was also proud of the fact that he was elected democratically from the ground up—something impossible in China and more akin to a typical American-dream story. In China, he found the kind of short-cut decision-making that he viewed as ideal for effective governance, while in the United States, he discovered political narratives that resembled his own. He was particularly fascinated by Donald Trump's rise to the presidency: a businessman, like him, who had risen to the top job without prior party links. But Jokowi was equally drawn to Xi and his determined consolidation of power. Thus, on a personal level, Jokowi's "hedging" between the United States and China was partially the result of both great powers appealing to different aspects of the president's political character.

Having reviewed Jokowi's relationships with China and the United

States, we must ask: does Jokowi's handling of the Sino-American challenge qualify as an independent brand of foreign policy within Indonesia's nonalignment tradition? Or was it a mere outgrowth of his economic instincts? The first thing to note is that the initial image of Jokowi as a foreign policy amateur proved unsustainable (Connelly 2015). Jokowi steered Indonesia for a decade through a world of growing great power tensions, and he did so without major incidents. In this sense, the fears of Megawati and others that his inexperience in external affairs would be a big risk turned out to be unfounded. Similarly, while much-criticized as shallow, Jokowi's approach enters the history books as his specific version of Indonesian nonalignment. In doing so, it stands alongside the more prominent approaches coined by his predecessors: Sukarno's left-leaning adventurism; Suharto's anticommunist alliance with the West; or Yudhoyono's promotion of Indonesia's global democratic credentials. Jokowi's paradigm was, of course, a reflection of his personal attitudes, but that does not exclude it from consideration as a foreign policy brand in its own right. It was based on his prioritization of economic practicality, which led him to view Indonesia's international relations exclusively through the lens of how they benefitted the archipelago's national development agenda (Umar 2023). However, we also have to ask what other ideas Jokowi developed in the international arena, outside of Indonesia's search for economic gains amid great power competition. What vision, if any, did Jokowi have for Indonesia's future on the international stage? It is this arena of inquiry that we have to turn to next to fully appreciate Jokowi's impact on broader world affairs.

A Value-Free Foreign Policy?

Hassan Wirajuda, Indonesia's respected former foreign minister, looked like he had waited for "the" question. Addressing a small audience at Kyoto University in the autumn of 2023, he had labored through a rather dense presentation of his own foreign policy, which covered the period between 2001 and 2009. No doubt, having been foreign minister under both Megawati and Yudhoyono was a remarkable feat, given the notoriously bad relationship between the two former rulers. But his active time was now a decade and a half away, making much of his talk historical in nature. After he completed his lecture, however, an audience member asked him how his foreign policy compared to Jokowi's. The normally reserved ex-diplomat grinned, and began to unload. "Jokowi's foreign policy has been very transactional," he proposed, "and I hear that the president has often asked his foreign minister

what we will get from this or that initiative."[32] The longer Wirajuda talked, the more serious he became. As foreign minister, he had initiated the Bali Democracy Forum in 2008, which subsequently met every year and brought together leaders from the Asia Pacific to discuss pathways to democracy. For Wirajuda, this was an ideal mechanism to showcase Indonesia's rise as the third-largest democracy in the world. Yudhoyono loved the forum, and he attended all summits during his presidency. "Jokowi attended only once," Wirajuda said, with unambiguous disappointment in his voice. "I know the president expects outcomes. But what about value-based foreign policy, what about soft power? These are also important measures of a foreign policy."

Wirajuda's critique aptly summarized what many within Indonesia's foreign policy establishment felt was wrong with Jokowi's approach to external affairs (Wicaksana 2023). While Jokowi succeeded in shielding Indonesia from a more serious impact of the Sino-American tensions, his overall approach—so the critics argued—lacked guiding principles and values. Even his closest aides acknowledged that at its core, Jokowi's foreign policy was purely focused on transactions. As a result, he struggled to come up with a narrative for Indonesia's role in the world beyond ambitions for economic growth. In this aspect, his foreign policy *did* fall short compared to that of his predecessors, who could point to a set of values, however controversial, that inspired their broader political agenda and the specific goals of foreign policy embedded within it. Few doubted that Sukarno was genuinely driven by his deep belief in nationalism and anticolonialism (Yeremia 2020); Suharto was anchored in anticommunist beliefs of the Cold War era (Fibiger 2023); and Yudhoyono wanted Indonesia to become a model Muslim democracy that could excite the rest of the world (Umar 2016). Jokowi had no such compass to direct him in the portrayal of Indonesia's motivations and ambitions in the international arena. In his later years, he made some attempts to establish Indonesia itself as a voice of the Global South (Winanti and Avian 2021). But while we noted earlier that he echoed many of the views held in that region, he did not pursue this narrative with much coherence. Mostly, he remained unbothered by suggestions that his foreign policy needed a value frame.

Instead, he systematically molded Indonesia's foreign ministry in line with his economy-first thinking. Jokowi demanded that Indonesian ambassadors act as the country's chief salespersons abroad. According to Sukma, who became Indonesian ambassador to London in 2016, "he told us that our overarching question should be: 'do we have something to sell?,' and then it was our task to sell it."[33] This commerce-oriented approach often led Jokowi to offer hands-on advice. When ambassadors assembled in Jakarta

for their annual briefing by the president in 2018, Jokowi told his envoys not to locate Indonesia's booths in trade exhibitions close to the toilets: "We are a big country. If we want, we can be close to the entrance" (Prasetia 2018). Another dimension of this pragmatic reorientation of the foreign service was a stronger focus on services. "When I was a businessman and visited trade fairs abroad, I found the service of Indonesian embassies lacking," Jokowi recalled.[34] Thus, as president, he ordered the foreign ministry to massively upgrade its service delivery to Indonesian citizens. "I experienced this firsthand," Sukma stated. "When we bought a new embassy building in London, he insisted that a large section of it be reserved for services—not like in the past, when this was the smallest part of an embassy." Retno acknowledged that this new direction—both in terms of the intensified commercial promotion function and the strengthened emphasis on services—was a challenge to her ministry, "and it took us quite a while to adjust."[35]

In concert with these pragmatic alterations to Indonesia's foreign policy apparatus, the projection of the country's image abroad began to change. As noted, Yudhoyono had centered his promotion of Indonesia's global role around its identity as a young and rising Muslim democracy. He and his foreign ministers, including Wirajuda, had often used speeches at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) to build this image, and the Bali Democracy Forum underlined their ambition in unequivocal terms (Rüland 2017). By contrast, Jokowi dropped the habit of Indonesian presidents of speaking to the UNGA. In his decade as president, he did not once travel to New York for the UN General Assembly. "We would have liked him to go," Retno conceded, "but he wasn't convinced of the value of doing it."[36] According to Sukma, "Jokowi viewed the UN essentially as a pointless talk shop."[37] Similarly, as Wirajuda lamented, Jokowi ignored the Bali Democracy Forum. Moreover, the speeches Indonesian representatives delivered at the UNGA between 2014 and 2023—some of which were recorded by Jokowi as videos—methodically dismantled Yudhoyono's foreign policy legacy. In a study of these speeches, Lucas Greenslade (2023) showed that the theme of democracy—dominant during Yudhoyono's presidency—gradually disappeared under Jokowi (see fig. 9). In its place, Jokowi put more references to economic and development issues, with a particular stress on equality. However, these references, while high in frequency, did not form a compelling thematical frame that could have replaced the democracy paradigm it pushed aside.

Jokowi's fixation on commercial aspects in foreign policy was so strong, and his recognition of other dimensions so weak, that his aides had to pack-

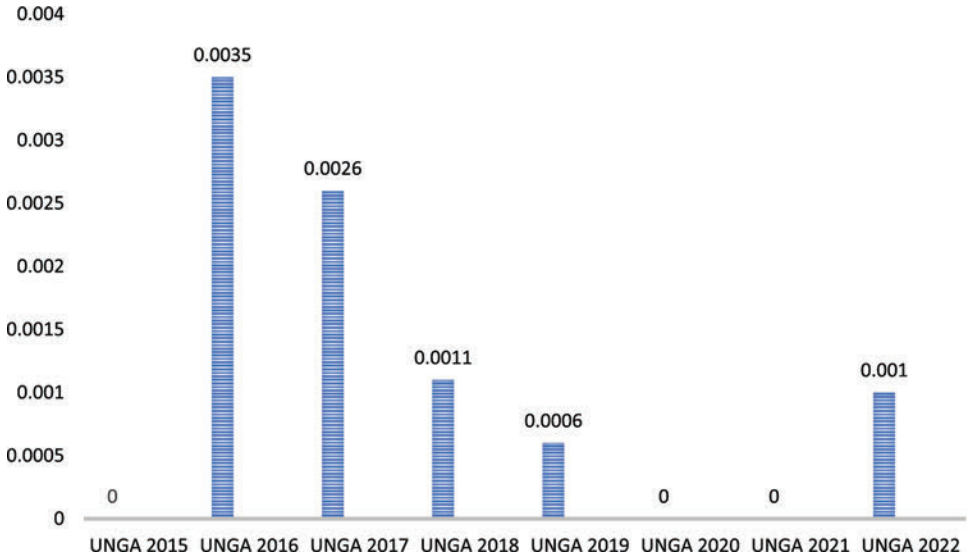

Fig. 9. Frequency of "Democracy" References in Indonesian UNGA Speeches, 2015–2022 (Reprinted by permission, from Greenslade [2023, 45].)

age all issues in economic language so that he would understand their relevance. For instance, in a meeting with Angela Merkel early in his presidency, Jokowi was surprised at how much emphasis the German chancellor put on the crisis in the South China Sea. Talking to Sukma after the encounter, he wondered "why she and other Europeans kept asking about the South China Sea although it is so far away from them."[38] Sukma then explained to Jokowi that if the situation in the South China Sea were to escalate, global trade flows would be interrupted, and the impact on the world economy would be severe. Given that many of its exports passed through the South China Sea, Indonesia would be affected, too. "Only then did he understand the significance," Sukma said. This way of illustrating things for him in economic terms became the standard operating procedure throughout his presidency. Retno, for her part, found it useful to show Jokowi maps and explain how a particular problem affected Indonesia's economy. When discussing the Taiwan conflict with Jokowi, "I pointed to a map and explained: 'this is Taiwan, this is Indonesia, this is our policy on Taiwan, and this is what would happen to the economy if there was a conflict: trade flows would be disrupted.'"[39] This made him appreciate the threat of a war over Taiwan as "scary."[40] But by presenting all major foreign policy issues as having an economic angle,

Jokowi's advisers unwittingly cemented the president's chronic inability to grasp the importance of other geopolitical themes and make them part of Indonesia's ambitions in the global arena.

His one-dimensional understanding of foreign policy also led Jokowi to miss opportunities for Indonesia in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Rosyidin and Pattipeilohy 2020). Founded in 1967, ASEAN is the regional group in which Indonesia's influence is historically the greatest. But Jokowi's interest in the group remained limited throughout his term. When he became president, he even wanted to skip the 2014 ASEAN summit. Unsympathetic to the convolutedness of multilateralism, Jokowi particularly disliked ASEAN's decision-making by consensus. Hence, Sukma and Retno had to talk him into attending the summit. Said Sukma, "we told him that he would be the first Indonesian president to not attend an ASEAN summit, and that changed his mind."[41] While Jokowi eventually recognized, in Sukma's words, that ASEAN was "somewhat important"[42] to Indonesia—Retno stated more carefully that he "understood" its significance[43]—he did not invest much capital in it. In some cases, he tried to influence key policy decisions in ASEAN, but often lost patience quickly and abandoned the initiative. For instance, when the Myanmar military launched a coup in 2021 to overthrow the government of Aung San Suu Kyi, Jokowi asked ASEAN to take the unprecedented step of excluding the junta from summits until it committed to a five-point-plan he brokered. But Jokowi got frustrated when Myanmar's generals showed no willingness to compromise. Consequently, when Indonesia took the ASEAN chairmanship in 2023, Jokowi offered no new initiatives. Instead, he now stated that he was "flexible" on the five-point-plan, implying both awareness that it had failed and an absence of interest in exploring further options to save it.

But even in the arena of managing the Sino-American tensions, in which he successfully averted major upheaval, he lacked a more conceptual basis for his actions. His economic instincts told him to avoid the costs of purchasing balancing capacity and to hedge instead. But this did not add up to a geopolitical vision for Indonesia (Kharisma and Muhibat 2019; Laksmana 2021). Jokowi's confusion over the concept of "middle power," and whether Indonesia belonged to that category, was testimony to that visionary dearth. Even after he endorsed the concept, he did not draw a better understanding of Indonesia's place in the world from it. Sukma, Jokowi's first foreign policy teacher, saw little ideational development in his former pupil: "Indonesia's geopolitical reality is that we are a regional power with selected global engagement. But the government hasn't produced a clear frame for that,

even after a decade."[44] Sukma also found that Indonesia's most important relationships, including with the great powers, remained ill-defined: "What is our policy towards the United States, for instance? What are our geopolitical interests, outside of economic benefit?" Indeed, any conversation with Jokowi on such matters led the president to list economic problems with each state, rather than to reflect on the broader strategic issues involved. For instance, in a September 2023 interview with me, he labeled the hurdles that the IRA posed against Indonesia's nickel export ambitions as the biggest foreign policy problem with the United States.[45]

Ultimately, Jokowi's tendency to favor the easily appreciable and to stay clear of multilayered intricacy produced a foreign policy that delivered short-term stability for Indonesia, but left the country not much wiser about its future course. And while Jokowi gave the world a taste of Indonesia's growing international importance, he developed no globally anchored narrative of its rise. In that, his pragmatist imagination hit its limits. Like in the economic arena, his no-nonsense attitude guided him to some successes—but also to miss major spots of strategic relevance. For handling the Sino-American rivalry, for example, this meant that he had ideas of how to muddle through and keep Indonesia momentarily out of harm's way. But there was not much evidence of strategic scenario-building in his government for the eventuality of an escalation in the South China Sea or in Taiwan. How would Indonesia position itself in such a conflict? How would it use its weight as the world's fourth-most-populous nation to help seek a resolution? And beyond that, what was Jokowi's definition of Indonesia's goals when interacting with other nations around the globe? Jokowi's answer to that latter question—that Indonesia wanted development and equality with the industrialized West—was powerful in its simplicity but also deficient in its unimaginative flatness. Thus, Indonesia—which Adam Schwarz (1994) once famously called "a nation in waiting"—had to extend its long wait for a comprehensive storyline outlining its role in world affairs. Jokowi had not delivered it.

Jokowi's International Posture

However critical one might be about his lack of imagination in formulating an inspiring foreign policy framework, it is important to note that external affairs during the Jokowi presidency were quintessential Jokowi. Suggestions that he was uninvolved in its design and execution, or that he happily

handed foreign policy to Retno and her department, were misleading. Jokowi made momentous decisions that shaped Indonesia's external posture—such as not bolstering the country's military capacity to face the Sino-American challenge—and he left a deep mark on the diplomatic service. His reorientation of the embassies from more traditional diplomatic work to economic promotion and service delivery ruffled a lot of feathers in the proud foreign service elite. Taking a micro-managerial interest in the setup of embassies and how they delivered services, he often demanded reports on how specific "Key Performance Indicators" (KPI) had been met. Tellingly, these KPI also included the expected number of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) an embassy had to secure with businesses of their host countries. Similarly, far from just reading out speeches prepared by the foreign ministry, he gave it instructions on what should be covered and how. According to Retno, "prior to big foreign policy speeches, he sent in guidelines to tell us which of his priorities should be discussed. And he read and commented on drafts."[46] Therefore, any analysis of Jokowi's foreign policy—and his management of the Sino-American tensions within it—needs to start from the premise that he played a large role in formulating it. Given how Jokowi started his presidency—belittled as a country bumpkin and external affairs novice—this outcome could not be taken for granted.

Importantly, Jokowi's ultra-pragmatist approach to the great power rivalry of the 21st century echoed beyond Indonesia. Unlike during the Cold War, when many Third World countries formed alliances based on the ideological orientations of their leaders, the Sino-American conflict saw much more diffuse and loose patterns of economic and political allegiances. Jokowi was representative of this new climate of ad hoc hedging. Washington, therefore, had to learn that appealing to values of freedom and democracy was no longer enough to build alliances against a great power rival. The idea of a "democratic coalition" against autocratic China was a hallmark of both the first Trump administration and Biden's term in office, and proved spectacularly unsuccessful (Brands 2021). Although Jokowi participated virtually in Biden's first Summit for Democracy in 2021—put together with the goal of rallying developing democracies against China—it was clear that the Indonesian president did not intend to take the bait. At that point, Jokowi had already relegated democracy from a core theme of Indonesian diplomacy to a marginal issue, and while he decided that recording a three-minute video for the summit was an acceptable demand on his time, he quickly reaffirmed his status as a free agent in the great power competition. As Mahbubani argued, "by treating the new China challenge as akin to the old Soviet strat-

egy, America is making the classic strategic mistake of fighting tomorrow's war with yesterday's strategies" (He 2021). Indeed, we noted that Mahbubani presented Jokowi as an example of Asia's new autonomy in world affairs that others should follow.

At the same time, Beijing had to accept that it could not simply purchase Jokowi's loyalty by offering investments and loans. As much as Jokowi was interested in the latter, and as much as he pushed the boundaries of nonalignment to make China the most important economic partner of Indonesia, he was keenly aware that he had to set limits to his own utilitarian instincts. Partly, these limits were defined by Indonesia's history of nonalignment and its domestic sensitivities related to the role of the ethnic Chinese. But to no small extent, they were also cemented through Beijing's own missteps. China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea worried Jokowi, and led him to be careful toward its diplomatic overtures. With Jokowi, it appears, China repeated the mistake it had made with Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. When Duterte assumed the presidency in 2016, Beijing believed that the new leader—who had called then–US President Barack Obama a "son of a bitch"—was a natural ally. But instead of charming him, China stepped up its claims against the Philippines in the South China Sea, turning the otherwise pro-China Duterte against Beijing (de Castro 2020). Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who succeeded Duterte in 2022, then changed course and reaffirmed the Philippines' long-standing alliance with Washington (Camba 2023). In Indonesia, a Marcos-style policy reversal is unlikely under President Prabowo Subianto—but he is equally unlikely to fully move Indonesia into China's geopolitical camp.

While Jokowi left mostly stable and balanced foreign relations to the next administration, he also passed on a major challenge: that is, Indonesia's persistent military frailty (Budiana et al. 2023). In that regard, Jokowi simply kicked the can down the road. By not investing in a stronger military, Jokowi freed up funds for his development agenda and generated a further rationale for his hedging vis-à-vis the great powers. But in the longer term, Indonesia will find it hard to gain more prominence on the international stage if it does not acquire at least a respectable military force. At spending levels of around 1 percent of GDP, this is not achievable—and the longer Indonesia continues to underspend, the longer it will take to catch up with others. Indonesia has not only been left behind by the United States and China, but by middle powers in its own Asia-Pacific region and elsewhere. For example, Türkiye and Brazil—both middle powers—had defense budgets in 2024 that were twice as large as Indonesia's. As Indonesia will find, and as China knew

all along, economic power alone does not deliver political and geostrategic might. Projections that Indonesia will be among the world's top economies by 2040 or so are reason to take Indonesia more seriously than it is taken now, but they won't reserve it a seat at the table of the strategic actors who dictate world affairs. For that to occur, Indonesia must swallow the bitter pill and set a larger share of its revenues aside for defense. Jokowi did not do this, and the consequences of that call will endure.

CHAPTER 5

"What Is That Thing?"

Battling COVID-19

In October 2020, a delegation of senior Indonesian officials visited London. The team, consisting of foreign minister Retno, state-owned enterprises minister Thohir, and officials from the health ministry, hoped to sign a deal with AstraZeneca, the producer of one of the first COVID-19 vaccines. At home, the pandemic situation was severe, and many countries expressed concerns about Indonesia's ability to control it. After trying numerous other things, Jokowi now seemed to view vaccines as the best way out of the pandemic and the economic malaise caused by it. But just as the team was about to sign a binding agreement with AstraZeneca, Indonesia's health minister Terawan Agus Putranto refused to authorize his staff to do so. Terawan, who had remained in Jakarta, was a known vaccine skeptic, believing that Indonesia could achieve herd immunity without them. "He also said that we could all go to prison if we signed this contract and the product turned out to be a dud," one team member recalled.[1] "We were furious." At the end, a much less binding MoU was signed to save face, but most team members felt that Indonesia had wasted a golden opportunity. With so many other countries competing for access to vaccines, Indonesia had compromised its place in the queue. Walking to the plane that would take them back to Jakarta, one official quipped that "we should ask Terawan's health ministry guys to swim home."[2] When the news of Terawan's actions reached Jokowi and his assistants, there was disbelief and outrage. Luhut screamed at the health minister through the phone, and Jokowi decided that enough was enough: Terawan had to be replaced.

The London episode highlighted two contrasting patterns in Jokowi's response to the COVID-19 pandemic—arguably the longest and most serious socioeconomic challenge of his presidency. On the one hand, he had put Terawan in charge and stuck with him for the first year of the crisis, despite his well-known anti-vaccine activism and other absurd positions. As the former doctor of the presidential family, Terawan had personal ties to Jokowi, but the president also liked some of his controversial views. In short, Jokowi's initial COVID-19 approach shared similarities with that of fellow populists such as Trump and Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro. On the other hand, the president cut Terawan loose when he threatened one of his key policies. Terawan's obstruction of vaccine purchases was a step too far for Jokowi, finally convincing him that allowing his health minister to continue was too risky for Indonesia. Throughout the pandemic, Jokowi swayed between these two poles of his COVID-19 approach: At times, he was attracted to unscientific ideas, and he rejected systematic mobility restrictions despite experts begging him to impose them. But at other times, he accepted the expert advice given to him, and he ordered policy adjustments as a result. This policy fluctuation, in which the only constant was Jokowi's belief that the economy needed to be protected even at the expense of significant loss of life, produced a checkered COVID-19 report card for Indonesia. While at the end the country did not do as badly as others, the death toll was staggering. Based on estimates, up to 955,000 Indonesians died of the virus prior to the end of 2021 (COVID-19 Excess Mortality Collaborators 2022, 1513). Only India, the United States, and Russia had higher ceiling estimates.

Of course, the discussion of any leader's performance in managing COVID-19 steps into a normative, scientific, and methodological minefield. One of the main criticisms of Jokowi at the time of the pandemic—and one that the argument made in this chapter sustains—relates to his quick dismissal of lockdowns or other strict social mobility restrictions. Jokowi deemed such measures too expensive, impossible to uphold, and ineffective in fighting COVID-19. While there continues to be much new literature highlighting the effectiveness of social mobility restrictions in reducing COVID-19 deaths (Ambade, Thavorn, and Pakhale 2023), there has also been an increasing body of work that casts doubt on such findings and instead considers the overall public health and economic damage done by lockdowns (Herby, Jonung, and Hanke 2023). Especially in the West, many of the restrictions imposed—such as regulations on movements in open-air environments—have now been found to be unnecessary. But while Jokowi may see himself as vindicated by such streams in the literature, there is no escaping the brutality of Indonesia's death toll. Indeed, the estimate

for Indonesia—whose official data were notoriously unreliable—continues to be revised upward. A 2023 study placed Indonesia as the country with the potentially second-largest number of excess deaths, only behind India (Msemburi et al. 2023, 134). Thus, although this chapter acknowledges the importance of economic, social, and public health concerns associated with mobility restrictions, it uses a country's basic record in saving lives as its primary yardstick of measuring the effectiveness of COVID-19 management. Readers may use other yardsticks, as Jokowi certainly did.

Telling the story of Jokowi's battle with COVID-19 is best done chronologically. This is because he experimented with different approaches in each phase, making adjustments on the way. In the first phase, stretching from January to December 2020, Indonesia offered one of the world's poorest COVID-19 responses. Denialism and downplaying were the order of the day, with numerous charlatanistic interventions by close Jokowi aides tarnishing Indonesia's reputation abroad. The dismissal of Terawan—the chief cheerleader of quackery in the Jokowi government—marked the beginning of the second phase, which stretched from January to June 2021. In this period, Jokowi acknowledged COVID-19's severity and became a strong believer in vaccines. In line with this, he brought in more professionals who studied international best practices. However, his simultaneous reluctance to allow more mobility restrictions in reaction to the Delta wave in India then triggered the third phase: that is, the massive spike of fatalities in mid-2021. The magnitude of the disaster convinced Jokowi that more needed to be done, and he put Luhut in charge to fix the problem. In the fourth phase, between late 2021 and late 2022, the situation stabilized—partly because the Delta wave had naturally immunized much of the population. This encouraged Jokowi to promote a narrative of Indonesia's COVID-19 performance as "one of the best in the world," and to sideline those who disagreed with it. Emerging from the pandemic, Jokowi reached the apex of his political authority.

Denialism and Chaos

When Indonesian transport minister Budi Karya Sumadi suddenly felt sick in March 2020, doctors at the hospital he visited told him it was typhus. A few days earlier, Indonesia had announced COVID-19's arrival in the country, after many weeks of insisting it was—in contrast to its neighbors—free of the virus. As transport minister, Sumadi's task was to ensure that COVID-19 did not slip into Indonesia through its airports and sea connec-

tions. He was also asked to oversee the return of Indonesians from Wuhan in China, the initial center of the outbreak. They were first flown to Natuna for observation, where Sumadi then tried to arrange for their transport to health facilities. Given Sumadi's exposure to potential infection risks, then, his falling ill should not have come as a surprise. Yet Indonesia's testing capacity was low, and doctors appeared confused. "It was Luhut who insisted that I seek more intensive treatment, and that's when it was found I had COVID-19," Sumadi recalled.[3] As it turned out, Sumadi's case was severe. He was unconscious for fifteen days. The government, still reluctant to make regular COVID-19 announcements, asked Sumadi's wife to go public with the news, but she was too distraught. Pratikno then told the media—for many Indonesians, this was the first indication that COVID-19 was a serious threat. Sumadi was given patient number 76, two weeks after patient number 1 was acknowledged. While Indonesia was still counting infections in the dozens, experts believed that the virus was already rampant, as it was in other parts of the world. Sumadi eventually recovered, but it was a long struggle: "I had to learn to walk again. Sixty steps at once were great progress."[4] Others weren't so lucky. Indonesia's cemeteries filled up quickly.

While Sumadi's case brought home the reality of COVID-19's entry into Indonesia, many officials saw little reason to be alarmed. Throughout January and February 2020, they had systematically downplayed the threat (Lindsey and Mann 2020). Terawan recommended prayers, healthy food, and walks in the sun to fend off the pandemic. Another health official suggested Indonesians were immune because of their Malay race, and others again claimed that the country's warm weather would protect them from the virus. Jokowi, for his part, said that he wanted to attract more tourists during the crisis, profiting from border closures elsewhere. While the government's tone changed somewhat after the recognition of COVID-19 cases in March, the overall message remained one of unexcited calm. In hindsight, Jokowi explained that he deliberately talked down the threat because "I feared a mass panic."[5] He admitted that "this was seen by many as the president underestimating the true dimension of the crisis."[6] One of the consequences of this strategy was that Jokowi's own apparatus saw no urgency in acquiring testing capacity. Terawan was a particular failure in this regard. Budi Gunadi Sadikin, who as deputy minister for state-owned enterprises tried to coordinate with him on the purchase of testing machines, found that "nobody picked up the phone in the health ministry."[7] Given this chaos, Indonesia's testing rates remained dismal. In early October 2020, Indonesia's testing ratio stood at 7.8 per 1,000 people. Indonesia's peers tested significantly more (see fig. 10): India tested seven times more; South Africa nine

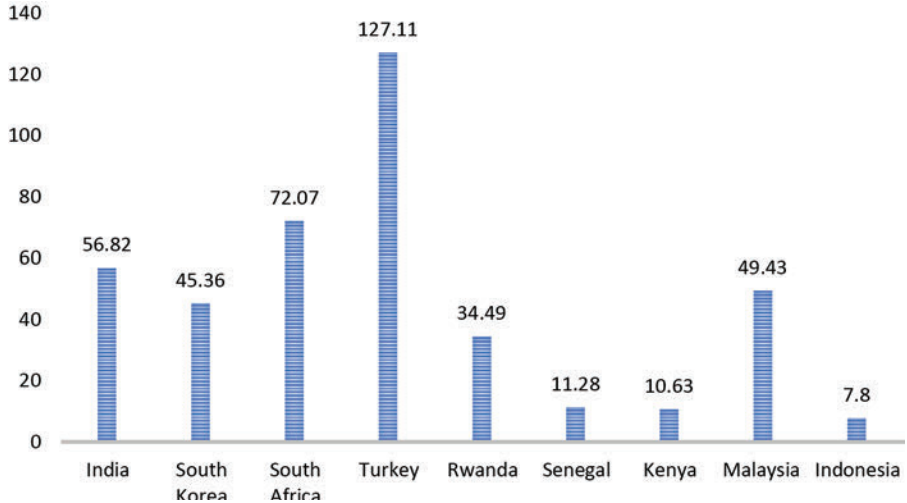

Fig. 10. COVID-19 Tests per 1,000 People, Indonesia vs. Selected Other Countries, October 2020
(*Note:* See Our World in Data [2020]. Indonesia's test data has since been removed from this data set.)

times; and Türkiye sixteen times. Indonesia's testing was at par with or below the poor regions of sub-Saharan Africa.

The lack of testing left Indonesian authorities flying blind when trying to control the escalating pandemic. With the number of official cases low, the only indications of the spread of the virus could be found in funeral statistics. At the end of March 2020, 84 COVID-19 deaths were reported in Jakarta, but the burial statistics of that month suggested that at least 1,300 people had died of the virus in the capital in that period (Allard et al. 2020). The discrepancy between official statistics and the spiking burial numbers became so large that critics began to suspect that testing numbers were deliberately kept low to conceal the true dimension of the pandemic. Indeed, populist governments around the world—from Brazil to the United States—either tried to camouflage their case numbers or to pour cold water on their own statistics. At that time, President Donald Trump famously said that the United States only had high case numbers because it tested so much, and that it would have lower numbers if it tested less. Watching the baffling inability, or unwillingness, of Indonesian officials to increase testing capacity, many experts—including the country's leading epidemiologists—wondered whether a similar logic was at play in Jokowi's government (Jung 2023, 140). Sadikin, who later replaced Terawan as health minister, discovered on taking

office that many local officials—"including some pretty prominent governors with political ambitions"[8]—underreported the cases from their regions. Clearly, Terawan did not mind—he made no effort to obtain more credible statistics (Jaffrey 2020). Jokowi, it appears, did not insist on producing such numbers either.

In Jokowi's view, the initially low case numbers—however fanciful—supported his main policy argument in the pandemic: that is, his strong opposition to lockdowns. To the president, who had begun his second term two months before the outbreak, the COVID-19 crisis was primarily a massive nuisance and disruption (Mudhoffir and Hadiz 2021). All his plans for the next five years, with the construction of Nusantara on the top of the list, now seemed to be under a big cloud. "My first reaction, when I heard of this new virus, was: 'what is that thing?,'" Jokowi told me later.[9] Following the instincts that had guided him in other policy areas as well, his thoughts then moved to the potential economic fallout: "I spoke to President Xi three times on the phone, but it became clear to me that the lockdowns imposed in China and elsewhere were inappropriate for Indonesia. The savings of Indonesians would never be enough to get through a lockdown; many don't have any savings at all."[10] But Jokowi was not only concerned about the economic impact on individuals. He also worried about the state's finances, and consequently his ability to carry out his second-term programs: "The cost of a lockdown to the state would have been US$40 million per day in Jakarta alone. A lockdown puts all related costs on the government. We could not do that."[11] The officially low case numbers, therefore, allowed him to uphold the logic that the economy could remain open. This, in turn, would enable the state to keep its reserves for non-pandemic expenditures. At the same time, the seemingly benign statistics kept Indonesia out of the international headlines, which protected the country from capital outflows—or so it was hoped.

The oligarchs around Jokowi supported and consolidated his anti-lockdown views. While the president was firm in his position, there were loud voices in Indonesia's elite and society at large demanding effective mobility restrictions (Ghaliya, Gorbiano, and Syakriah 2020). Concerned that Jokowi might give in to them, oligarchs lobbied the president to stand his ground (Aditya and Heijmans 2021). One of them was Golkar chair and coordinating minister for the economy, Airlangga Hartarto: "I told Jokowi not to opt for a lockdown. As a manufacturer myself, I understand how important supply chains are. The supply chain can't be interrupted, under any circumstances."[12] Jokowi also received letters from the country's wealthiest entrepreneurs. Budi Hartono, Indonesia's second-richest man,

wrote to Jokowi in September 2020 to complain about mobility restrictions in Jakarta that its governor Anies Baswedan had imposed against Jokowi's wishes (Siswanto 2020). Hartono provided numerous arguments why lockdowns didn't work but failed to mention concerns about his commercial bottom line. Ironically, his billionaire brother chose to sit out the pandemic in his house in Singapore. In an interview in April 2022, Michael Hartono volunteered that "one day before Singapore ordered its lockdown, I noted that COVID-19 was more serious in Indonesia than in Singapore, so I, my wife, and one kid stayed in Singapore while my two other kids went to Australia"—which also practiced lockdowns (Hariyani 2020). He argued that Singaporeans were more disciplined than Indonesians in following COVID-19 rules—the very rules his brother asked Jokowi not to adopt.

As Hartono's letter indicated, Jokowi's main political adversary in the COVID-19 pandemic was Anies Baswedan (Tangkudung and Sugiharto 2020). The two men had a difficult relationship, and the pandemic made it worse. Anies, a former rector of an Islamic university, had been on Jokowi's 2014 campaign team, and the president subsequently appointed him education minister. But when Jokowi suspected that Anies used the portfolio to pursue his own presidential ambitions, he replaced him in 2016.[13] Anies then challenged Jokowi's ally Basuki Tjahaja Purnama for the Jakarta governorship in 2017—and won by siding with the Islamist anti-Purnama protest movement that had, as noted, filled the capital's streets for months. As the pandemic erupted, Anies became the strongest advocate for lockdowns. Most irritatingly for Jokowi, Anies fed information to the foreign press about Indonesia's poor COVID-19 management. He confirmed burial numbers that pointed to the underreporting of cases, eroding the image of successful pandemic control that Jokowi wanted to convey to the world. Moreover, Anies ordered his own lockdowns for Jakarta, using regulations Jokowi issued in March 2020 that gave local governments heads some freedom in making their own rules. However, they still had to seek approval from Terawan, who was characteristically dragging his feet in most cases—and if he did respond, he often refused to endorse lockdowns. Anies's lockdown application was also stonewalled at first. Told that his application was incomplete, the governor retorted: "It is as if we are proposing a project that needs a feasibility study. Can't the ministry see that we are facing a rising death toll? Is that not enough?" (Syakriah 2020).

Some former Jokowi allies sided with Anies against the president. For instance, Tom Lembong—Jokowi's former trade minister and investment chief—tweeted his support for hard mobility restrictions as the crisis escalated. His message was not well received in the palace. Prior to the tweet,

Lembong's relationship with Jokowi had remained formally cordial, despite him missing out on a second-term ministry: "In early 2020, Jokowi had told me that I would be considered as the head of the new capital. But the contact cooled considerably after my stance on COVID-19."[14] Part of the issue, Lembong believed, was that his position was seen as an explicit endorsement of Anies. And indeed, Lembong identified this incident as the moment in which his political alliance with Anies began and his ties with Jokowi fully broke down.[15] Lembong was highly supportive when Anies finally got the reluctant approval of the health ministry to establish his lockdown in Jakarta, which triggered Budi Hartono's wrath and led him to write to Jokowi. Lembong also supported Anies through every subsequent conflict with the central government over this policy. Later, during the Delta spike of August 2021, Lembong joined Anies's gubernatorial team as a supervisor in a major city-owned enterprise. Finally, when Anies prepared his 2024 presidential run, Lembong became his chief economic adviser. Thus, while Jokowi did not turn the issue of lockdowns into a culture war in the way that Trump and Bolsonaro did in the United States and Brazil, respectively, the controversy nevertheless demarcated domestic political battle lines that allowed the president to identify friends and foes.

Initially, Jokowi did not believe that he had to change his overall approach in response to Anies's pressure. In fact, he allowed his officials to offer grotesque "miracle cures" to the anxious public. While Jokowi himself in March abandoned a brief flirt with hydroxychloroquine—a drug Trump promoted without scientific evidence—he did not intervene when ministers came up with their own initiatives. For instance, Jokowi's agriculture minister, Syahrul Yasin Limpo, proudly presented a series of eucalyptus products in July 2020. The star of the collection was an antivirus necklace. "We have tried it. If we [use it] for 30 minutes, it can kill 80 percent [of the coronavirus]. We have also produced a roll-on [product]," Syahrul proclaimed (Oktavianti and Kahfi 2020). His cabinet colleague, research minister Bambang Brodjonegoro, announced plans to develop a coconut oil supplement to prevent COVID-19 infections (Azzahra 2020). The army chief of staff and deputy police chief, for their part, lobbied for several drug cocktails—that is, new combinations of existing drugs (Chaterine 2020). They even took the unusual step of visiting Indonesia's Supervisory Agency for Drugs and Food (BPOM) in August to ask it for expedited approval. Packaged as the "world's first COVID-19 medicine," the proposed drug combinations failed to convince BPOM, however, and it withheld approval. Furthermore, Luhut suggested in August that a "herbal mangosteen juice," developed by Surabaya mayor Tri Rismaharini, had healed "thousands" (Akbar 2020). Evidently,

these actions did not help to improve Indonesia's international reputation in COVID-19 control.

But ultimately, Jokowi understood that the status quo was unsustainable. Indonesia's embassies were busy writing letters to foreign news editors to counter the—mostly correct—impression that Jakarta was mismanaging COVID-19 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2020). In many ways, Terawan was the embodiment of this mismanagement, and if Jokowi wanted to signal a fresh start, it was obvious that he needed to overhaul the health ministry. In addition to the domestic and international image problem associated with Terawan, Jokowi also began to have policy differences with him. As the incident in London indicated, the biggest of these differences concerned vaccines. "Terawan did not think that we had to purchase that many vaccines, and this created discord in cabinet. From my perspective, I wanted an expert in that position who could oversee the vaccine roll-out. So, let's just say I required someone with a different skill set," Jokowi said, summarizing his disagreements with Terawan.[16] According to Pratikno, an additional complication was that "Terawan promised his own vaccine, which would be different from all the others."[17] Most experts believed that Terawan's vaccine, called "Red and White Vaccine," was a delusion—and it distracted him from acquiring international products. For a while, Jokowi tried to simply sidestep Terawan by handing key tasks to other officials. For instance, Jokowi asked Airlangga to assume responsibility for the vaccine development with China—which ran parallel to the attempts to procure vaccines in the West.[18] But Terawan's blowing up of the AstraZeneca deal persuaded Jokowi that only a reshuffle would do. Terawan was shown the door, and Jokowi gave himself the chance for a new beginning.

The Return of Reason

As angry as Jokowi was about Terawan's failures, the split from his family's former chief doctor was painful for the president. Beyond the personal sympathies involved, Jokowi also felt that Terawan's dismissal constituted the abortion of a reform project. In 2019, he had appointed him in the hope that he could shake up Indonesia's medical establishment. Terawan was in open conflict with this very establishment, and Indonesia's leading medical associations thus had written to Jokowi during the 2019 cabinet formation to advise against his appointment. Traditional doctors viewed Terawan as a maverick: he had offered unapproved treatments to patients, such as "flushing" brains to both treat and prevent strokes. For Jokowi, the rejection by

the doctors' professional lobby groups was—at that time—a welcome confirmation of his choice. He believed that Indonesia's medical landscape was in desperate need of radical change. Indeed, the country's medical statistics were dismal. For instance, Indonesia had only 4.27 doctors per 10,000 people (World Health Organization 2020). Vietnam, with a considerably lower GDP per capita than Indonesia, had twice as many. Indonesia even had fewer than the Philippines (6) and Myanmar (6.77), and only slightly more than the much poorer Laos (3.73). The quality of medical services was also questionable, with many Indonesians who could afford it seeking treatment abroad, especially in Singapore, Thailand, or the United States. When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, Jokowi blamed Indonesia's poor health system for its troubles, and he initially held on to Terawan because he still believed in his ability to enforce reforms.

Eventually, however, Jokowi sacked Terawan because he felt that he found a suitable replacement: Budi Gunadi Sadikin. Like Terawan, Sadikin was a trailblazer. He held a degree in nuclear physics, had worked at IBM as an information technology officer, and then climbed the corporate ladder in banking. He ruffled feathers in every senior position he occupied but gained much respect even among those he challenged hard. But in contrast to Terawan, Sadikin had a razor-sharp business mind. He relied on experts to tell him what worked and what didn't. Fluent in English and blunt in his expression, Sadikin attracted Jokowi's attention when he worked as Erick Thohir's deputy in the state-owned enterprise ministry. It was Sadikin who convinced Jokowi that he couldn't save the economy without solving the health crisis. Meeting Jokowi in September 2020, Sadikin told him that "this crisis is different from any other I've seen as a banker. The source is not economic or political, it is medical. So the solution must be medical, too."[19] According to Pratikno, "Jokowi started to call him 'Dr Budi,' although he wasn't a medical doctor, or any doctor for that matter. His command of detail was impressive."[20] To Pratikno, Jokowi then asked whether Sadikin's appointment as Indonesia's first health minister without a medical background would make the doctors' associations angry again.[21] When Pratikno answered that that was possible, the president made the appointment. In Sadikin, Jokowi saw a better version of Terawan—fierce and courageous, but rational.

In Jokowi's first meeting with Sadikin as new health minister in the final days of 2020, the president laid out what he expected. His primary task, Jokowi told Sadikin, was to oversee the vaccine rollout. The first vaccines from the joint project with China—named Sinovac—were ready to be administered in January 2021. Jokowi hoped that all Indonesians could be vaccinated twice by August in that year. Fortunately for Sadikin, he could

count on Jokowi's full support: unlike Trump and Balsonaro, who knew that many of their core supporters were suspicious of vaccines, Jokowi had an entirely unproblematic attitude toward them. In turn, most of his followers were likely to adopt his stance (Halimatusa'diyah and Durriyah 2023). Hence, Jokowi got his first dose in front of TV cameras in Sadikin's first month as minister. Jokowi's second order to Sadikin was to coordinate other pandemic control measures, "although he didn't say what they should be."[22] In contrast to his clarity on and enthusiasm for vaccines, Jokowi continued to struggle to come up with a coherent concept on other steps that could be taken. In this regard, Sadikin did not leave the meeting with Jokowi any wiser. Finally, Jokowi charged Sadikin to do what Terawan hadn't delivered: that is, to reform the health system. "Pratikno told me that 'the health professionals will hate you,' but I was ready for that challenge," Sadikin said.[23] Complicated institutional issues were his specialty, both in the private sector and in government. As deputy minister for state-owned enterprises, he had consolidated dozens of the state's pharmaceutical companies and hospitals into a single unit within six months. Jokowi wanted to see similar breakthroughs in the health system as a whole.

But things were more challenging than even someone as formidable as Sadikin was prepared for. As he found out in his now regular meetings with the president, Jokowi had not changed his opposition to strict mobility restrictions—which epidemiologists said were crucial before the vaccines could be administered to everyone. While Jokowi had been vague in the first briefing for Sadikin, the president increasingly revealed that although Terawan was gone, the policy of protecting the economy from disruption stayed. If anything, Jokowi's views on this issue had hardened further. One reason for this was that societal views had changed in his favor. After the regulations of March 2020 that allowed regions to issue their own social distancing rules, a hotchpotch of half-hearted stipulations had emerged that confused the population without achieving much in terms of containing case numbers and fatalities. But especially in the lower classes, the feeling firmed that the restrictions, however lax, played havoc with their income opportunities. As a result, the polls started to shift. While in May 2020, 61 percent of respondents in a national survey wanted public health to be prioritized over economic considerations, this number declined to 45 percent in July, with a majority now prioritizing the economy. As indicated above, the specialists disagreed: in an expert survey in July, 71 percent of respondents still believed that the government should place public health over the economy (Indikator 2020, 27). It was clear to Sadikin that his room to maneuver was limited by Jokowi's aversion to lockdowns: "I knew the president's parameters, and I

stayed within them; the suggestions I made to him, accordingly, couldn't go anywhere near a full lockdown."

The vaccine rollout was also slow. Sadikin soon discovered that Indonesia's governmental system only handed him a role in procuring vaccines and making them available—the distribution itself was the responsibility of the country's governors and their subordinate officials. While Indonesia is formally a unitary state, a major decentralization drive after Suharto's fall transferred many resources and powers into the regions (Hill 2014). Hence, Sadikin complained that "in this 'federalized' system, all I could do was [give] the vaccines to the governors, and it stopped there." However, the procurement itself was stalling, too. By July 2021, Indonesia had only obtained 30 percent of the vaccine supply it needed to vaccinate its population with two doses (Purnamasari and Galih 2021). Out of the supply it possessed at that point, less than half had been administered. As a consequence, Jokowi's goal of having the population vaccinated by August was unachievable. Frustrated, Sadikin told the president that "you gave me a job, but I can't execute it."[24] The health minister explained to Jokowi that a big problem was the reluctance of the police and military—which were central to the vaccine distribution—to receive orders from civilian governors or even ministers: "They didn't listen to me or Airlangga, who held overall responsibility as the coordinating minister for the economy. Airlangga was angry that I told the president this, but it was the truth."[25] As a solution, Sadikin proposed that Luhut, as a former general feared and respected in the security establishment, be put in charge of coordinating the vaccine rollout and other COVID-19 measures. Jokowi was open to the idea but needed to consider the political sensitivities in his cabinet.

Another problem confronting the vaccination program was societal resistance. While Jokowi's strong support for vaccines carried weight with his voters, there was some opposition in religious circles. Conservative Muslims—who were not among Jokowi's core constituency—proved particularly skeptical. As the world's largest majority-Muslim population, it was unsurprising that Indonesians would have questions about whether the vaccine was halal, or allowed by Islamic law. The fact that the vaccine was produced in China, where pork ingredients are widely used, added to the anxiety. To address the suspicions, Jokowi asked his vice president, the orthodox Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin, to lead the vaccination information campaign. In late 2020, Amin declared that even if the Halal Committee of the Indonesian Council of Islamic Scholars (MUI) should find the vaccine to be not halal, it could still be used because Islamic law provided for exceptions in some emergencies. As a former MUI chairman, Amin was highly

influential in the group. Pressured from above, MUI issued the official halal certificate for Sinovac in early January, a few days before Jokowi received his first shot. But by mid-2021, a survey in Jakarta found that about a third of the population still refused to be vaccinated, and a third of those did so because of concerns over the product's halal status (Kumparan 2021). This mixed with reasons found in other parts of the world: fear of side effects and doubts about whether the vaccine worked. As time progressed, Western anti-vaccine narratives also leaked into Indonesia: for instance, one survey in late 2021 showed that 10 percent of vaccine skeptics believed that a supervision microchip would be implanted in them (Dihni 2021).

As a consequence, Indonesia's COVID-19 situation remained precarious—despite Sadikin's appointment and Jokowi's departure from the quackery promoted by some of his aides in the early COVID-19 phase. To be sure, testing rates increased significantly throughout 2021, reaching World Health Organization (WHO) standards in the first months of the year and subsequently exceeding them. But Jokowi's resistance to more coherent mobility restrictions, while the vaccine rollout stuttered, left Indonesia walking on thin ice. The president had accepted that science had to take the lead on most issues, such as testing and vaccines, but he held on to his belief in the supreme importance of the economy when considering mobility restrictions. These remained lax and incoherent by international standards, and Jokowi had no intention to alter that. Inescapably, then, case and fatality numbers kept creeping up, and although Indonesia had thus far avoided a spike of the kind that countries such as Brazil had witnessed, most analysts believed that it was only a matter of time until Indonesia was more severely hit (Lamb 2021a). Many epidemiologists continued to shake their heads about what they saw as their government's irresponsible inactivity, and they became frequent sources of damning foreign media reports on Indonesia. Sadikin was also anxious: "Some foreign media reported that if we stayed at such a low speed of vaccination, it would take us 10 years to vaccinate everyone. We had to do more."[26] In short, Indonesia in the immediate post-Terawan period was in a holding operation—the ship was momentarily steady, but it was clearly heading into a storm.

The storm eventually came in the form of the Delta variant, and it was brewing in India (Novelli, Colona, and Pandolfi 2021). This variant of the COVID-19 virus had first been detected in the subcontinent in October 2020, but it took until May 2021 to unleash its full destructive potential. With higher transmissibility than the original COVID-19 virus, Delta—once established—spread like wildfire. At its mid-June peak in India, it killed at least 25,000 people a day—with unreported cases likely to be signif-

icantly higher. During that period, the orange light emanating from Indian mass burials at night made for harrowing satellite pictures that were shared around the world. But despite the Indian catastrophe, and Delta cases being detected in Indonesia by early May, Jokowi saw no reason to react. In other countries, such as the United Kingdom, the arrival of Delta led to an extension of mobility restrictions, delaying initial plans for a partial reopening. Others still, like Australia, ordered new lockdowns. But Indonesia remained passive. Once again, the country's leading epidemiologists were livid. Pandu Riono, for example, slammed the government for its "relaxed" attitude at a time when other world leaders were in panic (Amindoni 2021). He warned that if no additional restrictions were imposed, the variant could rapidly get out of control. Jokowi, however, was unmoved. He believed that the vaccination drive would end the pandemic soon, and that Indonesia had to sit tight only a little longer to emerge on the other side. With this "buckle-up" strategy, Indonesia moved full steam ahead into the hurricane, and many wouldn't survive the impact.

The Delta Catastrophe

On a cloudy day in early July 2021, the undertakers at Rorotan Cemetery in Bekasi, West Java, could hardly keep up. One body after the other was delivered to them, with the expectation of an immediate burial (Velarosdela 2021). A traffic jam of hearses, both formal and informal, clogged the cemetery's entrance and stretched as far as the eye could see. Many of the officials at the cemetery hadn't slept in days, and avoided going home to their families because they feared they might infect them. In that week of July, Indonesia reported about 2,000 deaths a day, but to everyone involved on the ground, it was clear that the death toll was much higher. Graves were dug nonstop, space was running out, and every day, the number of arriving corpses increased. What's worse, the story of Rorotan Cemetery was replicated manifold across the archipelago. Videos of tired undertakers angrily telling the government "to do something" made the rounds on people's phones. By late July, the official daily death toll had reached 4,500, and by mid-August, it had doubled to 9,000. In the second half of August, Indonesia had the highest daily COVID-19 death numbers in the world. The families of those who were infected and sick but still alive struggled to obtain oxygen tanks for their relatives, as hospitals ran out of supplies and the prices of such tanks skyrocketed. What had happened to India two months earlier was now playing out in Indonesia. The country was, for a

brief but deeply traumatic period, the globe's COVID-19 epicenter (Mogul 2021; Hong and Jiao 2021). There were few Indonesians who did not lose a family member in this tsunami of cases; social media became primarily a place to mourn loved ones.

At the height of the carnage, on August 16, 2021, Jokowi stepped to the podium to deliver his annual Independence Day speech to Indonesia's legislators. Given what was happening outside, Indonesians were curious about what their president had to say. But those who had hoped that Jokowi would assume the role of the nation's comforter-in-chief, as presidents in other countries often do in times of crisis, were disappointed. There were no condolences expressed, no words of consolation spoken. Jokowi even avoided any explicit reference to the massive escalation of the COVID-19 situation. The closest Jokowi came to recognizing the scale of the Delta disaster underway in Indonesia's hospitals, homes, and cemeteries was his opening reference to a fire: "The crisis, recession, and pandemic are like a fire. If we can, we stay clear of it, but if it still happens, there is much we can learn from it. A fire indeed burns, but it is also enlightening. If it can be controlled, it is inspiring and motivating. It is sickening but at the same time also strengthening" (Sekretariat Kabinet 2021). He then spent much of the speech on these positives of the fire: Indonesia had learned to improve its health system; citizens had become more disciplined and health-aware; and the preparedness of getting vaccinated was on the rise. "The pandemic has strengthened our social institutions, and it has consolidated our social capital," Jokowi claimed. He reminded his listeners that the government did not only focus on fighting the pandemic, but also pursued its other goals, such as infrastructure development. When the president finished his speech, it was hard to get the impression that he was particularly shaken by the events that were shocking the rest of the nation.

Jokowi's cold reaction to the calamity unfolding around him was both noteworthy and unsurprising. It was unsurprising in that we already identified his emotional remoteness and ability to be ruthless in dealings with others. His capacity to mentally withdraw and his Machiavellian instincts made him an imposing player in elite politics, and the Indonesian political landscape was littered with those he had used and disposed of without scruples (Ng 2024). But for a politician whose brand was his origin from, and representation of, ordinary people, his apparent lack of empathy for those dying in the thousands each day was puzzling. Obviously, people in positions of power need to make dispassionate decisions for the public good and must be able to insulate themselves—to some extent—from the fate of the individual. But in most cases, power-holders wrestle with this moral chal-

lenge in public, and they share some of the pain involved in these decisions with the citizenry—if only to make themselves look empathetic and retain the confidence of the electorate. Jokowi, by contrast, did not see the need for a public performance of empathy. Internally, too, his dealings with Delta were businesslike. When the news of Delta's arrival in Indonesia reached him, he was told that it might hit hard but be over quickly: "The advice I got was that it spreads more rapidly [than other variants], but that it is likely to end sooner, too."[27] The message Jokowi took from this was that a radical change of action—now that Delta already raged in the country—would not be helpful: "Even if we had imposed a full lockdown then, it would not have stopped the spread." Being patient and accepting that casualties would fall was, in his view, the only option.

But as much as Jokowi's aloofness was a key component of his personal and political character, it was counterbalanced by his ability to absorb information and recalibrate his stance accordingly. While the suffering he witnessed did not move him to order a comprehensive lockdown, and although he was personally prepared to grit his teeth and sit out the crisis, he sensed that some action was expected of him. Thus, he finally accepted Sadikin's advice and gave Luhut responsibility for the COVID-19 operations in Java and Bali (Lai 2021). As Sadikin had argued before, and as Jokowi now recognized, "we needed someone who could coordinate the police, military, and other agencies—somebody who had authority [in the security forces] and who people would listen to."[28] Luhut took up his new position in early July 2021. According to Luhut, "the president called me at that time and expressed surprise that the case numbers had increased so dramatically. So he put me in charge."[29] Jokowi asked him to come up with options, only telling him that "the economy and the health considerations still must be balanced."[30] Luhut ordered his staff to do some modeling, and based on the results, proposed a regime of selected lockdowns in specific locations—knowing that the president continued to oppose a full lockdown. And while Luhut now informally used the term "local lockdown," Jokowi didn't. As a compromise, it was decided to add the term "emergency" to the title of the old regulations. In effect, the central government now assumed the power to declare systematic mobility restrictions in areas where it deemed such action necessary.

Luhut's intimidation skills, which Jokowi had used to instill fear among the political elite and enforce loyalty, came in handy in his new role. When talking to officials in charge of executing the emergency rules, Luhut did not mince words: "I said to them, 'if this isn't working, I'll fire you. And I'm going to find out what your past sins are [to use them against you].'"[31]

Even among his many critics, Luhut had a reputation for getting things done, and he was determined to use it to manage the Delta mess. Luhut had never been as religiously hostile to lockdowns as Jokowi was, but as a fiercely loyal aide to the president, he did not question the anti-lockdown directive of his boss. However, now that Jokowi had opened—in a time of crisis—some room to maneuver in the policy space, he took this chance to develop a more systematic approach to mobility restrictions: "We used NASA's night images to identify areas of particularly high levels of activity, following the intensity of lights. Based on that, we moved into those areas to impose restrictions."[32] To be sure, as Pandu Riono had predicted prior to the Delta outbreak and as Jokowi was told by his experts, once the variant had hit, any action taken during the July and August wave itself was unlikely to be effective. As in India, the virus would burn through the country. The new methods, therefore, were mostly designed to stabilize the situation once the worst was over, and to have a regime in place that could mitigate a repetition of the disaster. Jokowi, although he had acted too late to anticipate Delta's fury, could point to the new action plan as evidence of his ability to adjust—while not abandoning his stance that full lockdowns had to be prevented to protect the economy.

Sadikin also used the crisis to accelerate some of his own changes to Indonesia's COVID-19 management (Cahyani et al. 2022). In the first half of 2021, he had begun to reform the way COVID-19 data was processed and announced: "We needed to know which variant was at which stage of its curve and then act accordingly. And to establish that, we had to do genomic profiling and sequencing, which in turn relied on the data from the regions that we received."[33] The problem was, as under Terawan, that "many local officials faked the data, because they thought that they looked bad if their numbers were high."[34] To address this issue, Sadikin ordered the test labs to cease the practice of first sending the data to local governments, who would then pass it on to his ministry in Jakarta. Instead, he asked for the data to be transmitted directly to the ministry in a Google file, and it was then to be published immediately, before governors, district heads, or mayors could intervene. But "at the time of the Delta spike, we weren't yet fully in control of this process."[35] The pressure of the Delta spike, and the new momentum Luhut brought to the government's response, allowed Sadikin to further institutionalize the collection of data: "After the Delta crisis, it was all driven by bioscience. We knew where infections were happening, which variant it was, and when it was likely to peak. This gave us the basis for a quicker response."[36] Sadikin, working within the boundaries Jokowi had set for him, was able to get Indonesia to catch up with international best practices.

The magnitude of the Delta crisis, combined with the additional government measures it triggered, led to an improved COVID-19 situation after the spike was over. Like in India, once the virus had ravaged the country, case and fatality numbers began to drop. By October, the daily death toll had declined to below 1,000. Instrumental to this outcome was the dramatically increased level of natural immunity that the Delta spike had caused. Tests undertaken in December 2021 showed that 88 percent of Indonesians now had COVID-19 antibodies (Sekretariat Kabinet 2022c)—although the first-dose vaccination rate had only reached 50 percent in October (Sekretariat Negara 2021). In other words, the Delta spike had spread antibodies across the population, including to those citizens who weren't vaccinated. By April 2022, the percentage of Indonesians with COVID-19 antibodies increased to 99 percent—whether through additional vaccinations or through natural infection (Sekretariat Kabinet 2022c). Furthermore, the emergency regulations imposed in July, which were extended several times, helped control the situation. Under a four-tier system, regions with high infection rates remained under tight mobility restrictions, while those with lower case numbers could relax them. In early 2022, another COVID-19 spike occurred, this time as a result of the Omicron variant. But given how many people had immunity, the mortality rate was much lower this time—the peak was in April 2022 with 1,400 daily deaths. Nevertheless, the government's COVID-19 team—still coordinated by Luhut—kept the instruments of mobility restrictions in place. The overall framework for these measures was only lifted in December 2022.

It is hard to overstate, however, how high the price was that Indonesia had to pay for the COVID-19 stabilization from late 2021 onward. As noted, close to a million people are likely to have perished in 2020 and 2021, most of whom died during the Delta spike. The official death toll stood at 144,000 at the end of 2021, but there are few reasons to take this number seriously. Based on more reliable excess mortality estimates, the fatalities due to COVID-19 constituted the biggest irregular loss of life in Indonesia since the anticommunist massacres of 1965 and 1966. During this explosion of violence, up to one million people were killed (Cribb 2002). One must go back to the Japanese occupation of Indonesia in World War II between 1942 and 1945 to find an event that was more catastrophic in its deadly impact: figures vary widely, but somewhere between 2.5 and 4 million people died, often of starvation, in that period (Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies, n.d.). Of course, there are significant differences between deaths caused by political violence or occupation on the one hand and those associated with a pandemic on the other. Most importantly, the question of

responsibility is a much heavier one in the cases of massacre and war. But the events are similar in their fundamental impact: they all left behind millions of grieving families. We mentioned already Jokowi's reluctance to recognize the large number of victims. As it turned out later, this wasn't only due to his emotional coldness; it was also a result of his concern about how the pandemic would be portrayed in society at large and in the history books.

"One of the Best"

As Jokowi took the stage at a health ministry event in March 2023, he was beaming with pride and self-confidence. He looked like a man who had completed a difficult mission and who wanted everyone to know just how successful he had been. "It is clear," he began his remarks, "that compared to the world average we are included in the cluster of countries that succeeded in the handling of COVID-19" (Muliawati 2023). To back up his claim, he cited international sources: "In June 2022, the WHO Secretary General Tedros Adhanom said that the COVID-19 management in Indonesia was among the best and its vaccination rate was one of the best, too. That's not us talking, that's the WHO director-general." He also pointed to a supportive statement from one of the highest-ranking universities in the United States: "And in September 2021, John Hopkins University stated that Indonesia was one of the best in the world in achieving a decline in COVID-19 numbers" (Muliawati 2023). But he was proudest about the economic stability that he had, in his mind, upheld during the pandemic and its aftermath: "Because we obviously succeeded in reducing the transmission rate, and because we succeeded in pushing down the death rate, we also succeeded in maintaining the stability and growth of the economy, as evidenced in the GDP growth last year [2022] of 5.3 percent" (Muliawati 2023). In Jokowi's depiction, then, Indonesia had not only survived the COVID-19 crisis, but it had excelled at mastering it, and in doing so, had emerged as a model for the rest of the world.

Presidents and other powerholders around the world have cherry-picked data and citations to defend their COVID-19 records. Few have admitted to major mistakes they personally made. In that sense, Jokowi's attempt to talk up his and Indonesia's performance during the COVID-19 crisis is nothing unusual. What *is* remarkable, however, is the *success* he had at building his own COVID-19 narrative and making it the majority view in Indonesia. Even abroad, it found traction. While some leaders with particularly bad COVID-19 records—such as Trump, Bolsonaro, or UK Prime Minister Boris

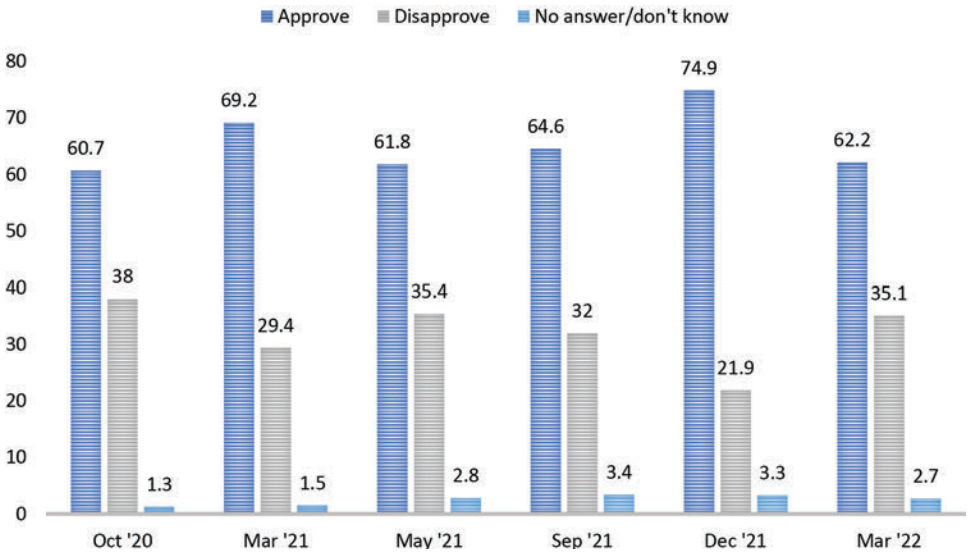

Fig. 11. Public Approval of Central Government's COVID-19 Management in Indonesia, 2020–2022 (in %)
(*Source:* Data from SMRC [2022].)

Johnson—lost office during or after the pandemic because their self-serving narratives did not stick with electorates, Jokowi emerged strengthened from the crisis. His approval rating reached heights that he had not seen in his first term. While dipping briefly to 59 percent during the Delta spike, it climbed up to 81 percent in July 2023. His predecessor, Yudhoyono, had lingered at around the 50 percent mark in his last year in office. Thus, Jokowi was at the zenith of his popularity and power after the pandemic, with few leaders in the international arena achieving similar poll numbers. Even during the pandemic, a majority of Indonesians consistently approved of the central government's COVID-19 management (see fig. 11). After the Delta variant had done its damage, and case numbers subsequently decreased, in late 2021, three-fourths of Indonesians gave Jokowi and his team a thumbs-up for their role during the disaster. This was a record high.

What explains Jokowi's ability to not only get through the pandemic with his popularity unharmed, but to convince most Indonesians that he had done, in his words, "one of the best" jobs in the world? Selective use of data and PR-style packaging of the facts played a role, albeit a minor one. In his speech cited above, Jokowi used a remark of the WHO director-general to him that praised Indonesia, at a specific moment in mid-2022, as "one of the countries with the best achievements in [the] vaccination

sector" (Sekretariat Kabinet 2022b). Jokowi then paraphrased this sentence as Adhanom certifying that Indonesia had one of the world's best overall COVID-19 records. Similarly, Johns Hopkins University had recognized that case numbers in Indonesia declined quickly in September 2021—after coming down from the Delta peak, when Jakarta reported the highest death toll in the world (Antara 2021).[37] In other words, Jokowi zoomed in on Indonesia's descent from the mountain without explaining how it had reached its highest pinnacle. In the economic realm, Indonesia witnessed slower economic decline in 2020 than many of its Southeast Asian peers (except Vietnam, which still grew). But Jokowi failed to mention that most of Indonesia's neighbors subsequently had better growth rates in 2022, as the pandemic ended. In 2022, Indonesia's growth of 5.3 percent was behind the rate of the Philippines (7.6 percent), Vietnam (8 percent), and Malaysia (8.7 percent). Cambodia was only one-tenth of a percent behind Indonesia. But as much as this biased use of data demonstrates how Jokowi viewed his own role, and how he wanted to be portrayed, it is only partly responsible for Indonesian society's massive affirmation of Jokowi's COVID-19 narrative.

Jokowi's undeniable achievements during the COVID-19 crisis are also part of the explanation. As noted, he was *not* the Indonesian equivalent of Trump or Bolsonaro, who were consistent deniers and obstructionists. Misguided by partisan interests and intellectual limitations, they hindered more effective approaches in their respective countries. Jokowi was of a different mold. Although he initially enabled Indonesia's denialism because he feared economic upheaval, he soon decided to break with those who downplayed the threat and promoted unscientific solutions. He became an avid mask wearer and strong believer in vaccines, throwing his full weight behind vaccine development and distribution. And despite his rejection of lockdowns, he allowed Luhut to use this instrument—albeit under a different name—after the Delta wave hit. Hence, unlike his American and Brazilian counterparts, he was prepared to learn from mistakes, although he rarely admitted to having made them. Despite leading to delays in executive action on slowing the spread of COVID-19, Jokowi's concern for the economy and the welfare of citizens also mitigated the risk of societal breakdown. He ordered a widespread social assistance program that helped to maintain order: in 2020, he allocated US$50 billion for this purpose and temporarily suspended budget deficit ceilings. On the international stage, Jokowi advocated for a more equal distribution of vaccines. Indeed, for a brief period, this theme inspired Jokowi's foreign affairs speeches and filled him with a passion that he normally lacked on such occasions. His speech at the World Health Sum-

mit in 2021, for instance, was one of the best of his career (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021a).

But while this record allowed Jokowi to avoid being seen as a member of the illustrious group of the world's most disastrous pandemic leaders, it hardly made him "one of the best." Even discounting other indicators, the high death toll alone is strong evidence against such an assessment. Consequently, we must look elsewhere to get a more complete picture of why Jokowi's COVID-19 management received such high marks in Indonesia. To do that, we must embed the COVID-19 episode within the broader context of Jokowi's control over Indonesian politics and society. As we noted in previous chapters, this control was based on a number of relationships, practices, and powers that Jokowi developed over time to cement the foundations of his regime. Among those were, for example, the president's close relationship with the owners of the country's media conglomerates; his oversight of the police and other security forces, with the authority to punish dissenters; and the inclusion of most parties in his government coalition, leaving few voices of opposition in Indonesia's formal political institutions. In combination, these factors put Jokowi not only at the apex of the political regime, but in a position to protect his COVID-19 narrative and narrow the space for questioning it. Let us unpack these arenas of control and their impact on how public opinion on COVID-19 was shaped and sustained in Indonesia.[38]

In regards to the media, Jokowi could rely on friendly coverage by outlets owned by his allies. While there was much reporting on the misery the pandemic caused, few mainstream journalists associated the calamity with government policy. Critical scrutiny of the state's COVID-19 actions, or lack thereof, was limited to a handful of outlets. These outlets, in turn, soon became the target of bullying. In August 2020, after publishing several critical articles on the government's handling of the pandemic, the website of news magazine *Tempo* was hacked and made inaccessible. Instead of *Tempo* coverage, users found a message that stated: "Stop the hoax, don't lie to the Indonesian people, return to true journalistic ethics" (Sutrisno 2020). On the same day of the *Tempo* hacking, seven articles, including two critical of the Indonesian intelligence agency's role in the pandemic response, disappeared from the website of *Tirto*, an alternative news channel. Concurrently, Pandu Riono had his Twitter account hacked. Abdul Manan, the chair of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI), had no doubt about the purpose of these attacks: "There is a very clear intention: [it] is part of an effort to reduce the media's critical attitude toward the government" (Lamb and Widianto 2020). In addition to this, armies of online influencers, or buzzers,

defended Jokowi's COVID-19 handling. One journalist commented that "we can only hope that the government, or the President himself, is not the one paying these influencers [. . .]. Some of them have even been invited to the State Palace by the President" (Hermawan 2020). He continued to warn: "So don't let the coronavirus infect you [. . .], and please don't let social media influencers or 'buzzers' infect and eventually kill our democracy."

The security forces also watched closely how COVID-19 was discussed in society. In early April 2020, the police issued a circular to its branches across the archipelago to prevent "hoaxes" about the government's COVID-19 policies and "insults" to the president and other officials. By the end of May, newspapers published lists of people who had been arrested or otherwise warned about their social media postings on the president's COVID-19 approach (Haryadi 2020). The police subsequently institutionalized its approach: in February 2021, it announced the establishment of a "virtual police" force that would "educate" internet users about their postings (Aida and Hardiyanto 2021). The police viewed this as a move to help citizens avoid criminalization—it said it would simply "warn" users of criminal sanctions if their actions continued. But the message received by society was that surveillance would be increased and critical postings discouraged. At the same time, police moved against Rizieq Shihab, the conservative Islamic cleric who—after Prabowo's entry into cabinet in 2019—was Indonesia's most prominent anti-government leader. When the pandemic hit, Rizieq had been in exile in Saudi Arabia. But he returned to Indonesia in November 2020, receiving an enthusiastic welcome from Jokowi critics. In December, Rizieq was arrested—ironically for violating the otherwise lax COVID-19 mobility restrictions and other pandemic rules. He was sentenced to four years in prison, and his group, FPI, was banned. In the blink of an eye, Jokowi's fiercest critic had been removed from the scene, strengthening the government's control over its narrative (Sya'rani 2021).

With the media and opinion flows in society kept in check, the function of monitoring Indonesia's COVID-19 response fell to formal political institutions, such as parliament. But with six out of nine legislative parties already sitting in government, and one other lobbying Jokowi to be included, there were few critical voices. During a meeting at the palace between Jokowi and the leaders of his coalition parties in August 2021 (at the height of the Delta spike), Prabowo told the president and other attendees that "we don't need to listen to the voices that want to confuse the situation. We are on the right track. Your leadership is effective. I acknowledge that and I express my appreciation to you. I saw, I witnessed, I participated in cabinet. [. . .]. So please, Sir, don't hesitate" (Hakim 2021). Echoing Prabowo, the other party leaders

delivered similar speeches. The palace recorded the statements and shared them on its social media channels. The message was clear: the political elites, including Jokowi's former foes, supported the president's COVID-19 policies. For their part, the two opposition parties—the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and Demokrat—were rather muted in their responses. Demokrat, for instance, was distracted by other issues. In March 2021, Jokowi's chief of staff, Moeldoko, had led an internal party coup against Demokrat's chairman, Agus Yudhoyono, the former president's son. The matter went to the courts. In this context, Agus carefully avoided alienating the government: in August 2021, he stated that the party "fully supported" the government's handling of the pandemic (Safitri 2021). Even Anies, Jokowi's main opponent in the early phase of the crisis, softened his stance because the constant fights with the president drained his energy and resources.

Thus, as much as Jokowi would have liked the high societal support for his COVID-19 response to be genuine, at least some of it was politically manufactured. With mainstream news coverage controlled by his allies, the police disincentivizing the expression of dissent, and the legislature co-opted, Jokowi enjoyed generous commentary, regardless of his specific policies. Interpreted within this frame, it is not surprising that far from making Jokowi weaker, the pandemic strengthened his position. It gave him a further pretext to tighten control and remove the last of his remaining adversaries. When the pandemic was officially over, by the end of 2022, he had taken the last step in his transformation from a political novice in his early years as president to the powerful Machiavellian leader Indonesians both feared and admired (Setijadi 2021).

From Crisis to Increased Power

Jokowi's handling of COVID-19 mirrored the main dimensions of his political character with striking precision (Fealy 2020b). When the pandemic hit, his first instinct—as in many other key decisions of his presidency—was to protect the economy. Arguments put to him that this pandemic threatened the very existence of life did not impress him, because in his view, a functioning economy was the precondition for life to exist. He was so convinced of the validity of his position that even talking to Xi Jinping about the rationale of lockdowns did not change his mind—in contrast to previous occasions, when he had followed the Chinese president's advice, such as on the importance of infrastructure. There was no major policy discussion inside the Indonesian government in which the president did not

demand that economic concerns guide his assistants in making decisions on COVID-19 management. Tellingly, whenever he did allow for adjustments, they were the result of him being told that economic rationales required them. Sadikin's pep talk in September 2020 convinced him that if he wanted to save the economy, he had to take the health factor more seriously—and get rid of those in government who tarnished Indonesia's reputation. Sadikin was a banker, and thus his advice carried more weight for Jokowi than that of other voices in the debate. Like his foreign policy advisers, Jokowi's COVID-19 aides learned that if they wanted to impress the importance of an issue on him, they had to package it in economic vocabulary—even when the death toll climbed to new heights. Luhut, knowing the president's leanings better than most, used the same technique to finally extract his approval for some limited lockdowns during the Delta spike.

Jokowi's pragmatism, which was key to his approaches to power management and foreign affairs, also drove him during the COVID-19 pandemic. He was not the type to spin conspiracy theories to mobilize his base in times of crisis, as some of his counterparts around the world did. To be sure, Jokowi tolerated Terawan's charlatanism for some time—when he believed that the pandemic would be over soon—but his matter-of-factness kicked in once he recognized that the virus was there to stay. During COVID-19, as in other decisive moments of his rule, Jokowi was at his best when he listened to experts—and at his worst when he didn't. His excessive belief in the primacy of the economy and his irritation about the interruption the pandemic had caused to his agenda led him to accept some bad advice, and the consequences of this tendency were serious. But ultimately, he could rely on his fundamental cool-headedness to moderate his own economy-first obsession and that of his presidential circle. This was a self-correcting mechanism that Trump and Bolsonaro did not have, and thus their COVID-19 outcomes were worse. Jokowi, while not the model COVID-19 manager he liked to be portrayed as, avoided their fate because his utilitarianism effectively recalibrated his other instincts at main junctures of the pandemic. The dismissal of Terawan and his appointment of Luhut as de facto COVID-19 commander-in-chief were testimony to his capacity to adjust.

In Indonesia's COVID-19 response, we also find Jokowi's ruthlessness and willingness to exploit a crisis for political gain. While we earlier noted his comfort with dispatching political allies and foes unscrupulously, this time he displayed a remarkable apathy toward the loss of life engulfing him. This ability to insulate himself from the impact of his decisions on the individual well-being of others made him more of a risk-taking president than most of his democratic predecessors. It also led him to identify, and

then strategically pursue, political opportunities inherent in the COVID-19 crisis. With his approval, the president's apparatus tightened sociopolitical controls in the name of better emergency management. This was a practice not unfamiliar in other countries (Croissant 2020; Ringe and Rennó 2023; Imran and Javed 2024), but Jokowi was more successful at it than most of his international peers. Without reducing his popularity, and without undermining the majority's perception that democracy was being upheld, he chipped away at freedom of expression and the right to political dissent. Displaying no hesitation, he had his main opponent locked up, under questionable charges. Most importantly, he used the narrowing space for opposition to promote a pandemic narrative that further cemented his popularity. In this narrative, his COVID-19 performance was the envy of the world. In short, while Jokowi initially had viewed COVID-19 as a distraction from his government agenda, it proved a useful instrument to push this agenda further. Ultimately, it even handed him an excuse to lobby for an extension of his term.

CHAPTER 6

"But You're the President, Right?"

Indonesian Democracy under Jokowi

Rocky Gerung was in great form. The academic and activist, widely known as Jokowi's most sharp-tongued critic, posted a video in August 2021 on his personal YouTube channel in which he joyfully ripped into the president. Gerung, a regular in seminars in Jakarta and across the country throughout the Jokowi presidency, described the state of democracy as "the worst" since the post-authoritarian transition had begun. He ridiculed the president's repeated insistence that he didn't mind being criticized by others: "We are all confused about what those in power want, they say that they are not offended by criticism, and yet they crack down on critical thinking" (Amelia 2021). Having warmed up, Gerung worked himself into his trademark hyperbole, saying that Jokowi headed a "failed" government and that "he was elected in 2014 only to erode democracy." Accusing Jokowi of persistently lying to the Indonesian people about the positive change he wanted to bring, Gerung eventually reached the climax of his tirade: "The change that the people want is a change in president, and the best way to [achieve that] is [for Jokowi] to step down." Satisfied with the power of his words, Gerung reclined and let the message sink in. It was performances like this that had earned him many an invitation to television interviews, consolidating his image as a fearless fighter against an increasingly authoritarian government. And for a long time, it seemed as if Jokowi's regime was happy for Gerung to attack it, as he could be cited as evidence that freedom of expression was still observed in Indonesia. There was also no evidence that Gerung's critiques damaged Jokowi's popularity.

But Gerung's luck ran out in late July 2023. After another foul-mouthed statement, in which Gerung called the president a "silly" and "cowardly bastard," at least twenty-six Jokowi supporters reported him to the police for "spreading lies" that "created uproar in society" (Detik 2023). Within two weeks, the police—normally not known for its speed in handling cases—had interviewed fifty "witnesses." In public, Jokowi seemed to be relaxed about the matter, saying it was a "small issue" and that he kept working as normal. But internally, it was a different story. The president was incensed. When I asked him about the case in August 2023, Jokowi first dutifully stated that "democracy needs to be dynamic."[1] His facial expressions and body language changed, however, when pushed further on whether he would ask his supporters to withdraw their complaints to the police, given his insistence that he was not offended. "I can't do that," Jokowi retorted, "because it is their democratic right to file a report. If I intervene, I will be seen as interfering with police work." Now leaning over to stress his point, he said: "Do you know how many supporters I have? Millions. And they feel insulted [by Gerung]." He further pointed out that he had reprimanded his son Gibran for announcing that he wished to speak to Gerung: "I said to him, 'why do you want to meet someone who has slandered me?'" The police eventually slowed down the prosecution but did not end it completely—a common and effective practice of the Jokowi government to deal with critics. This approach enabled the president to keep up the pressure against dissidents while upholding the image of a regime that was unbothered by their criticism.[2]

The Rocky Gerung case illustrated the president's selective understanding of democracy—and the way it shaped the polity under his rule. In this instance, Jokowi hid behind his supporters to justify Gerung's reporting to and investigation by the police, knowing well that his loyalists had taken action because they thought he expected them to. A word from him would have stopped the case, either through the withdrawal of reports or the police closing the books on it (the police chief at the time was Listyo, the president's former adjutant). But Jokowi, who we noted showed no scruples in regularly using law enforcement agencies to discipline political allies and foes, refused to issue the much-awaited instruction because this was, in his view, undue presidential interference. In reality, of course, Jokowi fully intended to send a warning to a critic who had irritated him for some time. Moreover, this warning was to be delivered not only through the police, but by "millions" of his supporters as well. This pattern—in which Jokowi defended his actions through references to democracy, even when those actions undermined it—dominated Jokowi's approach to other arenas of democracy as well. As a result, Rocky Gerung's view that Jokowi had eroded

democracy and brought it to its lowest point since Suharto's fall in 1998 was widely shared among liberal Indonesians.

This chapter, therefore, discusses Jokowi's complicated relationship with democracy and evaluates to what extent it influenced Indonesia's democratic pathway. The first section presents an overview of macro-level developments in the democratic arena during the Jokowi presidency, drawing primarily from international democracy indexes. In the second section, we explore Jokowi's view of democracy, which was strongly informed by his prioritization of development, a majoritarian understanding of the people's will, and assumed cultural limits to liberal norms. In this mix of ideas, he amalgamated—as indicated earlier—ideas he observed in China *and* the West. The third section assesses the Jokowi government's approach to human rights. It focuses on Jokowi's reluctance to deal with the legacy of the 1965 massacre of suspected communists, the treatment of Islamist activists, and freedom of expression. In the fourth section, we look at the fate of key democratic institutions under Jokowi: the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Constitutional Court (MK), and the Civil Service Commission (KASN). Among Jokowi's politico-democratic impacts, the weakening of these institutions was the most debilitating and enduring. The conclusion situates Jokowi as a routine tester of democracy's boundaries. Crossing some of them and staying away from others, he reduced Indonesia's democratic substance but retained enough of it for the country to be an average performer in democracy's worldwide theater. Crucially, it was Jokowi's habitual and exploratory pushing of the democratic envelope that later also allowed him to secure the election of his chosen successor.

Jokowi's Democracy: A Bird's-Eye View

In December 2023, the first televised presidential debate for the 2024 elections was held at the building of the General Elections Commission in Jakarta. In this debate, Anies Baswedan—Jokowi's nemesis and the candidate he wanted to prevent from winning—took aim at the president's democratic record. Amid audible displeasure among the supporters of Prabowo and Gibran—the pair supported by the president—Anies forensically laid out the problems Indonesian democracy was facing. "When we talk about democracy," Anies said, "minimally three things need to be present: first, there needs to be freedom of expression; second; the opposition must be a counterweight to the government; and third, there has to be

an electoral process that is neutral, transparent, honest, and fair" (Nugraheny and Krisiandi 2023). In all three areas, however, Anies found serious defects: "We witness how the freedom to talk has declined, including the [right] to criticise parties, and the score of our democracy has declined [in the indexes]" (Nugraheny and Krisiandi 2023). "Fact checkers" close to the president quickly insisted that Indonesia's democracy score in the government's in-house index—managed by the National Statistics Board—had in fact recorded an increase, peaking at an all-time high in 2022 (Taufani 2023). But these were not the indexes Anies was talking about: instead, he referred to international democracy indexes, many of which saw the quality of Indonesian democracy declining. Like Gerung, then, Anies believed that Indonesian democracy had hit rock-bottom under Jokowi, and he was certain that he had evidence to prove it.

Jokowi, for his part, felt the urge to respond to his adversary publicly. We noted earlier that this was unusual for him: the president only did so when a commentator hit a vulnerable spot. Jokowi's reaction to Faisal Basri's critique of the government's industrial down-streaming policies was one such rare instance in which Jokowi could not hold back. Similar to that occasion, Jokowi reacted to Anies with a lengthy defense: "It is clear that we never imposed any limitations [on freedom of expression]" (Nugraheny and Krisiandi 2023). As proof, Jokowi presented himself: "In the area of freedom of opinion, there are some who curse the president, are condescending towards the president, are badmouthing the president, all of that is normal" (Nugraheny and Krisiandi 2023). Ignoring the fact that some had been prosecuted, warned, or intimidated for doing exactly that (as in Gerung's case), Jokowi went on to observe that "in front of the palace, almost every week, almost every day there is something like that, and there hasn't been a problem." This was his line of defense both at home and abroad, including in the interviews conducted for this book. As for international democracy indexes, he clearly took note of them, but found that they overlooked his points. For him, the fact that people could still say or write things critical of the government disproved any notion of democratic decline under his watch.[3]

But what do the international democracy indexes actually tell us about the state of democracy under Jokowi? The first challenge in answering this question is to decide which indexes to look at. Over the last few years, many political scientists have prioritized the use of the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) indexes, given their methodological rigor and longitudinal data (Pelke and Croissant 2021; Skaaning 2020; Ehrhart, Lundåsen, and Lidén 2024). Therefore, let us explore V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index for Indonesia as the most comprehensive of the available international democracy

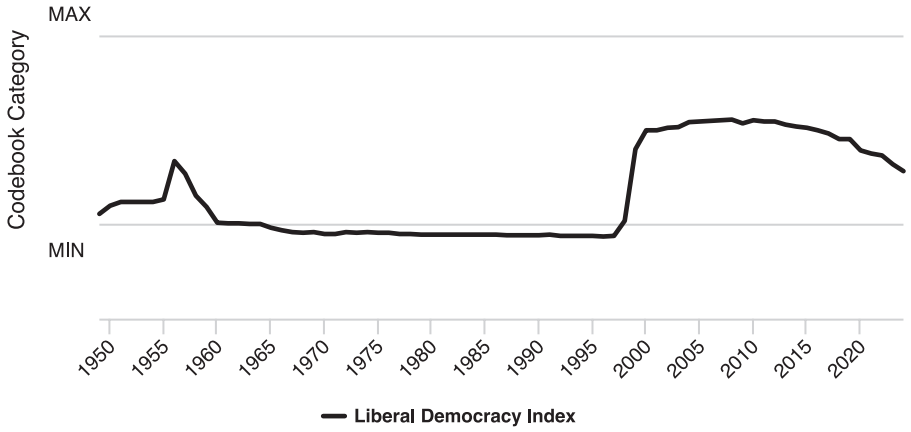

Fig. 12. V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index for Indonesia, 1949–2024
(Courtesy Varieties of Democracy, V-Dem data version 15, Highcharts.com.)

assessments. (To be sure, V-Dem also provides charts for "deliberative" or "electoral" democracy, but they do not display significantly different curves.) In choosing the assessment timeframe, it is important to take a long-term perspective: that is, Indonesian democracy under Jokowi should not just be compared to the period of his predecessor Yudhoyono, for instance, but also to previous episodes of democracy and autocracy in the country. Hence, the graph here (see fig. 12) shows the development of liberal democracy in Indonesia from the achievement of full sovereignty in 1949 to the late Jokowi period. It clearly highlights the long stretch of authoritarianism from 1959 to 1998, as well as the democratic phases both preceding and following it. In short, it allows us to put democracy under Jokowi into a historical context, beyond day-to-day political analysis.

Having chosen a methodologically reliable index and a historically robust timeframe, the next task is to interpret the resulting chart. This, unsurprisingly, is a matter of emphasis. On the one hand, there is no doubt that the quality of Indonesian democracy declined under Jokowi. This decline did not start with Jokowi, but it gained pace during his presidency. After democracy reached its substantive peak in about 2008 during Yudhoyono's first term, it descended slowly but, over time, noticeably. In the Jokowi period, this decline accelerated to a point where it returned to the quality levels from which democratization had started in 1998. On the other hand, it is also evident that its moderate and gradual decline notwithstanding, Indonesian democracy did not fully break down under Jokowi. It remained far above the standards of the authoritarian Sukarno and Suharto periods, and

even at its lowest point, it was still roughly on par with the climax of Indonesian democracy in the 1950s, namely the much-celebrated first elections of 1955 (Feith 1957). Thus, while it is warranted to lament the democratic backsliding under Jokowi, it is equally important to note that Indonesian democracy survived—however damaged—for another decade during his presidency, creating the longest stretch of democratic rule in the country's history. In 2023, Indonesia marked a quarter of a century as a formal electoral democracy—quite a feat for a nation that started its democratization project with so much historical baggage that some predicted its imminent failure. Indeed, a few authors even sounded the alarm bells about Indonesia's possible balkanization (Richburg 1998). Overall, therefore, the chart tells stories of democratic injuries but also of survival, and both narratives deserve the same attention.[4]

Another widely used democracy index, Freedom House's Freedom in the World, confirms this version of Indonesia's democratic narrative. After reaching a peak of 67 in its combined score of civil liberties and political rights in 2008, Indonesia began a slow descent in democratic quality. It reached 65 in 2010, 64 in 2014, 62 in 2019, and 57 in 2024. In 2013, just before Jokowi's presidency began, the country was downgraded from an overall status of "free" to "partly free." But at the same time, there are also signs of democratic survival in Freedom House's data: most significantly, there was no further status downgrade under the Jokowi presidency, indicating that Indonesia remained a functional democracy, albeit of diminishing quality. It did not join the ranks of other ASEAN states that were rated "not free," such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Brunei, Vietnam, and Cambodia. It also retained better scores than the hybrid regimes of Singapore and Malaysia, and was at the same level as the post-Duterte Philippines. Thus, Indonesia was not an underperformer in a region with a checkered history of democracy. In Freedom House's terms, Indonesia displayed both signs of democratic backsliding and stability, keeping it above the democratic waterline and out of the autocracy cluster that is so densely populated by Southeast Asian countries.

Academic literature, both within Indonesia and outside, also documented the country's democratic decline as well as its resilience. Starting from the late 2000s and early 2010s, political science scholarship on Indonesia shifted from recognizing the big leaps the nation had made since Suharto's resignation to noting signs of stagnation and regression (Tomsa 2010; Mietzner 2012; Hadiz 2017; Power and Warburton 2020). Observers focused on diverse fields of politics. To begin with, many authors discussed the phenomenon of rising religious conservatism in society, which slowed and eventually suffocated the acceptance of nonconformist lifestyles in post-

Suharto Indonesia (Sebastian, Hasyim, and Arifianto 2020). Other scholars emphasized how oligarchic forces increasingly monopolized the country's political institutions, including elections (Ford and Pepinsky 2014). Others again pinpointed examples of growing executive aggrandizement (Power 2020), while a further stream in the literature investigated the cartelization of presidential coalitions (Slater 2018). The weakening of the anticorruption commission—with Jokowi's consent—in 2019 marked a milestone in this academic discourse: even scholars previously inclined to give Jokowi the benefit of the doubt now came out with harsh criticisms of his actions and Indonesia's democratic decline more generally (Mujani and Liddle 2021). But amid the critiques, there were also frequent contributions that reminded us of Indonesia's continued democratic resilience despite the patterns of erosion (Slater 2023, 2024). Ken Setiawan (2022), for example, filled her 2022 review of Indonesian politics not only with proof of Indonesia's ongoing democratic weakening but also with cases of successful resistance against elite pressures and societal conservatism.

As far as ordinary Indonesians were concerned, they offered fluctuating but overall positive assessments of democracy under Jokowi. In a February 2024 survey, 71 percent of respondents gave a rating of "good" or "very good" to the way democracy was practiced at that time (Indikator 2024b, 16). Twenty-four percent gave an assessment of "medium" satisfaction, while only 6 percent stated that democracy was in "bad" or "very bad" shape. Significantly, this evaluation was given at a moment in which reports about the president's democracy-damaging interventions in the 2024 elections—more about that in chapter 7—could be found all across newspapers, television, and social media. Evidently, most Indonesians did not care much for such democratic minutiae. What they *did* care about became obvious in September 2021, just after the Delta spike during the COVID-19 pandemic. At that time, the outcome of a similar survey on satisfaction with democracy produced a different outcome: only 48 percent of respondents were satisfied, while 44 percent were dissatisfied (Andriansyah 2021). It is unlikely, however, that respondents wished to express an opinion on democratic decline; rather, they were temporarily dissatisfied with their situation in the Delta crisis, and if anything, asked for more decisive leadership. When Jokowi overcame the crisis, satisfaction with democracy returned to normal levels, and reached new heights as Jokowi approached the end of his rule. Apparently, whatever Jokowi did to democracy in his decade in power, it ultimately found popular approval.

Anies, then, was correct in his claim that democracy indexes had recorded a decline in Indonesian democracy's quality. That decline was sig-

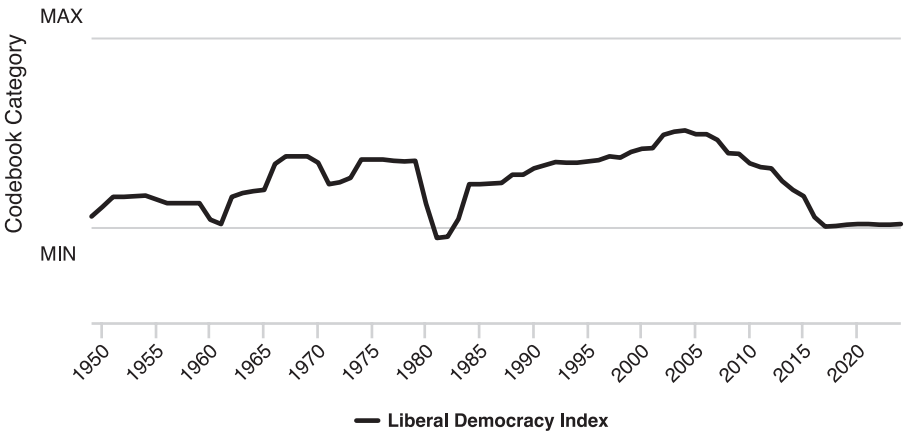

Fig. 13. V-Dem Liberal Democracy Index for Türkiye, 1949–2024
(Courtesy Varieties of Democracy, V-Dem data version 15, Highcharts.com.)

nificant, and was consistent across the indexes favored by political scientists. But there were two major caveats to this. First, as Anies found out at the ballot box, the vast majority of Indonesians did not share the indexes' views, and thus his criticism of Jokowi's treatment of democracy did not develop mass appeal. Second, even the indexes painted a nuanced picture: one of gradual decline but also of persistence. In order to fully grasp this nuance, it is useful to contrast Indonesia's case with sharper democratic falloffs elsewhere. There are many such cases, but it suffices here to concentrate on two countries of similar significance: Türkiye and India. Türkiye—like Indonesia a majority Muslim state and long suffering under military dominance—embarked on a new phase of democratization in the 1990s. But under Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the country slid—first slowly but then decisively—into autocracy (see fig. 13). From writing his own constitution to banning rival parties, Erdoğan used the full spectrum of autocratic measures to extend his hold on power (Whiting and Kaya 2021). India, the world's largest democracy, traveled a similar path under Rahendra Modi's leadership. Openly discriminating against the country's 170 million Muslims and obstructing the opposition, Modi entrenched himself in power in a way none of his predecessors could (Tudor 2023; Ganguly, Mistree, and Diamond 2024). Jokowi's Indonesia, by comparison, appeared like a polity in which autocratization trends were noticeably present but executed with less political determination and precision.

But as insightful as the bird-eye's perspectives offered by democracy indexes are, their value is limited. While they allow for comparative con-

textualization, they miss essential details and can mislead us into the indifferent shoulder-shrugging of whataboutism. Hence, the indexes can only be the start of our investigation into Jokowi's attitude toward, and practice of, democracy. As we shall see in the following sections, the closer one zooms in on Jokowi's democracy, the more its warts become visible, and the more the lived experiences of affected Indonesians during that time influence the overall assessment of how democratic quality fared under him.

"Polite" Democracy

Dressed in traditional Malukan attire, Jokowi delivered his annual Independence Day speech to Indonesia's legislators on August 16, 2023. Held as usual in the parliament's large plenary hall, this was the place where two years earlier the president had systematically circumvented references to the Delta spike's death toll. This time, Jokowi had a different agenda. Probably still infuriated by the Rocky Gerung case, he grumbled about the lack of politeness in Indonesian democracy: "What makes me really sad is that the culture of being polite and noble seems to be disappearing. Freedom and democracy are being used to spread malice and slander. This cultural pollution—I repeat: cultural pollution—is wounding the Indonesian culture of displaying a noble character" (Kompas 2023). But, Jokowi claimed, the majority of the people agreed with him: "The slander and cursing actually activate our joint conscience to unite and protect the morality in the public space." This unity, he continued, was necessary to "guard the mentality of the society so that we can still move forward in the transformation of the nation, toward an Advanced Indonesia, toward the Golden Indonesia in 2045" (Kompas 2023). In a few sentences, Jokowi had conveyed his understanding of democracy and of his place in it. Democracy, in his view, had to be polite, and in Indonesia's contemporary politics it no longer was; he, as the masterful reader of the public's wishes, understood that the people shared his complaints; and an impolite democracy threatened to obstruct Indonesia's progress in its quest to become a modern and industrialized society. Democracy, in other words, had to be domesticated to support Indonesia's development, and he felt that the people concurred.

Among the pillars of Jokowi's conceptualization of democracy, the conviction that it should facilitate economic growth was the strongest and most apparent (Warburton 2016). We already noted that Jokowi's prioritization of the economy was visible in other fields as well, such as foreign policy and the management of COVID-19. Neither was Jokowi's stance unique among

his peers in the developing world. Indeed, the idea that developing countries must place economic advancement above democratic niceties is widespread in Asia, Latin America, and Africa—as is the notion that the West insists so strongly on upholding democratic standards because it wants to slow down the progress of potential competitors from those regions. A key element of China's attraction to developing countries has been its open challenge to the West's call that, unlike in the latter's own industrialization almost two centuries ago, today's economic newcomers need to ensure that their rise conforms to democratic and environmental standards (Beeson and Pham 2012). Nevertheless, Jokowi's clear-cut views on the matter still stood out. "What is the point of democracy if it doesn't lead to prosperity?," Jokowi asked me in the first interview session for this book.[5] Thus, in his mind, democracy was merely one of the instruments to achieve the ultimate end goal of all human existence: that is, the economic well-being of the people. If democracy was supportive in this endeavor, then its contribution was welcome. But if it wasn't helpful, democracy and its associated processes needed to be adjusted to the needs of national development.

Many Indonesians hold a similar view. As noted, the fluctuation in Indonesians' satisfaction levels with democracy points to an understanding of democracy that is based more on pragmatic considerations than substantive concern for democratic rights and freedoms. Public opinion research has confirmed this pattern. One study (Aspinall et al. 2020, 514) found that most "citizens [view] democracy as a means of delivering social and economic benefits" rather than of democratic procedure and representation. For instance, in one battery of questions respondents were asked to identify which of the following statements best represented their feeling about democracy's most essential characteristic: first, "government ensures law and order"; second, the "media is free to criticize the things government does"; third, "government ensures job opportunities for all"; and fourth, "multiple parties compete fairly in the election." The result was unambiguous: 45 percent of respondents saw the government offering full employment as coming closest to their understanding of democracy; 22 percent endorsed the law and order option; 10 percent found competitive multiparty elections to be most important in democracy; and 8 percent prioritized a free media. Consequently, Indonesians' support for democracy is tied to its ability to deliver material welfare to them. If it doesn't—as in the brief period of the Delta spike—citizens are more than prepared to reconsider their endorsement of the way democracy is practiced. In this sense, the majority was on board with the view Jokowi espoused during his rule: democracy was only as good as the concrete benefits it delivered to the general populace.

Jokowi's awareness that his views on the developmental essence of democracy were in line with the Indonesian mainstream also consolidated the second pillar of his democratic paradigm: that is, the belief in majoritarianism. For him, democracy was simply what the majority wanted—and the conservative-but-moderate mainstream was its concrete embodiment. In this, his tendency to strip complicated matters to their bare bones again came to the fore. Rather than dealing with the intricacies of specific constitutional rights and limitations, Jokowi found it easiest to focus on the basic question of what the mainstream desired. The other attraction of this majoritarian proposition was that he could turn to a powerful yet straightforward instrument to assess the will of the people: that is, opinion surveys: "In my job, the most important thing is figuring out what the people want. And I find out what the people want by reading the polls."[6] From his early days as a mayor and governor, Jokowi was a passionate reader of polls. A visitor who saw him in 2013 found him with a pile of polling reports, with little else populating his desk. As president, his focus on polling intensified, developing it into an institutionalized branch of his advisory structure. While the pollsters he consulted were not officially employed by him or based at the palace, he drew from the country's best polling institutes that carried out commissioned surveys paid for by the president's allies. When key matters had to be decided, it was not rare for him to have consecutive meetings with four or five pollsters, and he would make a determination after having considered their input. For Jokowi, this was not only smart political strategizing—it was the core of democracy.

That politicians can be obsessed with polls is nothing unusual (Schumacher and Öhberg 2020). But for Jokowi, opinion surveys became the primary compass in determining what was democratically allowable and what wasn't. If a majority approved of or did not object to something, this made it acceptable in Jokowi's eyes. If, on the other hand, most voters were against a particular issue, this led the president to reconsider. The result of Jokowi's habitual reliance on the polls was mixed. On the one hand, it set him boundaries that he did not cross. For instance, when Luhut and Tito lobbied him to abolish direct elections for local executive heads, Jokowi told them off: "I said to them, 'haven't you seen the polls?' The people want direct elections. It would be crazy for us to touch this issue."[7] Similarly, when polls indicated that a majority was against a third term for him, he grudgingly accepted the verdict. But more often than not, he used the polls to test existing democratic boundaries. In many cases, the bar for him wasn't whether people enthusiastically approved of something—it was sufficient for him if they didn't care enough to have a principled stance on it, or if they felt that

they lacked knowledge to form an opinion. Such signs of indifference were all he needed to move ahead with a contentious plan. For instance, when Jokowi banned the Islamist group Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in 2017 because of its role in the anti-Purnama protests, he knew that 72 percent of Indonesians had never heard of the organization. Out of those who were aware of the group, only 11 percent liked it (Kumparan 2017). With most Indonesians unaware of HTI or disliking it, 78 percent agreed with its ban, allowing Jokowi to repress it without a backlash.

Years of experience with interpreting massive amounts of polling data nurtured an almost infallible instinct in Jokowi for what the average Indonesian voter desired. One of the convictions born out of this instinct was that Indonesia's liberal segment of voters was small and of limited use. To be sure, in the 2014 and 2019 elections, he courted this constituency because he knew that it despised his rival, Prabowo Subianto, and that anti-Prabowo votes would get him over the line in a tight race (Fukuoka and na Thalang 2014). But outside of election times, he mostly ignored pro-democracy activists and their agenda. For him, the average Indonesian voter was not urban, educated, and middle class—the kind of milieu in which liberal circles were rooted. Instead, the polls told Jokowi that the typical respondent in a survey was rural, suburban, or part of the urban poor, and of low to medium income and education. Their orientation was, as noted, primarily toward economic benefits and state assistance, not liberal-democratic values. Asked in 2014 who he thought was most decisive in delivering victory to him, Jokowi said: "The liberal segment was vocal but small. The most important contribution came from the villages and urban hamlets [*kampung*]."[8] Time and time again, Jokowi discovered that issues which Jakarta's intellectual elite thought to be of great concern were of little relevance to the median voter he targeted. As a result, he felt no need to advance a reformist democratic agenda, and could even afford to chip away at existing democratic rights. As his late-term approval rating of 80 percent indicated, voters confirmed his intuition.

The developmentalist and majoritarian pillars of Jokowi's democratic model were strengthened by a third, culturalist column. In the president's view, democratic norms were limited by religious and other social belief systems present in Indonesia or, more generally, the "East." Consciously or otherwise, the president's position on this drew from the Asian values debate of the 1990s, in which leaders such as Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad argued that Asian democracies could not be compared to those in the West because they were based on different values (Thompson 2001). While Jokowi lacked the rhetorical elegance of his Southeast Asian

colleagues, he expressed his conviction in this regard in no uncertain terms. In a 2016 interview with the BBC, Jokowi was asked about the rights of homosexuals in Indonesia. While he said that they had civil rights and the police should protect them, he added: "But Indonesian society has a culture, it has norms, and in Indonesia there is the general belief that [homosexuality] is not allowed, Islam doesn't allow it" (BBC Indonesia 2016). (In fact, the situation of the LGBTI minority worsened under his watch, with the police undertaking raids in 2017 that led many of its members to withdraw into the private sphere.) Similarly, when students at Yogyakarta's Gadjah Mada University—the president's alma mater—declared Jokowi their "most embarrassing alumnus" in December 2023, he again used a culturalist defense: "The democratic process allows this, but I also must remind [them] that we have an Eastern ethics of being polite" (Saputri 2023b). In Jokowi's world, then, democracy had to be well-mannered and pious, and eschew the robust debates considered normal in the West.

Jokowi's belief in "polite democracy" was eloquently reflected in his taste in the field of political humor. As president, he developed a passion for comedians, and he often invited them to palace functions. "Sometimes, we even brought them into his office for private sessions to relieve his stress," said Sukardi Rinakit, Jokowi's speechwriter.[9] But Jokowi only favored comedians who conformed to his understanding of "polite" democratic culture. In this culture, jokes needed to be nonconfrontational. The president found the stinging commentary that is the hallmark of Western political stand-up to be offensive. Hence, he frequently invited Cak Lontong, a middle-aged comedian from East Java, who was known for the simplicity and politeness of his jokes. At an event to commemorate National Batik Day in October 2023, Cak Lontong turned to Luhut, an ethnic Batak, and said: "Batik has a close connection with him because he is a Batak" (Astuti and Bahar 2023). The simpleminded wordplay left Jokowi and his entourage in stitches. Amrih Widodo, an expert in Javanese culture, remarked that "Jokowi's sense of humour is rooted in, and limited by, Javanese comedy, or *dagelan*. It can have modern twists but can't go beyond stand-up jokes in the form of meaningless language slapsticks."[10] Cak Lontong's performances, according to Amrih, fit Jokowi's expectations seamlessly. "He is very different from some other Indonesian comedians who see American stand-up as their model." Cak Lontong's humor, in "trying to please rather than to roast,"[11] was the perfect representation of what Jokowi saw as healthy democratic discourse: friendly in its tone, culturally suitable, and supportive of national economic development.

Our portrait of Jokowi's protracted relationship with democracy highlights that the democratic trials of his presidency were not just the product

of unsavory compromises he had to make with predatory elites. The image of a well-meaning president who had to get into the mud to get things done was systematically reproduced by his supporters (Prasodjo 2022), but it missed the true character of Jokowi's agency in key events of his presidency. As noted in previous chapters, he was a Machiavellian actor who knew what he wanted and how to get it. The above description of his belief in the developmentalist, majoritarian, and cultural ingredients of Indonesian democracy cements the positioning of Jokowi not only as a mediator in democracy's difficulties that unfolded in Indonesia in the mid-2010s to the mid-2020s, but as a driver of them. As we progressively zoom in on Jokowi's impact on contemporary Indonesian democracy in some of its subfields, his footprints become ever more visible and compelling.

Human Rights as Political Currency

Usman Hamid, Indonesia's preeminent human rights activist, never thought much of Jokowi. Asked to reflect on the president's decade in power, the director of Amnesty International's Indonesia branch recalled one of the first meetings he had with Jokowi. It was at a concert of the rock band Slank in December 2013, at which Jokowi—then still governor of Jakarta—was invited to address the crowd. Jokowi was already the front-runner in the presidential polls, and Slank had positioned itself as a supporter of the man who carefully cultivated his image as a lover of popular rock music. Backstage, Usman Hamid was introduced to Jokowi and given some time to address key human rights concerns with the would-be president while sitting down in a secluded area. "I briefed him on military issues, the still-unresolved murder of [prominent human rights lawyer] Munir a decade earlier, and other cases. I told him that the perpetrators of many human rights violations still sat in important positions of government, and that they needed to be removed," Usman recounted to me later.[12] "Jokowi nodded but didn't say anything." Usman then pushed him further: "If you become president, will you resolve the many past cases of human rights abuses that the state so far has been reluctant to touch?" Once more, Jokowi gave an unconvincing answer: "Yes, yes," he mumbled, before falling silent again. But when a woman joined the conversation and asked Jokowi about Jakarta's new buses, the governor came to life and explained to her with great passion the details of the purchase. "I knew then that he didn't have much interest at all in human rights issues," Usman concluded.

Jokowi, however, took a particular interest in Usman. Through intermediaries, he tried at several occasions to co-opt him into his team. During

the 2014 campaign, for instance, Usman was offered a chance to become the candidate's human rights spokesman. But when Usman learned that Hendropriyono—the chief of the National Intelligence Agency (BIN) at the time of Munir's murder and thus a controversial figure—would work on the campaign as well, he rejected the invitation. Once president, Jokowi continued to extend offers to Usman to join his government. Curious, Usman inquired what the job description of the position would be, but he was invariably told that he should "join first" and everything would become clear in due course. Usman did not take the bait and accepted the job of Amnesty International director instead. Even then, the palace continued to reach out to him. It appeared that although Jokowi had no intention of promoting a progressive rights agenda during his presidency, he wanted to be seen as doing so. In one meeting with Jokowi in which other activists participated, too, Usman criticized the president for having done nothing to resolve human rights cases. According to Usman, "Jokowi looked really agitated, insisted on answering me, and then proceeded to blame his ministers for the lack of progress."[13] For Usman, these interactions confirmed, rather than softened, his overall judgment of Jokowi: "He weakened all aspects of society—civil society, the media, freedom of expression, you name it." The fact that Usman preferred to use public transport because he felt that his enemies were less likely to attack him there added a striking nuance to his narrative of human rights activism under Jokowi.

Jokowi's expedient attitude toward human rights and civil liberties could be illustrated with numerous examples (Robet, Fitri, and Kabelen 2023), but let us focus on three that highlight its general pattern. The first is the Jokowi government's handling of the mass murders of 1965. The issue of whether the state should accept responsibility for the anticommunist massacres, and possibly issue an apology for them, had been around for a long time (McGregor and Setiawan 2019). But in an attempt to differentiate himself from his rival, Prabowo, Jokowi promised during the 2014 campaign to revisit the issue if elected. Thus, when he came to office, he had to deliver something, however limited in nature. He initially endorsed the idea of a seminar on 1965 to be held by the National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas), a think tank loosely affiliated with the department of defense. Its governor at the time, Agus Widjojo, was a retired military officer and the son of one of the generals killed by communists during the 1965 coup attempt. A reformist officer who believed in truth-and-reconciliation processes, Widjojo seemed well positioned to treat this topic with the necessary care. Luhut was also involved, giving the event further protection. But when the seminar was held in April 2016, the response by active and retired military leaders was devastating. Prominent retired officers held a counter-event in which they loudly warned

of a possible revival of communism in the country, and active generals made quiet but explicit representations to the president that the officer corps was unhappy. As Jokowi needed the military to consolidate power in this early period of his presidency, he withdrew his support from Widjojo's initiative.

The case of 1965 was, of course, about much more than closing a chapter in the nation's history books. It was a symbol of the continuing impunity of security and other state officials (Easton 2022). As such, it was a matter of power politics, and Jokowi embraced this when he effectively terminated the 2016 project. Having consolidated power in his first term, however, he decided to have another go in his second. This time, his coordinating minister for politics, law, and security, Mahfud MD, was in charge. In February 2020, Jokowi called him and asked: "What's the latest on the old human rights cases?"[14] Mahfud MD, a constitutional law professor, explained to him that the 1965 case and other allegations of human rights abuses were formally difficult to prove and thus likely to fail in court. Mahfud recalled that "Jokowi first told me that we should bring them to court anyway as it didn't matter whether they led to convictions or not; the important thing was to show that we were serious."[15] But Mahfud then convinced the president to try a nonjudicial resolution by establishing a team to consider the cases. Jokowi agreed, and Mahfud set up the team—which included archconservative retired officers and members of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Indonesia's largest Muslim group. NU had also been involved in the 1965 killings and hence opposed an apology. "In the team meetings, the bottom line was that the military and NU didn't want to use the term 'apology,' and we had to accept that," Mahfud asserted.[16] Consequently, in January 2023, Jokowi followed up on the team's recommendations with a statement in which he only "recognised" and "regretted" that human rights violations had taken place in 1965 and eleven other cases. No apology was issued.

To be sure, some activists considered Jokowi's declaration a useful albeit insufficient step. But others were much more critical. Mahfud, whose job it was to explain the government's new stance on past rights abuses to exiled Indonesians in Europe and convince some of them to return home, observed the anger firsthand. Sri Budiarti, a woman who had been in Germany since 1963 because she was considered a communist sympathizer, told Mahfud during his visit in August 2023: "Jokowi says 'we recognise, we regret, we try to fix, we try to prevent.' What, Sir? What is it that we recognise? What is it that we regret? What is it that we want to fix? What is it that we try to prevent?" (CNN Indonesia 2023c). Indeed, Jokowi's "recognition" had only vaguely referred to the 1965 "events," without mentioning what that event was and who the perpetrators were. "Without revealing the truth, we cannot

move forward," Budiarti told a tight-lipped Mahfud, who had little success in securing returns of exiles to Indonesia. Usman Hamid also thought that the outcome of the process was a typical example of Jokowi compromising with powerful perpetrators for political reasons, while wanting to be seen as progressive. Mahfud had early on asked Usman—at Jokowi's insistence—to join the team, but when Usman wanted to see a draft of the order that set it up, Mahfud stalled.[17] Eventually, Usman declined. He wasn't the only one. Mahfud conceded that others, too, refused to be on the team because "there were members of perpetrating groups on it."[18]

This chapter's second case study of Jokowi's complex entanglement with human rights relates to his treatment of Islamists. In this field, we see Jokowi not as the reluctant arbiter of past human rights violations, but as a behind-the-scenes orchestrator. As noted, he did not lose sleep over using the coercive instruments of the state to discipline elites and society. In most cases, his apparatus targeted a few specifically selected critics to silence them or extract cooperation. However, once Jokowi identified a whole group as a threat to his regime, he had it systematically pursued. In no other instance was this more obvious than in the case of politically organized Islamists who had challenged him in the anti-Purnama demonstrations of 2016 (Nuraniyah 2020). As noted, two Islamist groups—FPI and HTI—were banned, and some of their leaders imprisoned. These included Munarman, the secretary-general of FPI, who was sentenced to three years in jail for questionable "terrorism" charges. Ahmad Dhani, a rock singer close to Islamists, was imprisoned for a tweet that called Purnama supporters "bastards." But the most severe punishment was dished out to the movement's leader, Rizieq, who—as mentioned—was incarcerated for breaching COVID-19 rules. When he was arrested in December 2020, police killed six of his bodyguards during a car chase. Indonesia's Human Rights Commission found that the deaths of at least four of the six constituted unlawful killings and recommended a trial. In that trial, the police shooters were acquitted, despite the fact that even the state's prosecutors had demanded a mild sentence. Rizieq himself was released on strict parole conditions in 2022, which ensured that he moderated his rhetoric.

The intimidation of Islamists did not only affect its leaders, however. The criminalization of top leaders was part of a much larger campaign to remove persons suspected of holding Islamist views from key positions in state and society. Greg Fealy (2020a) wrote at the height of this anti-Islamist campaign that "public servants, academics, and teachers whom state security agencies deem to be active in suspect Islamist groups [are] put on 'watch lists' and warned by their supervisors that their religious or political activities are

unacceptable." Furthermore, "similar processes are occurring in state-owned enterprises and private corporations, [while] ministries have introduced vetting for recruits to screen out those holding Islamist views." Fealy (2020b, 312) further argued that these systematic measures added up to "a serious human rights issue, with probably many thousands of Islamists in the public and private sectors subject to discrimination on the basis of their [. . .] views." Jokowi, however, was unfazed by such accusations. From his perspective, he wasn't damaging democracy, but protecting it from its real enemies. As far as he was concerned, Islamists threatened to undermine democracy and pluralism, and therefore needed to be dealt with harshly.[19] But while he could count on the support of some civil society groups who shared his concern over Islamism, there was no doubt that his effort "netted" numerous individuals whose views could not be categorized as "radical." Instead, they simply were religiously conservative or opposed the government for other reasons. For Jokowi, this didn't matter: using a broad-brush approach stabilized his rule, with individual rights violations merely a tolerable side effect.

In our third case study of Jokowi in the human rights arena, let us look at how his actions against his chief critics fed into a broader system of controlling freedom of speech. In line with Jokowi's concept of a "polite democracy," offensive criticism of state officials, and the president in particular, was discouraged (Setiawan 2020). With social media as the main venue of such criticism, the most-used instrument against dissenters was the 2008 Law on Information and Electronic Transactions.[20] This law made it possible to criminalize any citizen for "slanderous" remarks made online. Under Jokowi, its usage increased significantly. In Yudhoyono's second term (2009–2014), there had only been 74 cases (Hamid 2019); in Jokowi's first period (2014–2019), this number increased to 233, with 82 of them directly related to alleged insults of the president (several Jokowi critics were charged just prior to the 2019 election). In addition, we already pointed to agencies such as the police team to detect critics of the government's COVID-19 policies, which reprimanded or otherwise threatened people who posted critical or offensive statements online. Practices such as these stifled the general willingness of citizens to openly express their view of state authorities. In a September 2020 opinion survey, 70 percent of respondents agreed that citizens were "increasingly" afraid of stating their opinion (Nurita 2020). Even after the pandemic had ended, this number did not decline much. In a 2022 poll, 62 percent of respondents still confessed to being increasingly fearful of voicing their views. Remarkably, this included a majority of the president's supporters.

One especially sensitive freedom of expression case involved a member

of the presidential campaign team of Ganjar Pranowo, the 2024 presidential candidate of PDI-P. Once it was clear that Jokowi did not support Ganjar and instead threw his weight behind Prabowo and his own son Gibran, Ganjar assumed the role of an opponent to the president. In late 2023, Ganjar's official spokesperson, Aiman Witjaksono, opined that the police were not neutral in the election race. This was not a unique view—indeed, the newsmagazine *Tempo* delivered almost weekly reports on how the police helped to mobilize support for the president's pick (Tempo 2023b). In Witjaksono's case, however, the police went all out to prosecute him. In a pattern of investigation that reflected the way the Rocky Gerung case had unfolded, the police responded to a complaint by Jokowi supporters, and within weeks had interviewed thirty-six witnesses. In the following months, the police repeatedly interrogated Witjaksono (in one instance, for twelve hours), his mobile phone was seized, and his arrest seemed imminent. Acting against Witjaksono achieved two things: first, it sent a warning to the rest of society that accusing the security forces of partisanship in the elections would not be tolerated. In this sense, Witjaksono was only a test case that aimed, like others before him, to deter further dissent. The second impact related more specifically to the functionality of Ganjar's campaign: for months, dozens of his team's lawyers were busy with the case, slowing down its operations. Ultimately, the case ended when the Constitutional Court annulled the article on which it was based. But for Jokowi, this was no longer relevant: Prabowo had already won.

In Jokowi's world, then, human rights were largely a political currency that could be utilized depending on the political settings that the president confronted. In its most benign context, Jokowi wanted to be perceived as advocating for human rights, when in reality he had little interest in investing political capital in it. The president's remark to Mahfud that creating the impression of activity was more important than achieving results perfectly encapsulated Jokowi's views on the matter. In another, more challenging setting, he recognized the opportunity of using human rights vocabulary against his adversaries: while systematically marginalizing Islamist leaders and citizens from influential posts—and violating individual rights in the process—he claimed to do so in the name of defending democracy. In this case, he hijacked the rights discourse for his own political purposes, and as polls showed, the vast majority of the population approved. And even when he curtailed freedom of expression more broadly, and used the umbrella of a "polite democracy" to justify such limitations, he got away with it. While about two-thirds of Indonesians felt that their freedom of expression was

declining under Jokowi, they still gave him positive marks on the implementation of democracy. As in many other instances of his presidency, he had turned a potential liability—on this occasion, his vulnerability on human rights issues—into an instrument for consolidating power.

Domesticating Democratic Institutions

In September 2019, tens of thousands of students left their campuses to organize protest marches across Indonesia. Over time, they expressed an ever-growing list of grievances, but the initial trigger of their outrage was an abrupt change to the law on Indonesia's anticorruption commission. After years of lobbying, party elites succeeded in convincing President Jokowi to endorse a wide range of revisions to the existing law, which in 2003 had established one of the strongest anticorruption bodies in the developing world, the KPK (Schütte 2012). Annoyed by the KPK's subsequent arrests of legislators, local executive leaders, and bureaucrats, elites wanted the authority of the agency curtailed. For much of his first term, Jokowi dragged his feet on the issue, but after his reelection in July 2019, he agreed without much hesitation at all. The amendments, rushed through parliament to avoid broader debates, turned the commission from an independent agency into a central government body. Further, they established an external oversight team that had to sign off on requests to wiretap suspects, and redefined the commission's priority from its earlier focus on law enforcement to one of corruption prevention. Parallel to the revisions, a former police general with a checkered history was appointed the commission's chair, confirming in the eyes of many—including the students—that the once fiercely autonomous agency was now under the control of the political elite. The protests against this move built up to the largest student demonstrations since Suharto's fall in 1998. One student activist of the 1998 anti-Suharto protests felt so inspired by the new movement that she published a widely read article headlined "Continue the Fight!" (Savirani 2019).

But Jokowi managed to overcome the students' challenge through a mixture of political gaslighting and coercion (Mudhoffir 2022). In late September 2019, at the height of the protests, he invited numerous civil society activists to the palace to discuss the law revision and other issues. In the meeting, senior civil society leaders pleaded with him to use an emergency decree to overturn the new law. Jokowi promised to consider the proposal, taking some steam out of the student movement. He also announced that other contro-

versial law revisions—including one on the criminal code, which included new regulations on public morals—were put on hold. But as it turned out, Jokowi made these concessions primarily to buy himself time. Behind the scenes, his apparatus began to develop a coercive strategy to stop the protests. Jokowi instructed his minister of higher education to "sanction" university rectors and lecturers whose students participated in the protests; the minister of education was asked to do the same for high schools and their students; and the police used increasingly brutal measures, with two students being killed during protests in Kendari on Sulawesi. Many of the students' parents, concerned that their children might lose scholarships, get expelled from campus, or suffer injuries during the protests, called on their offspring to cease the demonstrations. Once the protests had died down, Jokowi informed the public in early November that he would not issue an emergency decree to annul the law. His strategy had worked: while society was still wondering whether Jokowi would side with the protesters, his aides ended the demonstrations and therefore allowed the president to move on.

The events surrounding the 2019 student movement showcased the president's will to domesticate democratic institutions that he had promised to protect at earlier stages of his career. Arguably, this weakening of key agencies in Indonesia's democratic infrastructure is the most damaging of Jokowi's political legacies. In typical fashion, Jokowi did not destroy these bodies—with one exception—but he tamed and used them to his benefit. In the case of the anticorruption commission, he had begun his presidential bid with pledges to not only preserve it, but to upgrade its role in Indonesian politics. Indeed, in the 2014 campaign, Jokowi initially intended to appoint Abraham Samad, the then-chair of the KPK, as his running mate. According to Samad, "I was offered the post several times by his aides, and once directly by him."[21] But at midnight before the pair's planned registration on May 19, 2014, Samad received a call telling him that the deal was off. After his victory, Jokowi apologized to him, and offered a cabinet post. However, Samad let Jokowi know that he preferred to serve out his term at the helm of the commission until late 2015, and join the cabinet then. The president-elect agreed, promising Samad, "I'll wait for you."[22] As Jokowi took office in October 2014, Jokowi's honeymoon with the anticorruption body continued at first. He asked the agency to screen his list of cabinet nominees, and when it subsequently marked a number of candidates with a red color as unappointable, he went along with the KPK's recommendation. Abraham was impressed: "He was the media's darling, and he seemed honest and humble. He also said all the right things about anticorruption."[23]

But Jokowi's enthusiasm for the anticorruption body evaporated rapidly, and so did Samad's sympathy for the president. The body's decision early in Jokowi's presidency to declare senior police leader Budi Gunawan a corruption suspect marked the beginning of an ever-growing rift between the KPK and the palace. In meetings on the issue, Samad could sense the president's irritation: "He kept asking: 'where is the evidence?,' although we showed him everything."[24] When the police retaliated against the commission—it prosecuted Samad and his deputy over unrelated cases—the president only offered a weak defense: he asked the police not to arrest the two men, but suspended them until their terms expired. Once Samad was no longer with the agency, Jokowi did not appoint him to the cabinet, either: "Instead, he handed ministries to people we had earlier marked with red warning signals."[25] Subsequently, Jokowi's aversion to the KPK intensified. As early as mid-2015, he warned—through Luhut—that arrests of too many officials would make them risk-averse and thus slow down infrastructure development.[26] In essence, Jokowi wanted anticorruption authorities to go easy on bureaucrats in charge of implementing his development agenda. In 2017, the president had a fresh run-in with another chairman of the commission: Agus Rahardjo later leaked that Jokowi "angrily" asked him to stop a case against Setya Novanto, the speaker of parliament. Rahardjo refused. After this incident, Jokowi's mind was made up: he would no longer resist other elements in the elite to emasculate the agency. The 2019 revisions were, in Samad's words, "just the climax of a campaign against us that developed over a long period."[27]

Another major democratic institution that weakened under Jokowi was the General Elections Commission (KPU). For much of the post-1998 period, the KPU had been praised for overseeing free, fair, and competitive elections in a complex environment (Butt and Siregar 2021). But when the names of the seven new commissioners who would manage the 2024 elections were announced in 2022, experts expressed severe doubts about their competence and nonpartisanship. The candidates were first selected by the president's team and subsequently appointed by the legislature. As in the case of the anticorruption commission, it seemed, Jokowi and the parliamentary elite had collaborated to produce an outcome that served their joint interests. The new commissioners were pushovers at best and willing elite proxies at worst. Titi Anggraini, the country's most respected elections expert, commented that "this KPU is Jokowi's legacy in damaging democracy. [The commissioners] are not qualified to hold elections—they are held hostage by political interests."[28] Jokowi further contributed to the weaken-

ing of the KPU by withholding its budget until the last minute. The president, who at that time was suspected of still holding hopes for a term extension, only agreed to provide funds for the 2024 elections in May 2022—one month before the commission had to begin its preparations. During the elections, the KPU chair was found to have violated ethics rules four times by the agency's supervisory body, including for ignoring existing rules in the interests of parties and the president.[29] Unsurprisingly, then, the elections were widely considered the least professional, and least democratic, since Suharto's fall (Jaffrey and Warburton 2024).

The Constitutional Court (MK) also suffered a decline in its democratic credibility during Jokowi's rule. To be sure, not all of this decline was due to the president's actions. The court, which had gained a progressive reputation through a series of pro-democracy decisions in the mid and late 2000s, saw a gradual influx of more conservative judges beginning in the early 2010s (Butt 2015). Out of the nine judges, the president appoints three, with parliament and the Supreme Court picking three each as well. Thus, the court's eroding democratic image was due to the role of other nominating institutions as much as the president's. But Jokowi made the situation worse when he presided over the wedding of his sister Idayati with the MK's chief justice, Anwar Usman, in May 2022. Critics of the move at the time lamented potential repercussions for the separation of powers, but Jokowi brushed them aside. Anwar, too, dismissed any conflict of interest concerns: "Some accuse me of marrying [Idayati] for political reasons. [. . .] What for? Jokowi can't participate in the 2024 elections anymore because he has completed his two terms" (CNN Indonesia 2022). But what the skeptics had warned of became reality in October 2023: in that month, Anwar cast the deciding vote in a court decision that allowed Jokowi's son Gibran to run in the elections, despite the constitution requiring candidates to be at least forty years old (Gibran was thirty-six). By all accounts, Anwar not only violated conflict of interest regulations that barred judges from voting on cases involving relatives, he also convinced two other judges to change their votes. Anwar was later removed as chief justice over the ethics breach, but the verdict stood and the damage to the court had already been done.

In one case, Jokowi not only damaged an institution crucial to democratic reform, he abolished it: the Civil Service Commission (KASN). The agency had been created under his predecessor Yudhoyono in 2014 to oversee the implementation of civil service rules in national and local bureaucracies (Barus 2022). It was an open secret that the illicit "sale" of civil service positions served as a source of patronage and fundraising for local politi-

cians. Hence, the KASN was tasked with handling complaints by civil servants who faced financial or other irregular demands from their superiors, or who were reshuffled in contravention of existing rules. Nuraida Mokhsen, a KASN commissioner between 2014 and 2019, recalled that governors and other local executive heads had from the beginning lobbied Jokowi to kill the agency: "They told him that without the power to direct and freely shift their bureaucrats around, they could not guarantee the president's re-election in 2019."[30] At that time, Jokowi replied that he would like to see first how the body would operate. Indeed, as governor of Jakarta, he had been in favor of more transparent civil service selection processes, and he therefore felt that abolishing the KASN would be inconsistent with his previous stance. The longer he served as president, however, the more he concluded that the KASN—by ordering local government heads to refrain from reshuffles or to overturn them—unduly interfered with executive authority. In Jokowi's second term, local elites once again told the president that they would find it hard to mobilize resources and support for him (and themselves) if the KASN continued its disruptive behavior. Finally, in October 2023, he agreed with parliament to disband it.

In Jokowi's mind, he carried little responsibility for the harm to Indonesia's democratic institutions under his rule. In some cases, he simply denied that such harm occurred—for instance, he defended the revisions to the KPK law as necessary corrections.[31] In other cases, he shifted the blame to the political parties and parliament. In conversations with his chief political minister, Mahfud MD, Jokowi often professed lack of influence, complaining that "I don't have a political party, so what can I do?"[32] On the one hand, it is true that Jokowi was not solely responsible for the weakening of democratic agencies under his watch. Other segments of the political elite demanded concessions from the president for their continued support, and Jokowi felt that he needed to grant them to hold his coalition together. On the other hand, we noted how strong and determined Jokowi was vis-à-vis his coalition partners in matters that were essential to him, and that political party leaders feared his legendary retributions. The fact that Jokowi did not use his immense authority to protect democratic institutions suggests that they were not important enough for him to spend political capital on, and that his own views on the need for a "polite" democracy drove him to participate in their systematic domestication. Said Mahfud, "he improved infrastructure, for sure, but the conditions in the political and legal realm worsened under him."[33] And when Jokowi insisted again on one occasion that there was little he could do about that, Mahfud—according to him—replied dryly: "But you are the president, right?"

Pushing the Democratic Envelope

What, then, is Jokowi's democratic legacy? We recognized that a comparative bird's-eye perspective is more lenient toward Jokowi than closer analyses of his political thinking and actions. Embedded in a global context, Jokowi's presidency resulted in a gradual decline in democratic quality that was broadly in line with the patterns of democracy's worldwide recession (Diamond 2022). In 2024, the last year of Jokowi's rule, Freedom House recorded the 18th consecutive year of a net loss in democratic substance: that is, the number of countries that saw an erosion in political rights and civil liberties in the preceding year exceeded the number that witnessed an increase. Jokowi's Indonesia, in that sense, was simply a trend follower. In Southeast Asia's harsh political landscape, Indonesia was even one of the few low-quality democracies still standing. Thus, Indonesian democracy's survival is as much the story of Jokowi's time in office as is its slow but significant loss of quality and robustness. In the former part of this narrative, we see Jokowi's reluctance to mortally wound democracy—a hesitancy many of his peers in other struggling democracies did not display. In the less flattering aspect of the story, however, we also see the president's determination to curtail the notorious briskness of Indonesian democracy. He wanted a democracy that was benign in its criticism of power holders, supportive of the state's development agenda, and understanding of the difficulties of governance. In such a democracy, some dynamism was good for business, but too much was a nuisance. After a decade in power, he had roughly the kind of controlled democracy he wanted.

In trying to achieve his aims, Jokowi was a systematic pusher of the democratic envelope. He constantly tested how far he could go with his democracy-domesticating initiatives without losing support in the populace or in those segments of the elite that were crucial to his regime. In many cases, he could count on the developmentalist understanding of democracy in much of the electorate as well as on the elite's own interest in curtailing democratic scrutiny. Indeed, Jokowi often not only collaborated with, but responded to, the elite and its demands for greater limitations on democracy's drive for transparency and accountability. However, as much as he pushed boundaries, he also accepted that there were some he could not cross. In defining such unpassable borders, his majoritarian thinking provided a blunt but powerful guide. He believed that it was the people, speaking through polls, who set the boundaries that any rational politician keen on winning elections should respect. One of these boundaries, as we noted, was

the format of direct executive elections, both at the local and national level. He ignored, and actively spoke out against, numerous initiatives to review the system of elections during his presidency. He rejected other demands for democratic dismantling, too. Some of them came from Luhut. "I proposed to the president that he should issue an emergency decree that would allow him to appoint the chief justice of the Supreme Court," Luhut proudly proclaimed.[34] Oblivious to the implications of such a move for the separation of powers, Luhut thought it would be a great measure to streamline state effectiveness. Asked about Luhut's request, Jokowi laughed dismissively and said: "That's just Luhut."[35]

When designing operations in the democratic arena, Jokowi calibrated their scope and intensity based on his assessment of their utility and impact on his power base and societal support. In the arena of freedom of expression, for example, the president allowed law enforcement agencies to pursue selected dissidents so that the rest of the population would be more careful in criticizing him and other state authorities. But he did not take more systematic steps toward establishing a surveillance state such as is common in autocracies—Indonesia's social media sphere remained a chaotic universe in which rich and poor vented their anger about a myriad of topics. This put Jokowi in a position to claim noninterference in the democratic discourse while still ensuring that some of his critics got punished as a warning. Similarly, he ordered limited action to be taken on resolving past human rights abuses—only to be *seen* as doing something in this field—while not touching the vested interests of the military and other key societal forces involved in the incriminated events. Significantly, he added his own human rights violations with the same sense of strategic calibration. He prosecuted Islamists for their beliefs and their opposition to him, but could do so in the knowledge that many in the population supported his actions—in this instance, activists for religious pluralism, and moderate Muslim groups. In other cases, he advanced his ambitions after ascertaining that a majority in the population did not know or did not care about the issue concerned. In regard to the weakening of the KPK, for example, he moved ahead after learning that many people did not understand what exactly was being proposed, or agreed with it.[36]

For many of his critics—and for some of his allies, too—Jokowi's biggest gamble with Indonesian democracy was the way he arranged his succession. We touched on aspects of this in this chapter, but the magnitude of the events surrounding Jokowi's search for a suitable heir necessitates a separate discussion. While we confirm in the following chapter that no other of Jokowi's actions pushed Indonesian democracy so ruthlessly to the brink

as his succession maneuvers, we will again discover familiar patterns of balancing norm violations with partial withdrawals if a boundary proved too solid to cross. Once more, this formula was successful: he got an acceptable outcome for himself while maintaining his high popularity and public satisfaction with democracy. But how the end result of his operation—that is, a Prabowo presidency—will impact Indonesian democracy and Jokowi's own standing in it, is far less certain. By putting Prabowo into the palace, Jokowi left the fate of Indonesia's post-authoritarian project in the hands of a man whose commitment to it was even more expedient than his own.

CHAPTER 7

"Only a Fool Insults a Javanese King"

Jokowi's Game of Succession

On October 14, 2023, Jokowi was in a dark mood. Unlike at the other occasions of our regular interviews in the previous months, he seemed tense. It was a Saturday morning, when there are typically few staff at Jakarta's Merdeka Palace, and we sat down at the long cabinet table that I knew from numerous television broadcasts. He impatiently pointed at his watch, signaling that he wanted to get straight into the interview. Jokowi's intensity was hardly surprising. The president knew that the decisive months of his attempts to engineer a satisfactory succession lay ahead of him. In two days, Indonesia's Constitutional Court would decide whether his son Gibran, formally too young to run for the vice presidency, would be allowed to stand nevertheless. The newspapers speculated that Jokowi had quietly asked the court's chief justice, his brother-in-law, to clear Gibran's path (Tempo 2023a). Despite the president's public protestations that he had no stake in the ruling, he was unmistakably anxious about what the backlash to a decision in his son's favor would look like. As was his routine in such cases, he would rely on his pollsters to figure out what to do. If the public's response to a possible Gibran nomination was soft or positive, he had the option of pairing his son with his chosen successor, Prabowo Subianto. But even in this scenario, he still had to throw his full weight behind their campaign to secure their victory. Thus, the president's mind clearly swirled around these uncertainties as we began our conversation, and the massive Javanese shadow-play wood carving that stood behind his back accentuated the seriousness of the situation.

It didn't take long for Jokowi to offer remarks on his son's possible nomination. "My son can be difficult at times. Even if I were to tell him not to do something, there is no guarantee that he would follow my advice," the president said.[1] There was no doubt in my mind about what these words meant: barring a major public outcry, the president was bent on proceeding with Gibran's nomination, and he was already working on a narrative to conceal his authorship of this move. His son was an autonomous political figure, so the story would go, and Jokowi had nothing to do with his career planning. The difference between this storyline and his earlier comments to me on the issue couldn't have been starker. In August 2023, just two months earlier, he had told me that "Prabowo asked four times already whether I would endorse Gibran as his running mate. I said 'no, no, no.'"[2] He had made similar statements publicly, at one point emphasizing that Gibran was only mayor of Solo for two years and hence lacked experience to run for the vice-presidency (Nugraheny and Asril 2023). Now, by contrast, Gibran was portrayed as his own man unwilling to listen to the directives of his father. On the Monday after our interview, the Constitutional Court confirmed that Gibran could run—as noted, through a heavy-handed intervention by the president's relative. In the subsequent days, Jokowi's pollsters removed any remaining doubts from his mind: they told him that the ruling had no negative impact on Prabowo's and Gibran's electability. In fact, their numbers even rose. Relieved, Jokowi gave the green light to the official announcement of the pair a week later.[3] A year after that, they were inaugurated as Indonesia's new president and vice president.

The nomination of Prabowo and Gibran in October 2023 brought Jokowi's long search for an acceptable successor to an end (Gammon 2023b). This search had seen him flirting with the idea of extending his own term in office; seeking an arrangement with his political party; and then finally settling on a team consisting of his former rival and his son. In all these operations, Jokowi's signature traits were on full display: his Machiavellian instinct to explore the best option for his own interests, and then implement the plan emerging from this process ruthlessly; his belief that Indonesia's need for socioeconomic development and his continued political influence were inseparably intertwined; and his subordination of democratic concerns to the protection of his legacy, especially in the field of infrastructure building and industrial down-streaming. These predispositions and considerations led him to break with the party that had supported him during his decade in power, and to accept the loss of many personal relationships as the price he had to pay for what he deemed the best achievable outcome. But while many of his critics lambasted the president for his self-interested

pursuit of a dynastic solution and his disregard for established democratic norms, the events surrounding Jokowi's succession also highlighted his tendency to shy away from taking the last step into autocracy (Slater 2024). For all his machinations in this period, he did not push for a third term with the determination that would have been required to accomplish it. Instead, he remained formally within the democratic corridor, damaging it further as he headed for the exit.

Discussing Jokowi's game of succession, this chapter demonstrates that the president was far from situating Prabowo as his ideal successor, and that even Gibran emerged quite late as part of the plan. Principally, Jokowi went through a trial-and-error process when considering his succession, developing plans quickly and dismissing them with similar speed (Mietzner 2024). But once he arrived at a solution—however deficient it may have been even in his eyes—he took no prisoners while executing it. The first section focuses on Jokowi's initial plans to have his own term extended. While he clearly liked the idea, he was unwilling to go all in and eventually abandoned it in the face of elite and popular rejection. Subsequently, as the second section shows, he favored Ganjar Pranowo, a popular politician from his party, to succeed him. But his growing sense that he would not be able to control Ganjar if the latter became president led him to drop this option, too. In the third section, we look at Jokowi's slow warming up to the notion of a Prabowo presidency, and the steps he took to make it happen. At the last minute, he added a dynastic element to the mix, which he viewed as an insurance policy to keep Prabowo in check. Finally, we highlight Jokowi's willingness to go to the very limits of democratic territory to secure the victory of Prabowo and Gibran in the 2024 elections. Showcasing one more time that he was Indonesia's most influential post-Suharto president, he rallied the elite and electorate behind his choice. In doing so, however, he took a significant risk. While confident that he had picked the best alternative available to him, Jokowi put himself and Indonesia at the whim of a political veteran he had previously depicted as a loose canon.

Campaigning for a Third Term

In February 2022, coordinating minister for the economy and Golkar chairman Airlangga Hartarto visited a community of palm oil farmers in Riau. In a question-and-answer session held in the middle of a plantation, several farmers took turns praising President Jokowi and demanding that he be given a third term in office or a partial extension. A farmer named Sihomb-

ing came straight to the point: "My hope, and that of other palm oil farmers, is that Mister President Jokowi can go on to a third term. Since he became president, the price of palm oil has been good" (Burnama 2022). Tolen, a fellow farmer, offered the flattery that "the policies of the government are very much welcomed by the people," and he cited with surprising ease the rise of the government's micro-credit scheme budget from 283 trillion Rupiah (US$17.7 billion) to 373 trillion (US$23.3 billion) in the last year. Another farmer, identifying himself as Edy, claimed that without Jokowi, Indonesia would have foundered during the COVID-19 pandemic. This led him to his request: "If this government can be continued, then all its programs can be completed in a good way. Normally, if the government or president changes, the policies change" (Burnama 2022). Therefore, he said, "we, the farmers, ask for more continuity. If not in the form of an additional term, then we hope that the term of the Jokowi government can be extended to 2027 or 2028 so that the famers can feel the continuation of development." Nodding politely, Airlangga said that he would discuss these suggestions with other party leaders, and that for Golkar, "the aspirations of the people are automatically the aspirations of our party."

If the peasants' statements of support for an extension of Jokowi's presidency beyond the constitutionally allowed two terms sounded somewhat staged, that's because they were. A senior Golkar official later admitted that he was in charge of the event, and that his main task was to arrange for farmers to deliver preapproved requests for a Jokowi term extension. "For weeks, the palace had sent signals to us in Golkar that they wanted our party to come out in support of a third term or an election delay," said the official and legislator in June 2022.[4] "Initially, we refused. But when it became clear that Jokowi personally was behind these signals, we knew that we had to act." Golkar leaders decided that instead of reading out a party statement, an event was to be held in which ordinary Indonesians would recite prepared testimonials calling for a term extension. In turn, Airlangga would then promise to accommodate this aspiration. In that way, Golkar could claim that it had met the palace's expectations, but there was room for deniability as the matter still had to be discussed with other parties. Said the official, "we felt shabby about this; very few people in our party wanted a term extension. But given what Jokowi can do to people who reject his directives, we had no choice." The half-heartedness of Golkar's move was not lost on the palace, the political elite, and the public. Jokowi was reportedly unimpressed and thought that the operation had come too late; many in the elite took Golkar's obvious reluctance as a sign that support for another Jokowi term was spread thin among party leaders; and polls confirmed that

most Indonesian citizens felt unrepresented by the scripted calls for extending Jokowi's presidency.

The Riau event marked the climax of Jokowi's tacit but systematic campaign for additional time in office (Mietzner and Honna 2023; Kimura and Anugrah 2024). While he always denied being behind this campaign, there is little doubt that he inspired and encouraged it. His subordinates, in turn, interpreted this inspiration and encouragement as an indirect but firm expression of his expectations. They were not wrong. Like other presidents before him, Jokowi liked to drop hints about what he wanted, and it fell to his chief aides to interpret the messages.[5] This was no different in the case of a possible term extension. An aide to one of Jokowi's most senior ministers recalled that "it all started with Jokowi mentioning what a shame it was that the COVID-19 crisis had robbed him of valuable time to complete his agenda. My boss understood what this meant, so he asked Jokowi if he wanted him to explore options for a term extension."[6] Initially, Jokowi claimed to be surprised that such an option existed. According to the ministerial aide, "the president innocently asked back 'oh, is this possible?' My superior affirmed this and offered to prepare the necessary steps. Jokowi then gave the go-ahead, adding only that everything had to be based on the constitution." The reference to constitutionality became Jokowi's standard phrase when defending himself against accusations that he wanted to evade term limits. This line of defense implied that if a majority in the elite decided to change the constitution to lift or amend presidential term limits, then the president could not be faulted for it. As Jokowi said to me, "in a democracy, everybody can make proposals, right? Nothing wrong with that."[7]

Jokowi's desire to prolong his presidency beyond the established constitutional norms was not unusual in comparative terms. His mention of the COVID-19 pandemic as a justification for additional time in office was little more than a convenient pretext for articulating a very common ambition among longtime officeholders. One study of 234 state leaders in 106 countries since 2000 found that "no fewer than one-third of the incumbents who reached the end of their prescribed term pursued some strategy to remain in office" (Versteeg et al. 2020, 173). Out of the sixty cases of campaigns to evade term limits that the study analyzed, two-thirds were successful. What is more, some of the world leaders Jokowi admired and enjoyed good relations with had removed or otherwise circumvented term limits during his time in power. Xi Jinping had term limits abolished in 2018, and Putin reset the clock on his presidency by introducing a new constitution in 2020. Jokowi believed that the policy continuity that these actions provided gave the two countries an advantage over their political and economic competi-

tors around the globe. Increasingly, Jokowi raised in his speeches the need to reduce turnover in leaders and policies (Suhardi 2022), and it was no coincidence that one of the palm oil farmers in Riau almost perfectly reproduced the president's words. Behind this rhetoric of highlighting the benefits of leadership stability for long-term governance outcomes, however, sat Jokowi's belief that nobody could do the job of president as well as him. Once again, this was something he had in common with many a fellow president or prime minister.

But the president's quest for a term extension ran into two formidable roadblocks. The first was significant opposition within the elite (Hasyim 2021). Amending the term limit regulations—introduced in 1999 to prevent a repetition of another Suharto-style, decades-long autocracy—required a change in the constitution. This, in turn, necessitated approval by the country's supra-legislature—the MPR—with two-thirds of its members in attendance. Achieving this would have been a much bigger feat than bringing legislation on other topics through parliament, which Jokowi found easy to do. Limiting presidencies to ten years was an integral element of the elite consensus that underpinned post-Suharto Indonesia. It allowed various actors to hope for their own shot at the presidency within a reasonable time frame. In other words, another long-term autocracy in which political rejuvenation at the top would be impossible for an extended period was not in the interest of most elites. Unsurprisingly, then, the president was rebuffed by key leaders. Most importantly, Megawati was fiercely opposed. As noted, she did not believe that Jokowi had served the interests of her party, and hoped to find a more obedient replacement.[8] There were also fears in the party that a third term for Jokowi would only be a stepping stone to a full lifting of term limits. Charles Honoris, a senior PDI-P leader, asked retrospectively: "Do you think Jokowi would have stopped at a third term had we given him one? I doubt it."[9] Prabowo, too, was uncooperative, given that he wanted to run for the presidency again in 2024. Golkar, as demonstrated, could only be coerced into a lukewarm gesture of support, from which the party later retreated.

The second hurdle for Jokowi was public opinion (Slater 2023). We recognized earlier that in Jokowi's majoritarian understanding of democracy, opinion surveys were fundamental to his decision-making. While he worked hard to shape public opinion in his favor, and occasionally interpreted polling results selectively to strengthen a case he wanted to make, he mostly respected clear-cut verdicts by the public. Much to his disappointment, he found that various opinion polls showed that there was little public support for either a term extension or an election delay. In one poll in September

2021 (SMRC 2021, 21–23), 84 percent of respondents said that existing term limits should be maintained. Jokowi could take some comfort from the fact that the answers were somewhat different when another question in the same poll brought his name into play. Asked whether Jokowi should be allowed to be a candidate in 2024, 30 percent of respondents agreed while 48 percent were opposed. Thus, even though voters were less opposed to Jokowi running for a third term than to a general lifting of term limits, a majority of citizens still wanted him to leave office in 2024. As far as an election delay to 2027 was concerned, 82 percent of respondents rejected it. Initially, Jokowi and his closest aides hoped that the numbers might change, but they didn't. The president had to grudgingly recognize that an approval rating of around 80 percent did not mean that Indonesians wanted him to stay indefinitely. Combined with the rejection by most elites, the unsupportive stance of the public made it hard for Jokowi to get his term extension campaign off the ground.

The lack of elite and popular backing also meant that the efforts of Jokowi's aides to get his presidency extended were haphazard and constantly changing course (Baker 2023). Driven internally by Luhut and Bahlil, and also involving Pratikno, the first phase of the campaign stretched from late 2020 to the early months of 2022. It concentrated on changing the constitution to obtain a third term for Jokowi. Mahfud MD, then the coordinating minister for politics, law, and security, said that "I was visited by several people in that period who asked me to back that proposal."[10] Bambang Soesatyo, the head of the MPR and an internal party rival of Airlangga, told Mahfud that he could pull an amendment off. Another of Mahfud's visitors, politician Effendi Simbolon, suggested to him that Jokowi should travel to Mecca for a few days, during which time the MPR could quickly amend the constitution. According to Mahfud, "I informed both that I had nothing to do with this, and didn't want to. I just said that they could go ahead on their own if they wished to." With even leading ministers distancing themselves, Jokowi's inner circle lacked the determination to push the third-term idea through. Hence, in a second phase, they offered an alternative: that is, an election delay by two or three years. That theme emerged in Golkar's Riau event in February 2022, but also fizzled out quickly. In the third and final phase, some attempts were made to achieve an election delay by court order. In early March 2023, for instance, a state court in Jakarta granted a petition by an obscure party—which included a former senior intelligence officer—to suspend preparations for the 2024 elections. The decision was overturned on appeal, however.

After the court cases failed, it was clear that the campaign for a term extension had come to an unsuccessful end. Jokowi soon confirmed that

the 2024 elections would go ahead, signaling that it was now inevitable that a new president would take over. As such, he turned his attention to engineering the succession process. But the collapse of his attempts to remain in office revealed essential characteristics of Jokowi's rule and the state of Indonesian democracy. On the one hand, Jokowi had gone further than any of his post-1998 predecessors in challenging presidential term limits. Until Jokowi, the latter had been sacrosanct. That Jokowi dared to question their applicability in his case emphasized that established democratic taboos could now be broken without reputational damage for the initiator (Asfar, Wicaksana, and Asfar 2025). On the other hand, the failure of the extension project highlighted the polity's democratic resilience. Self-interested elites wanted to retain the competitive rules that gave them chances of political advancement, and the public found it easy to distinguish between its affection for Jokowi and proposals to semi-permanently entrench him in power. Jokowi, for his part, had to accept the painful truth that the loyalism he had engendered in the elite—through smart Machiavellian tactics of dispensing rewards and punishments—was institutional rather than personalist in nature. Put differently, the elite respected and feared Jokowi not because of the president's personal charisma but because of the formal constitutional and temporary powers he wielded. The term-extension episode, then, had showed Jokowi both his powers and his limits, and he had to adjust his political planning accordingly.

Ganjar as Successor: A Failed Experiment

In November 2022, Jokowi addressed a crowd of his supporters in Jakarta's Gelora Bung Karno stadium. For the president, it was an arena associated with many triumphs. In the 2014 elections, a concert held for him there had attracted hundreds of thousands, helping him to beat Prabowo in the final stretch of the campaign (Fionna and Njoto-Feillard 2015). Five years later, again in an electoral battle with Prabowo, the stadium hosted the peak campaign event for Jokowi's reelection. Now, in 2022, the president assembled volunteers who had worked for him in the two previous elections to tell them what to do ahead of the 2024 contest. As noted above, his quest for a term extension was failing, and new approaches were needed. "Later, in 2024, you must vote for someone who understands what the ordinary people feel, do you agree with me?," a worked-up Jokowi asked the attendees, who responded with roaring approval (Detik 2022). "I have to tell you that a leader who thinks about his people is identifiable by looking at his face," he

continued. Next, he dropped the much-awaited hint at who that could be: "There are those who think about the people [with such intensity] that their hair is all white" (Detik 2022). Everyone in the stadium knew who he meant: Ganjar Pranowo, the young, good-looking, but white-haired governor of Central Java. A member of the president's party, Ganjar had been sitting at the top of the polls of presidential contenders since June 2022. Jokowi's "vote-for-the-white-haired" remark grabbed the headlines, and it was widely interpreted as the president's way of communicating his endorsement of a successor.

Indeed, Ganjar seemed to be an ideal choice for Jokowi. Like the president, Ganjar was a member of PDI-P. This offered the chance to arrange a smooth intraparty succession and to guarantee a maximum level of policy continuity (Utama 2023). At the same time, Ganjar was not part of Megawati's inner circle, raising the prospect that he would try to emancipate himself from the party matriarch and rule in the same way Jokowi had done—that is, by building a broad-based coalition to dilute the influence of PDI-P. Importantly, Ganjar also possessed high levels of electability; for Jokowi, that was a precondition for being considered a candidate for his succession. One of Jokowi's main mantras was that electoral popularity could not be constructed from scratch—it had to be nurtured from a genuine base of voter affection. In the eyes of the president, this meant that the pool of his potential successors was limited to candidates who already enjoyed strong popularity ratings—and Ganjar was the biggest fish in that pool. Jokowi also knew Ganjar well, and the two men got along. Ganjar—governor since 2013—had campaigned for Jokowi in 2014, touring Central Java tirelessly to mobilize support.[11] In 2019, Ganjar was even accused of unduly pressuring all district heads in his province to help Jokowi prevail. Jokowi's huge wins in Central Java in 2014 and 2019 (67 percent and 77 percent, respectively) were key to Jokowi's victories over Prabowo. Finally, Jokowi also appreciated that Ganjar came from a lower-middle-class background similar to his own. Both had climbed up the political ladder against opposition by the wealthy and privileged. Accordingly, when Jokowi used his 2022 stadium speech to hint at Ganjar as his heir, few were surprised.

Jokowi had cast an eye on Ganjar as a possible successor even when he was still pursuing a third term for himself. In typical Machiavellian style, Jokowi always liked to have more than one iron in the fire should his preferred option fall through. Consequently, as early as December 2020, he instructed Andi Widjajanto—his 2014 campaign manager and first cabinet secretary—to assemble a team and work on a future Ganjar candidacy. According to Widjajanto, "I had the first meeting with Ganjar in January

2021. Very few people knew about this at the time."[12] Many of Jokowi's long-term allies then working for him in the presidential administration were also Ganjar supporters. Anggit Nugroho, Jokowi's private secretary from his Solo days, was one of them. Sukardi Rinakit and Ari Dwipayana, respectively the president's chief speechwriter and expert staff coordinator, were also favorably disposed toward Ganjar as Jokowi's successor. Jaleswari Pramodhawardani, a deputy in the Presidential Staff Office and a former member of Jokowi's 2014 campaign team, did not hide her sympathies for Ganjar either. In the cabinet, Jokowi's infrastructure minister, Basuki Hadimuljono, was a known Ganjar supporter, too. In short, Jokowi was surrounded by aides who agreed with him that Ganjar might be his best option to protect his legacy, and they committed to making it happen.

But Jokowi's excitement about the notion of a Ganjar succession dissipated quickly. One of the main reasons was that it required Megawati's cooperation—which was not forthcoming (Iqbal 2022). Recall that presidential nominations at that time could be made by a party or coalitions of parties that had won at least 20 percent of the seats or 25 percent of the votes in the last election. In this context, PDI-P was the only party that could register a 2024 nomination on its own. Not being a party leader, Jokowi had to look to Megawati to put Ganjar forward. However, throughout 2022, Megawati refused to discuss the issue with Jokowi. According to Ganjar, "Jokowi told me that whenever he raised my nomination with her, she changed the topic."[13] Megawati's reaction to Jokowi's lobbying was consistent with her public stance: time and again, she reiterated that the presidential nomination was only hers to make. The message to Jokowi was clear: Megawati had no intention of involving him in the 2024 succession. In fact, many within PDI-P were not only happy to see Jokowi disappear into obscurity after his second term, they also wanted a successor who would be easier to control than him. In June 2022, PDI-P secretary-general Hasto Kristiyanto told me that "we want a president who acts more based on the guidelines given by the nominating party."[14] Translated into the language of power politics, this meant that even if Megawati were to agree to Ganjar's nomination, she would do so only on her terms—and only if she could be sure that Ganjar would accept being her agent, not Jokowi's. For the president, this made a Ganjar nomination by PDI-P exceedingly unattractive. Essentially, he felt that he would gain nothing from it.[15]

Accordingly, Jokowi planned to have Ganjar nominated by an alternative party coalition (Supriatma 2023). Using his tested powers of intimidation and promises of rewards, he "persuaded" Golkar, PAN, and PPP to form the United Indonesia Coalition (KIB) in April 2022. Together, these parties

met the threshold for making a presidential nomination. For Jokowi, this approach offered many potential benefits: it would have allowed him to circumvent Megawati, neutralize PDI-P's influence over the next president, and present himself to Ganjar as the only actor responsible for his rise to power. But Ganjar opposed the idea. In June 2022, he said to me, "I don't need this vehicle. I am certain that Megawati will come around and nominate me."[16] Besides, he continued, "I have been a PDI-P cadre for most of my adult life. My soul is PDI-P. I can't betray that." Jokowi was taken aback by Ganjar's reaction. In his view, Ganjar obstructed his plan to make him president without the complications associated with Megawati's insistence on dominating the succession process. The president was also flabbergasted that Ganjar rejected the chance of escaping his own conflicts with PDI-P: within the party, Megawati's daughter Puan opposed Ganjar's candidacy, seeking the role for herself. Her allies vehemently attacked Ganjar—which caused him pain but also triggered sympathy support for him in the polls. In the president's inner circle, Ganjar's stance led to consternation. Luhut, for instance, was angry: "[Jokowi] went out of his way to offer Ganjar a non-PDI-P pathway to the nomination. Ganjar did not want it, so that was that."[17] Ganjar, in Luhut's view as well as Jokowi's, was now part of the problem, not the solution.

As Megawati had still not confirmed his nomination as president by early 2023, Ganjar increasingly focused his efforts on lobbying the PDI-P leader rather than Jokowi. Previously, Ganjar's assessment was that "the nomination is determined to 50 percent by Jokowi, and to 50 percent by Megawati."[18] Over time, this calculation proved inaccurate, at least as far as PDI-P's internal process was concerned. It was now clear that the key to PDI-P's nomination was Megawati alone. It was equally obvious that this constellation forced him to make difficult choices. As it turned out, one of these choices would effectively end his relationship with Jokowi. In late March 2023, Ganjar sided with Megawati on the rejection of Israeli participation in the upcoming Under-20 FIFA World Cup to be held in Indonesia (Muhtadi 2023a). Jokowi supported the holding of the soccer event with Israel's involvement, while Megawati was opposed because of her father's pro-Palestine stance in the 1960s.[19] PDI-P asked Ganjar—one of the tournament's hosts—to take a position on the matter, and he rightly viewed this as a loyalty test: siding with Jokowi would have signaled that he was the president's man, while taking Megawati's position would show that he was willing to follow her orders. Ganjar was aware of this dilemma. But ultimately, he adopted Megawati's viewpoint. This step took him closer to obtaining Megawati's endorsement as PDI-P's candidate but distanced him further

from Jokowi. "I was surprised [hearing about Ganjar's decision], and there was no prior communication from him on this," Jokowi recalled.[20] While publicly the president insisted that he was not disappointed in Ganjar, internally the incident led Jokowi to shelve his plan to make him heir.

From then on, Jokowi's relationship with PDI-P and Ganjar went from bad to worse and ultimately broke down amid open conflict (Muhtadi 2023b). In April 2023, Megawati announced Ganjar's presidential candidacy without consulting Jokowi first. What's more, she ordered him to attend the nomination event on short notice. Jokowi tersely commented that he "appreciated" Megawati's decision, and that Ganjar was "close to the people" (Paat 2023). The president strategically avoided an endorsement, however. He was also incensed that Ganjar had not informed him of the imminent nomination—Megawati told him not to share the information with anyone. Unable to extract an endorsement from Jokowi, PDI-P forced his son Gibran and his son-in-law Bobby Nasution, the mayor of Medan, to record videos in which they declared their support for Ganjar. Subsequently, the party called in and publicly reprimanded Gibran when he met with Prabowo, Ganjar's rival. All this deeply enraged Jokowi. "What PDI-P didn't understand," Luhut explained, "is that Jokowi is a Javanese king. Only a fool insults a Javanese king. And they insulted him greatly, numerous times."[21] Indeed, Jokowi's tone when speaking about Ganjar became increasingly harsh. In July 2023, in my first interview with him for this book, he left no doubt that he thought Ganjar was a failing candidate, and that he had no intention of saving him. "Ganjar is a good product, but he is controlled by people who don't know how to sell him," Jokowi said.[22] "Unless he can demonstrate that he is not beholden to Megawati, and unless he fixes the problems in his campaign, he is going to lose." The president conveyed this assessment directly to Ganjar in several meetings that the latter described as "tough."[23]

In sum, what initially appeared to Jokowi as a good solution to his succession problem had progressively turned into an intractable mess (Lane 2023). All main actors involved were responsible for creating it. For a start, Megawati's refusal to discuss a joint Ganjar nomination with Jokowi closed the door to a stable succession arrangement within the halls of the governing party. While she believed that she upheld the party's (and her) supremacy in the succession debate, she actually excluded both from it. It is likely that Jokowi would have proceeded with supporting Ganjar's nomination had he felt that Megawati wanted to give him an equal stake in it. Without such an undertaking, there was no incentive for the president to engage. Ganjar, for his part, missed the opportunity to use the alternative coalition Jokowi had prepared for him as leverage to increase his autonomy from Megawati.

Instead, he tied himself to his chairwoman, and when the public blamed him for FIFA's eventual decision to cancel the Under-20 FIFA World Cup in Indonesia, Jokowi let him drown. Without Jokowi's support, Ganjar's polling numbers dropped, and he never recovered. The president, finally, was guided in his actions exclusively by self-interest. Ignoring the policy agenda that he shared with Ganjar, as well as his similar political origins and reputation for modesty, Jokowi focused only on one thing: that is, the extent to which a succession deal could secure his post-presidency power. This approach was, of course, not unusual in the world of presidential politics. But it opened Jokowi for alternative options that held much greater risk for Indonesia than a Ganjar presidency.

Prabowo: From Foe to Heir

As Jokowi grew increasingly disillusioned with Ganjar, he turned to the man who he had defeated twice in presidential elections and who he previously depicted as a threat to the nation: that is, Prabowo Subianto (Aspinall 2015). This shift was not executed at a particular moment but stretched over a long period, until Jokowi firmed his decision by the middle of 2023. While the move might seem odd to outsiders, it was archetypical Jokowi. It highlighted his subordination of concerns for democracy—which Prabowo promised to dismantle in 2014—to his interests of power preservation and the protection of key projects. While telling Indonesian voters in two prior election campaigns that Indonesian democracy could not be entrusted to Prabowo, Jokowi now replaced these warnings with generous praise of Prabowo's patriotism, teamwork mentality, and commitment to development. Picking Prabowo also confirmed Jokowi's image as a risk-taker and maverick—a reputation he enjoyed and cultivated. As in his decision to move the capital and build a city in Borneo's no-man's-land, the president believed that endorsing Prabowo showed courage to make unconventional calls, however strange they might seem to others. Over time, Jokowi's endorsement of Prabowo also revealed a character trait in the president that he shared with other politicians in Indonesia and elsewhere: namely, a disposition to enjoy both flattery and offers of important positions for their family members. On both counts, Prabowo knew how to push Jokowi's buttons to ingratiate himself and secure the presidential nomination.

But above all, the endorsement of Prabowo was a pragmatic choice. The reality was that Jokowi's options were extremely limited. As noted, any serious candidate for his succession had to possess a reasonable baseline of electability.

In addition to Ganjar, only two others met this criterion: Anies Baswedan and Prabowo. Jokowi disliked Anies tremendously, for numerous reasons. Recall that he had fired Anies from the cabinet in 2016, only for him to align with the Islamist anti-Purnama protests and clinch the Jakarta governorship. Jokowi never forgot Anies's role in this affair—which he viewed as the biggest threat to his presidency in his decade in power—and he certainly never forgave him for it: "Anies played a role in mobilizing identity politics at that time, and that is something that I cannot accept."[24] Indeed, Anies's involvement in the Islamist challenge to his rule developed into a permanent trauma for Jokowi, and he thus reacted almost allergically to anything Anies did subsequently. Luhut recalled that "Jokowi was concerned about Anies running against him in 2019; he feared that Jakarta could be replicated on the national stage."[25] Further, as shown before, Anies was Jokowi's antithesis during the COVID-19 pandemic, favoring the lockdowns that Jokowi rejected. In short, with Ganjar now unattractive to him because of their failed succession talks, and Anies a long-term anathema, Jokowi had to consider Prabowo as an alternative.

Initially, when Ganjar still appeared like a suitable option, Jokowi used Prabowo primarily to obstruct Anies's quest for the presidency. The best way to achieve this was to ensure that Anies would come third in the first round of the 2024 elections, preventing him from moving into the possible runoff. For this plan to work, Prabowo's polling numbers needed to be strong enough to remain ahead of Anies. But from his peak in December 2021, Prabowo experienced a continuous decline in his electability throughout much of 2022, while Anies slowly increased (Indikator 2024b, 41). In November 2022, Anies overtook Prabowo and was almost at par with Ganjar. Jokowi responded by staging joint appearances with Prabowo in the final quarter of 2022, giving him more visibility and indicating that he enjoyed presidential patronage. In November, when Prabowo hit his polling low, Jokowi dropped his first hint that Prabowo might succeed him: at an event, he turned to his minister of defense and joked that having lost twice in elections, it was now Prabowo's "turn" or "allocation" to become Indonesia's next president. At that time, the move served two concurrent purposes: it signaled to Ganjar and PDI-P that he had other options if they continued to be difficult, and it lifted Prabowo's electability. In a December 2022 poll, taken just after Jokowi's remark about the possibility of a Prabowo presidency endorsed by him, Prabowo's numbers increased significantly. It is unlikely, however, that Jokowi had a firm plan at that point to make Prabowo his successor. Jokowi was still moving his pieces around on the political chessboard, and while Prabowo was certainly one of the key figures, the president was not certain yet about how to use it.

For a brief period, in early 2023, Jokowi experimented with the idea of a joint candidacy of Ganjar and Prabowo (Siregar 2023). Had this come to pass, it would have resolved his problem of whom to choose, and it would have guaranteed victory over Anies in one round. "That was my idea at the time," Jokowi said. "But the issue was, of course, that it wasn't clear who should be the lead candidate and who should be the running mate."[26] Jokowi took the two on a trip to Central Java in early March 2023, when Ganjar was still leading in the polls. Despite being behind, however, Prabowo asked Ganjar to run as his vice-presidential candidate. According to Ganjar, "Prabowo said to me that I should be his VP, and that he would only serve for one term. After that, I could be president for ten years."[27] Ganjar rejected the offer, and subsequently his polling numbers eroded due to his stance on the Under-20 FIFA World Cup. Prabowo took the lead in the surveys, consolidating his belief that he should be the primary nominee on a possible ticket with Ganjar. "In that situation, my plans changed," Jokowi told me in July 2023.[28] "I wanted to let them fight it out in the elections, and afterwards reconcile the winner and the loser." Meanwhile, Jokowi tried to pair each of them with a running mate of his choice. In August, it seemed that Jokowi neared a solution: "Prabowo could run with [State-Owned Enterprises Minister] Erick Thohir, and Ganjar could team up with [West Java governor] Ridwan Kamil. If that happens, I could sleep tight."[29] In other words, such a constellation would have allowed him to sit back and watch the election calmly, knowing that Anies could not win, and that the outcome would be generally beneficial to him.

But it is probable that Jokowi at that time had already made the choice to support Prabowo (Gammon 2023a). As demonstrated, his relationship with Ganjar was severely damaged, and he made little effort to hide that. The Ganjar narrative he presented to me in meetings in mid-2023 was that of a man he had tried to help but was now beyond saving. In an August interview, Jokowi asked his assistant to fetch his smartphone, on which he then showed me a video of a Ganjar campaign in Manado. "Look at the empty arena, hardly anyone is there—I won 78 percent of the votes in North Sulawesi in 2019," he said, shaking his head.[30] On Prabowo, by contrast, his tone was almost entirely positive. "Prabowo has changed a lot," the president claimed. "He was quite hot-tempered in the past, but now he is a team player."[31] Most importantly, he believed—or at least was impressed by—Prabowo's incessant sweet talk directed at him. Since joining the cabinet in 2019, Prabowo had heaped praise on Jokowi, highlighting the president's greatness on every occasion. Jokowi dismissed suggestions that Prabowo's intentions were purely strategic in nature. Asked whether he had consid-

ered the possibility that Prabowo was fawning on him simply because of the crucial importance of winning his—Jokowi's—endorsement in the upcoming elections, the president stated that "one can never know for sure, but I believe he is genuine."[32] Whether Jokowi truly trusted Prabowo's sincerity did not matter. What counted in this context was Jokowi's creation of a storyline that would allow him to throw his support behind Prabowo, however pragmatic the reasons.

If Jokowi was still hesitant, Prabowo sealed the deal with an offer that the president could not refuse. Powerful leaders around the world are attracted to dynastic arrangements to secure their influence after leaving office. Furthermore, many of them succeed in realizing their ambitions. A study of 1,029 political executives—that is, presidents and prime ministers—in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and Latin America from 2000 to 2017 found that 119, or 12 percent, belonged to political families (Jalalzai and Rincker 2018). This did not include relatives in other key positions—such as the vice-presidency. The latter is what Prabowo offered to Jokowi's son Gibran, and as we mentioned at the outset of this chapter, he did so repeatedly. Initially, Jokowi wasn't certain whether Gibran would be an electoral asset or a liability to Prabowo. The president's pollsters were deeply divided on this issue. But by August, Jokowi had come to believe that at the very least, Gibran would not drag Prabowo down. "It seems that Prabowo would win with Gibran, in the same way he'd win with Erick," Jokowi told me.[33] According to Luhut, "Prabowo also let the president know that the parties in his coalition had voted on the vice-presidency, and the result was that it must be Gibran."[34] In mid-September, Jokowi confirmed to Luhut that he had made his decision: he would support Prabowo, and Luhut mobilized his machinery accordingly. Judging from Luhut's explanation, Gibran was part of the package: "The best for this country is now for Gibran to be vice-president, and then to be president for at least two periods under a changed constitution."[35] While he did not claim that this was Jokowi's thinking, too, it is hard to believe that the president sharply disagreed.

What, then, did Jokowi expect to get out of a Prabowo presidency that he wouldn't have obtained through a Ganjar succession? In essence, where Megawati made no promises at all and Ganjar's approaches seemed untrustworthy, Prabowo presented concrete pledges (Sumaktoyo 2023). At the advice of Luhut, Prabowo sent Jokowi a handwritten letter in mid-2023 in which he laid out several undertakings. At the heart was Prabowo's assurance that if elected, he would invite Jokowi to build the first cabinet together in the latter's residence in Solo. Luhut reported that "Jokowi liked the letter and gave it to Gibran."[36] Moreover, Jokowi and Prabowo discussed the

policies that his then minister was expected to continue as president: "We talked about Nusantara, industrial down-streaming, the green economy, and other important initiatives that needed long-term planning and shouldn't stop just because the president was changing," Jokowi asserted.[37] Tellingly, he did not ask Prabowo for guarantees to leave the democratic infrastructure unharmed. Said Jokowi, "I did not feel that I had to ask him for that because it would not be wise of him to attack democratic achievements that the people care about. Direct elections, for instance: the people want them, and if a president wants to abolish them, voters will punish him or her."[38] While he cared little about Prabowo's detailed plans for democracy, and although he was savvy enough to not fully believe in the promises Prabowo made to him on policy matters, one thing was certain to him: Prabowo had offered him something, whereas PDI-P had refused to give him anything. The president packed this assessment into a trenchant counter-question to me in February 2024, when asked why he backed Prabowo so passionately: "What could I have done with Ganjar?"[39]

But the biggest factor that drove Jokowi to throw in his lot with Prabowo was the presence of Gibran on the latter's ticket (Lindsey and Butt 2023b). However strongly he denied having had a hand in Gibran's nomination, it was blindingly obvious that it was the most attractive benefit offered by any of his potential successors. With the vice president being the only executive leader in the central government that a sitting Indonesian president cannot remove, Gibran constituted the one element in the deal with Prabowo that the latter would be unable to renege on. In Luhut's view, "Gibran was the best chance for Jokowi to control Prabowo and provide him with a direct link into government."[40] Importantly, even if Prabowo were to decide to cut Gibran off from power, Jokowi's son could still use his post to build up his own popularity. Indeed, this is what happened in the Philippines: there, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. isolated his vice president and the daughter of his predecessor, Sara Duterte, from government. In turn, she emerged in the polls as the frontrunner for the 2028 elections. Thus, the prospect of a Gibran vice-presidency gave Jokowi reason for optimism amid a sea of doubts. Clearly, Jokowi decided that it was the maximum he could get from a process that had begun with the failure of his third-term campaign and the collapse of the Ganjar negotiations. He was now playing the long game: regardless of whether Prabowo intended to live up to his pledges of loyalty or not, Jokowi believed that Gibran would deliver as a long-term investment. Asked what he would do if Prabowo cut the budget for Nusantara, Jokowi shrugged his shoulders and smiled: "It's fine if he reduces funds for, let's say, five years; then the capital will just be completed at a later stage."[41]

End Game: The 2024 Election

The protesters assembling in front of Indonesia's Constitutional Court building on the morning of October 16, 2023, were in good spirits. On that day, the judges were scheduled to read their decision on a matter that had kept the nation on its heels: that is, the issue of whether Jokowi's son Gibran would be allowed to run as vice president or not. We noted earlier that Jokowi, too, was nervously awaiting the outcome of the process, and particularly, how the public would react to it. This was the last missing piece in his succession puzzle, and Jokowi would have hated to see it fall off the table. Of course, he had good reasons to believe that the judges would waive Gibran through. Recall that his brother-in-law, Anwar Usman, was the chief justice. But this was also what gave the protesters gathering at the court some hope that the story would end differently: many of them still doubted that their president could be so blatant in his approach to the country's highest court as to use his in-law to produce a favorable verdict for his son. And initially, their optimism appeared to be well-founded. As the decision on the first case scheduled for announcement on that day was read out, it appeared that the judges had rejected the request for Gibran to run. There was jubilation, and Indonesia's online news services reported that the court had blocked Gibran from running. Some experts in the know warned that more than one case had been filed on that subject, and more decisions were coming. But the second and third verdict confirmed the decision of the first (Lindsey and Butt 2023a). There was, it seemed, no more room for a surprise. Satisfied that they had accomplished their mission, most of the protesters went home.

The fourth and last ruling, however, opened a loophole for Gibran to run. While maintaining the general age requirement of a minimum of forty years for presidential and vice-presidential nominations, it allowed an exception for persons who had experience as a local government head. As mayor of Solo, Gibran qualified. It later emerged that Anwar had excused himself from the deliberations on the first three cases, citing conflict of interest, but then attended discussions on the fourth. His support for the exception changed the vote of two other judges, giving it a majority. After the verdicts had been read—in the afternoon, with only few protesters still around—two of the judges who voted against the Gibran loophole couldn't contain their anger. In highly unusual public statements, they fiercely attacked Anwar for his conduct. But while Anwar was later removed as chief justice for his ethics breaches, the verdict was irreversible. Following the court decision, Jokowi consulted his pollsters. As hinted at earlier, they found that although the small liberal segment of Indonesian politics was outraged at the

nepotism inherent in the court actions, the vast majority did not care—or were even supportive. In one poll, 76 percent of respondents said that they did not know that Anwar was the president's in-law (Sari 2023). Prabowo's and Gibran's electability numbers went up, not down. Once again, one of Jokowi's big gambles had paid off, at least in the short term. In his customary majoritarian thinking, he had speculated that the apolitical mainstream would be indifferent to his government's behind-the-scenes tinkering with the judiciary, and he was proven right.

The court decision on Gibran was the ugly opening salvo in the most controversial battle of the Jokowi presidency (Pepinsky 2024). In this battle, Indonesia witnessed the highest level of state intervention in elections since Suharto's regime. To be sure, few were surprised that Jokowi presented as a ruthless operator prepared to violate democratic protocol to pursue his interests. As this book demonstrated, he was adamant about what he desired and indifferent to collateral damage as the cost for obtaining it. But Jokowi's fight to get Prabowo and Gibran elected marked a new dimension in his Machiavellianism. To secure victory for his heir and his son, the president went to the outside boundaries of what was legal in a democratic polity. The echo in much of the international press and academic commentariat was devastating. *The Economist* (2024), not known for being romantic about global power politics, lamented Jokowi's "inglorious exit." The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported about the president's many "dirty tricks" (Barrett and Rompies 2024). Eve Warburton and Sana Jaffrey (2024) concluded that while some form of executive meddling in elections was common in Indonesia and elsewhere, "the centralised nature of intervention in 2024, its scale and the brazenness with which it was done, [was] unprecedented in Indonesia's brief democratic history." Indeed, it was "more reminiscent of elections under Suharto's rule, when state machinery was routinely cranked to ensure a victory for the regime-backed party, Golkar." In Indonesia itself, a documentary film entitled "Dirty Vote," released a few days before the elections, depicted the ballot as fully engineered by Jokowi. Predictably, Jokowi supporters reported its makers to the police.

Jokowi's heavy-handedness during the election campaign also seemed oddly out of bounds because it was so unnecessary. With Gibran at his side, Prabowo was heading for a comfortable victory (Parker 2023). Even prior to Gibran's nomination, Prabowo led in head-to-head poll scenarios by 10 percentage points against Ganjar and 23 points against Anies, respectively. After Gibran's anointment, Jokowi's 2019 voting base shifted en masse to Prabowo because it was now convinced that the president had made his choice in no uncertain terms. Polls showed that the percentage of voters who thought

that Jokowi supported Prabowo as his heir almost doubled from 33.5 percent to 64.4 percent between the middle of October and late November (see fig. 14). Parallel to this, the percentage of 2019 Jokowi voters who now opted for Prabowo grew from 29 percent to 41 percent, and Prabowo's head-to-head lead expanded to 20 points over Ganjar and to 27 points over Anies. In short, Prabowo and Gibran were in an unlosable position by the time the official campaign started in late November 2023—and that was primarily the result of Jokowi's high approval ratings. He cashed in this popularity to push the cause of his succession, and without any further intervention, the contest would have ended in his favor. The only question was whether one or two rounds would be needed, but that was a cosmetic matter. Apparently not so to Jokowi, however. Fearing that Anies might stage a comeback as he had in the second round of the 2017 Jakarta elections, and keen to return to his development agenda as quickly as possible, Jokowi decided to force a one-round outcome.

It was this obsession with a single-round victory that drove Jokowi into the most questionable interventions of the 2024 elections (Sidel 2024). A key element of the president's activism was a campaign-like tour in which he distributed social aid—both cash and food items—to the poor. While the president nominally claimed neutrality, the fact that his son was one of the candidates left little doubt that he handed out goodies with the intent of influencing the vote. To have the resources to do so, he had maintained the level of social assistance funding from the COVID-19 era, although the pandemic was long over. Moreover, some funding was cut from other ministries to beef up the social aid budget. In distributing benefits, Jokowi's main targets were Ganjar's Central Java strongholds, where Prabowo was behind. Bahlil, who headed a special campaign team while still a government minister, confirmed that "our data showed us where we had to collect additional votes, and Jokowi was part of these discussions."[42] Post-election polls showed that one quarter of the voters received aid, and 69 percent of those voted for Prabowo (Simatupang 2024). Partly because of this operation, Prabowo won in Central Java, humiliating Ganjar in his home province. Formally, of course, Jokowi's distribution spree during the campaign was not illegal—but the context in which it occurred made it an example of systematic presidential vote-buying. Jokowi later revealed to me that his aides had debated whether he should campaign openly and take leave from his office in order to do so.[43] But this would have left him without the resources of the presidency in the most important phase of the campaign. In many ways, mobilizing support for his preferred candidates by deploying the insignia and means of office was crucial to Jokowi's electoral strategy.

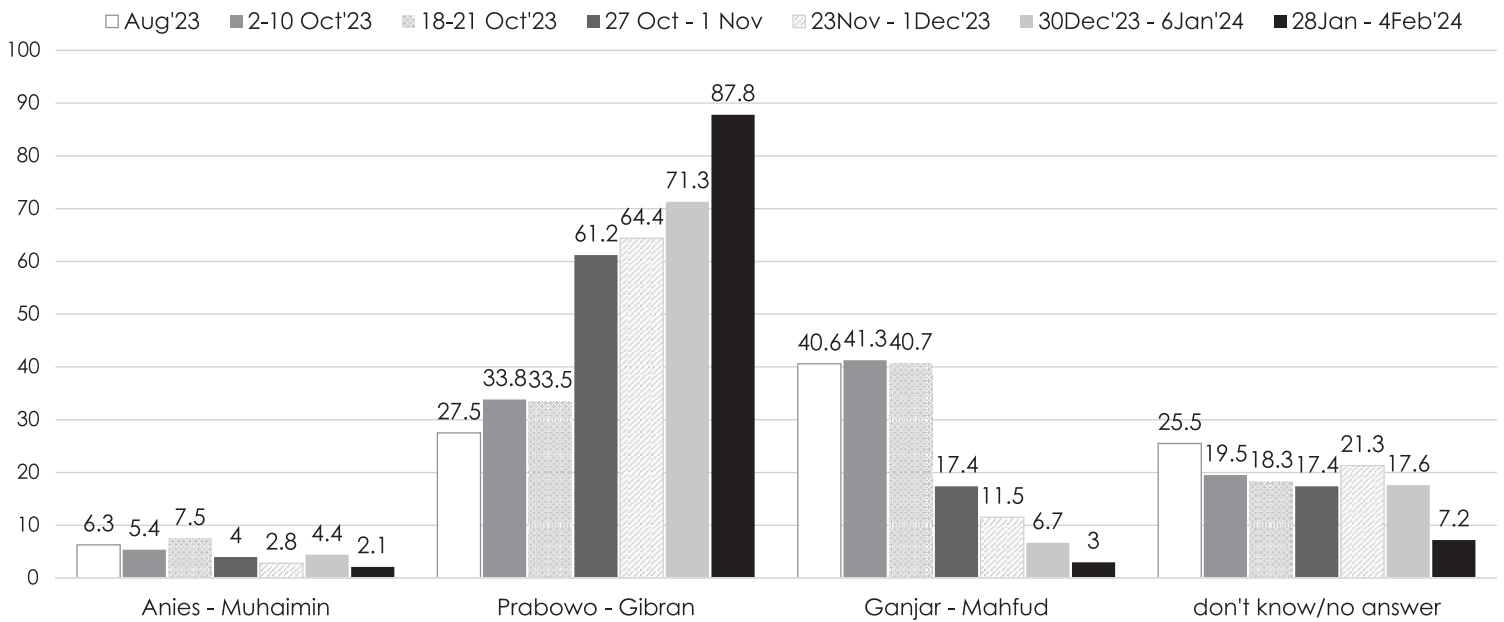

Fig. 14. Polls on Who Jokowi Supported in the 2024 Elections (in %)
(*Source:* From Indikator Politik Indonesia [Indikator 2024b, 68].)

Other practices were even more dubious. *Tempo* magazine reported widespread efforts by state officials, including police officers, to promote Prabowo's candidacy (Tempo 2023b). It was alleged that local bureaucrats were pressured to deliver high results for Prabowo or face sanctions. Crucial in this constellation was the circumstance that due to a change in local elections scheduling, Jokowi was able to directly appoint 271 acting governors, district heads, and mayors for the period 2022 to 2024.[44] This meant that Jokowi could place loyalists in half of the country's top local executive positions ahead of the polls (Wilson 2023). In Jakarta, for instance, Jokowi installed the head of his presidential secretariat as governor—who kept his palace position at the same time. Hence, a presidential official controlled the capital during the elections, reversing some policies of Anies Baswedan's governorship. This helped Prabowo win the presidential elections in Jakarta against Anies, albeit narrowly. The police, for their part, were integral to Jokowi's system of enforcing support from the lower layers of the state apparatus, including during elections. The chief of police, his former adjutant Listyo, was with the president during many official events during the campaign, signaling to police units across the country that he expected loyalty toward Jokowi. Similarly, Ahmad Luthfi, a former deputy police chief of Solo during Jokowi's time as mayor, was the Central Java head of police at the time of the campaign. In February 2024, shortly before voting day, Luthfi's officers asked some local academics to produce glowing videos praising the president, trying to counterbalance other university staff who had criticized Jokowi's electoral interventionism.

The police were also an important link between the president and the country's more than 80,000 villages (Syukri 2022). For most Indonesians, the village head is the most powerful official they have to deal with in their daily lives, being responsible for issuing key documents and permits (Berenshot and Sambodho 2017). In elections, therefore, the political leanings of a village head can be decisive. Village heads, in turn, often support who they think state authorities want them to support. With Jokowi being so openly in favor of Prabowo and Gibran, many found it easy to make their choice. But for those in doubt, local police officers helped to drive home the point. Pramono Anung, who was conflicted in the elections because the president was actively fighting his party's candidate, Ganjar, later acknowledged that "Jokowi understood the importance of the police in elections better than anyone. Suharto used the military to secure his rule, but today, the police hold the cards. And Jokowi didn't even have to be brutal, like Suharto was. In the villages, officials knew what was expected from them if the police came knocking."[45] Indeed, the police called numerous meetings with village heads

during the campaign, ostensibly for logistical reasons. Most village heads got the message: they were asked to deliver what their president wanted. And they could see on television every day what that was: in December 2023, for instance, Jokowi played soccer with locals in the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur, wearing a blue jersey with the number 22 (CNN Indonesia 2023d). Needless to say, Prabowo's number on the ballot was 2, and the color of his campaign dress was blue.

At the end, even Jokowi was surprised at the result of the elections. Prabowo won with 58 percent of the votes, leaving Anies with 26 percent and Ganjar—the former frontrunner—with a meager 16 percent. "I thought he'd probably get 53 or 54 percent," Jokowi told me two days after the elections.[46] But by the last week of the campaign, the inevitability of Prabowo's victory had permeated much of society, dragging the remaining undecided voters in his direction (Maulia 2024). Even more pleasingly for the president, all of this transpired with the widespread approval of the electorate. In one post-election survey, 76 percent of respondents declared their satisfaction with the conduct of the elections. In other words, three-fourths of Indonesians did not share the critical commentary by foreign journalists and liberal pro-democracy activists at home. Jokowi, it appeared, had achieved an optimal balance with his interventions. On the one hand, they were effective, delivering the intended outcome. On the other hand, they were not considered problematic by most voters, giving the elections a high level of legitimacy. Hence, his strategy of testing the limits of what was allowed and possible in democratic politics had succeeded once more. His protestations that he had remained within the formal parameters of democracy were deemed credible, despite the objecting headshaking of some. The fact that among the latter were some of his closest aides—Widjajanto, Nugroho, and Pramodhawardani broke with the president over the Gibran nomination and left his service—did not bother Jokowi. Neither was he perturbed by the critical voices in some international newspapers: "You can tell them to come here, I will explain it to them."[47]

The perception among most Indonesians that Jokowi's interventions in the elections were benign also drew from evidence of some real limitations in his influence. Jokowi failed, for instance, to lift the party of his second son, Kaesang Pangarep, over the parliamentary threshold of 4 percent. Kaesang had taken over the small Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) in September 2023, and Jokowi's picture subsequently featured on almost all its campaign posters (Suryadinata 2024). Jokowi was surprised at PSI's poor showing—he believed that Kaesang had done well as PSI chairman.[48] In fact, compared to Gibran, who often appeared strangely bored in public, Kaesang possessed a

more natural instinct to connect with the masses. But Indonesian legislative elections have their own local dynamics and are therefore more difficult to influence from the center: some voters form long-standing patronage relations with incumbents; others accept one-off bribes and vote as directed; others again cast their vote based on their communal or ideological roots. After the initial projections indicated that PSI had not made it into national parliament, there were some fears that Jokowi's government might try to engineer a better result in the official count. These fears were compounded when the KPU website showed sudden increases to the PSI vote, before going offline a short while later. Eventually, however, the final result confirmed the projections: Jokowi had made one of his sons vice president but had not succeeded in helping the other. It was the end to a long battle over his succession, and while he had suffered some bruises on the way, he was happy. It was, in his view, an outcome only he could have achieved. On this point, it was hard to disagree with him.

A Victory, But to What End?

Jokowi's game of succession once again placed emphasis on the fundamental traits of his presidency. The overarching frame of his thinking on whether or how he should be replaced was his conviction that the development policies he put in place needed to be continued, and that he had to retain some influence to ensure that they would. In order to achieve this general goal, he mobilized both his extraordinary popularity—which he had carefully crafted for this very purpose—and his control over the coercive apparatus of the regime. But beyond this broad target, his actions were marked by flippant pragmatism. Plans were developed and disposed of in haste, highlighting a tendency that was one of his biggest strengths and a weakness at the same time. On the one hand, he could rapidly adapt to changing circumstances to outplay both foes and friends. On the other hand, this adaptability betrayed a lack of fixed values. In Jokowi, expediency reigned supreme. Said Pramono Anung, "during the succession debate and at other times, he often changed his mind on the details. He knew what he wanted, but the process of how to get there was mostly explorative."[49] That his son ended up being a core part of the succession plan ultimately executed also showed that Jokowi was far from immune to the familial self-interest so common in popular leaders around the world (Kenawas 2023). Like most of them, he tried to conceal the narcissism inherent in his dynastic ambition, but like them, too, he was not particularly bothered by opposition to it. For him, only two things mat-

tered: first, that the outcome gave him a chance to preserve influence, and second, that most Indonesians were either oblivious to or supportive of the way he secured it.

As in previous episodes of his rule, Jokowi's crude majoritarianism during the succession epic both damaged Indonesian democracy and protected its minimalist parameters. It is important to note that Jokowi did not dare to openly reject existing constitutional rules, and that he respected the view of the public when making key decisions on his succession. Most importantly, when a majority rejected a third term and an election delay, he withdrew from those battlefields. This should not be taken for granted. During the same period, the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, had loyalist judges scrap the ban on him running for a second term (Meléndez-Sánchez 2024). Similarly, in Senegal—Africa's model democracy—then President Macky Sall tried to circumvent his term limit by delaying the elections (Ndiaye 2024). He initially succeeded, but the Constitutional Council later ordered the ballot to be scheduled. Jokowi did not cross these rivers. Instead, he used his powers for a series of unsightly interventions while formally upholding the status quo. However, it is equally crucial to recognize the damage Jokowi's moves did to Indonesia's democratic substance. The fact that the majority viewed the president's actions as unproblematic is irrelevant in this regard. To some extent, it makes the impact of these actions weigh even more heavily on Indonesia's democratic prospects. With most Indonesians indifferent to their president's in-law using his position as the country's most senior judge to advance the interests of the first family, future incumbents are likely to try the same. International democracy indexes are set to downgrade Indonesia due to Jokowi's electoral interventionism, and while he might not care, pro-democracy activists do.[50]

The most consequential legacy of Jokowi's succession search was the rise of Prabowo as president (Pepinshy 2024). Accused of human rights abuses, known for a volatile temper, and a past proponent of strongman rule, Prabowo had tried for at least twenty years to be president. Each time he ran, he failed because the electorate did not want to take the risk of putting him in the country's political cockpit. In 2014 and 2019, Jokowi had reminded voters of that risk and prevailed. This time, Jokowi not only got out of way of Prabowo's campaign, but he delivered victory for it. With this, Jokowi assumed responsibility for what a Prabowo presidency might do to Indonesia. As mentioned, Jokowi's majoritarianism led him to believe that Prabowo will leave Indonesia's democratic foundations standing simply because the people would disagree if he didn't. But given Prabowo's history, such a laissez-faire attitude must be viewed as naïve at best or cynical at

worst. To be sure, it is not impossible that Jokowi's assessment was correct and Prabowo will be content with ruling atop a minimalist—and gradually diminishing—democracy. But it is also possible that he misread him, and that Prabowo might explore more authoritarian paths in office. Jokowi could not have known with any kind of certainty what Prabowo planned for his presidency, beyond obsequious promises designed to secure his support. Thus, while Jokowi's own democratic record was checkered, and further tainted by his meddling in the 2024 elections, his largest gamble in this area was to whitewash Prabowo's antidemocratic history and install him in the presidency as his successor.

This uncertainty also extended to Jokowi's own political and personal interests, however. While he had no guarantees that Prabowo would protect democracy, he also didn't know whether his successor would honor any of the promises given to him as far as state policies and projects were concerned. Obviously, placing Gibran in the vice-presidency was a win for Jokowi, but the actual benefits of that were vague, too. In Indonesia's post-1998 political history, vice presidents have either been marginal to government business or have been cast aside when they demanded a larger role. The only vice president with greater political influence was Jusuf Kalla, and both his presidents—Yudhoyono and Jokowi—got annoyed at him and happily appointed an alternative for their second terms. In both cases, they opted for aging figures without a powerbase and gave them clerical or ceremonial work to keep them occupied. It is implausible to assume that Prabowo would stand by and let Gibran run the government for him. At this point, it is more likely that tensions between the two will develop as both prepare for a potential 2029 bid for the presidency—Prabowo to secure reelection at the age of seventy-seven, while Gibran could make his maiden run for the top job. The outcome of any of these scenarios is unpredictable, making it even more remarkable that Jokowi invested all his political capital in them. As Bahlil concluded with some anxiety, "Jokowi cut ties with his own political party, pushed aside his golden boy [Ganjar] as successor, and was attacked, smeared, and ridiculed for it. Now this partnership with Prabowo must work. If it doesn't, it will be one big headache for all of us."[51]

CONCLUSION

"I Will Fight Prabowo If He Does That"

Jokowi and His Legacy

In 1994, German philosopher Jürgen Habermas surprised many of his followers with an opinion piece about then Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Habermas, the patriarch of the left-leaning Frankfurt School, had for more than a decade been a leading critic of Kohl, a conservative. But in his 1994 contribution, Habermas used a different angle: while still critical of what Kohl *was*, he praised him for what he *was not*. "Kohl reconciled me with the old federal republic," Habermas revealed, "especially through what he is not and what he does not embody" (Habermas 1994). Habermas then listed the features that Kohl did not exhibit. For instance, he was not a historiographic revisionist, in contrast to so many others in 1980s Germany. Instead, the admission of Germany's guilt in World War II remained one of Kohl's unmovable perspectives. Similarly, Kohl did not see continuities between Prussia's militaristic past and Europe's future—he was a believer in the antiwar identity of the European Union. Kohl did not echo the hubris of Germany's young conservatives either, many of whom sat in his own party. His famed clumsiness, Habermas concluded, was nonthreatening and thus preferable to the dangerous national conservatives who surrounded Kohl. Hence, Habermas reminded us that in weighing up the legacy of political actors, we must consider who they were and what they did—but also who they were not and what they didn't do. Would an alternative leader have been better, worse, or just different? To what extent did the actor represent the sociopolitical trends of his or her nation? For Habermas, Kohl was "representative without representation"; that is, he mirrored his contemporary society without grasping the essence of democratic representation.

Assessing Jokowi's legacy requires a similar effort. Having analyzed in detail how he ruled and what he focused on, we must now reflect on what his presidency meant for Indonesia. In doing so, we need to evaluate not only the things he did, but also the things he did not do. For example, he had clear autocratic tendencies, as reflected in his use of coercion to discipline political friends and foes. But he also refrained from fully entering the realm of autocracy: when his third-term campaign foundered, he decided to let it go and look for alternatives instead. Thus, while he was certainly not a liberal democrat, he was not a Putin-style figure either. Similarly, although he was not a sophisticated foreign policy thinker, he was a stabilizing figure in the Asia-Pacific theater. Far from threatening his neighbors in the way Sukarno had done in the 1960s, Jokowi's rhetoric in the international arena was cordial and cooperative. His lack of a credible military apparatus obviously gave him few options to pursue a more aggressive course, but the latter would also not have been compatible with his personality and his broader political goals. He had little interest in bombastic vocabulary or gestures, whether at home or abroad—unlike the Philippines' Duterte, for instance. Jokowi, then, exhibited a complex mix, consisting of actions he passionately drove and those he eschewed. Getting him right, and accurately pinpointing the legacy he leaves behind for his country and beyond, necessitates unpacking this complexity. The result of this endeavor might not be as conciliatory in tone as Habermas's reflections on Kohl, but hopefully comes close to a balanced scorecard.

This concluding chapter reviews Jokowi's legacy through four analytical lenses. The first is the concept of power. We need to stand back and gauge how much power Jokowi had in Indonesia's multilayered political system, what power meant to him personally, and what he used it for. We will find a man who embraced the limitations of his power to focus on what he could achieve and who was happy to leave many sociopolitical obstacles to reform standing. Conceptually, he viewed power as an instrument to enforce his agenda, but like many of his global peers, he failed to resist the temptation to benefit his family politically and financially. The second lens is that of change. Did Jokowi change Indonesia, and if so, how? We noted that Jokowi was the most powerful post-Suharto president, but did this translate into significant transformations? As indicated, the picture in this regard is mixed: rather than fundamentally altering how Indonesian politics, the economy, and society worked, he often took already-existing paradigms and pushed them to their limits. He was—in a Habermasian sense—more a real-life representative of the nation that he led than a producer of new ideas of democratic representation. The third lens is focused on Indonesia's place

in the world. Did Indonesia's standing on the international stage improve under Jokowi? This not only requires looking again at his foreign policy but taking a broader view of Indonesia's economic and geopolitical weight. This analysis points more to Jokowi's ability to keep Indonesia stable than to his success in growing its global power. The fourth lens, finally, compares Jokowi to other Indonesian presidents and world leaders, and ponders what studying his presidency can contribute to key debates.

Jokowi's Power

Any assessment of a leader's legacy must start with an evaluation of the power they exercised over the polity they ruled (Bienen and van der Walle 1991). While we noted that Jokowi was more powerful than his post-Suharto predecessors, his authority had limits. He operated in a system in which presidents had to make compromises with other powerful actors in order to guarantee the stability of their rule (Mietzner 2023). These actors—which included party leaders, oligarchs, security agencies, religious groups, and others—held powers that potentially could have obstructed Jokowi's government. That they didn't undermine him, and allowed him to rule without any attempts to impeach him, was partly due to Jokowi's Machiavellian use of coercion against them. But it was equally the consequence of Jokowi's accommodation of their interests. In the case of the revision of the KPK law in 2019, for instance, he responded to the pressure of parties and parliament to curb the anticorruption agency's power. As noted, he had his own grievances against the KPK, but the timing and extent of the revisions were determined by Jokowi's allies. As he put it, "had I not given in to their demands, they would have ganged up on me and disturbed my other agendas."[1] Essentially, Jokowi cut a series of deals with other elites that protected areas of governance important to him—such as infrastructure development—and surrendered others to his coalition partners. His carrot-and-stick approach to power-sharing kept elites both fearful and satisfied, and helped demarcate the areas where Jokowi held almost complete authority and others where he was largely absent. In short, he abandoned some frontlines in order to hold others.

The areas in which Jokowi minimized his power in order to maximize it in others included some of the most crucial for democratic governance. He left predatory elites in charge of key bodies and agencies, including in his own cabinet. Weakened as they were, he often misused these institutions himself—as in the case of the Constitutional Court. Having handed

his allies authority over essential areas, and not caring enough about the latter to ask for a bigger stake, Jokowi was both unable and unwilling to alleviate some of the most serious structural defects in Indonesian society and politics. Asked about his biggest regret as president, Jokowi stated that he couldn't fight corruption as much as he wanted to.[2] But the truth is that he didn't put in a meaningful effort because he knew that this would have redefined the boundaries of his power settlement with the country's elites. In fact, we noted that he used corruption allegations as an effective instrument to control the patronage-soaked elites assembled in his cabinet. As such, he operated within the parameters of Indonesia's sociopolitical landscape—with patronage as its most fundamental, organizing principle—rather than trying to replace them. In that sense, his power was fragmentary and contextual—as was his impact on the polity he presided over. There are, of course, legitimate questions about whether he actually *wanted* to reform anything in Indonesia's broader sociopolitical setup. It is hard to know for certain, but having interviewed and observed him both at the beginning and the end of his rule, it is plausible to me that he had higher ambitions for structural improvements in his early years and later gave up on them to focus on his developmental priorities.

For Jokowi, then, power was a resource that could be deployed to gain superiority over others and to influence outcomes he felt strongly about. As a result, he spent much time and energy on developing and enhancing this resource. In his view, his power consisted of three major components. The first, and most important, was his popularity. As noted, he believed that his extraordinary popularity was the one feature that made him distinct from every other elite actor. Without it, he wouldn't have gained the presidency, and he wouldn't have been able to defend it for a decade. The second component of his power was the institution of the presidency itself. The political, institutional, and budgetary authority that the presidency bestowed on him allowed Jokowi to coerce adversaries into submission, hand out positions to partners to incentivize loyalty, and spread patronage to both elites and the population at large. In this way, the powers of the presidency further increased his popularity, which then cemented his position as president even more. The third component was his understanding that he couldn't rely on coercion and material handouts alone to keep Indonesia's powerful actors in check. Parties, security agencies, and other political veto powers needed to be given the impression that they were integral to the functioning of the regime. The fact that at least four Indonesian presidents (Sukarno, Suharto, B. J. Habibie, and Abdurrahman Wahid) had lost their posts because major parties and security actors had deserted them left a deep impression on

Jokowi. Power, he found, needed to be shared in order for one's own portion of it to be maintained.

By all accounts, Jokowi viewed himself as a highly successful conductor of power. In September 2023, he surprised a gathering of his volunteers by bragging about his power to gather and deploy information about the political elite he cooperated with. This knowledge, in turn, consolidated his power further. Beginning with a lecture on the importance of leadership, he said: "I know what's happening inside the parties. I understand where they are heading. The information I receive from my intelligence [services] is complete, from BIN, from the police, from military intelligence, and from others outside of these. Numbers, data, surveys, all is there. I hold on to everything and only the president possesses it, because it comes directly to me" (Mahendra 2023). Jokowi's statement was widely interpreted as a threat to the elite at the time, as he tried to remove opposition to him supporting Prabowo and Gibran in the 2024 elections. There is no doubt that he intended to issue such threats. But the boasting about his powers was also an accurate description of how he viewed his place in the pyramid of Indonesian power politics, and of how he assessed his own abilities in this field. Similarly, Jokowi claimed to me that he had used his power resources so aptly that he could orchestrate the "best" transfer of power in Indonesian history: "Did the transfer from Sukarno to Suharto go well? From Suharto to Habibie? How about the one from Habibie to Wahid? From Wahid to Megawati? From Megawati to Yudhoyono? And the one from Yudhoyono to me? All were troublesome. Only my transition of power to Prabowo was smooth."[3] In his mind, therefore, Jokowi not only knew how to wield power, but also how to transfer it.

But what did he use his power for? We recognized earlier that Jokowi did not arrive in the presidency with a clear program of priorities. His focus on infrastructure only emerged in discussions with Xi Jinping and other world leaders. Once he had settled on this focus, however, he used all his powers to pursue it. To be sure, there was not much resistance to this overall goal—most elites agreed that Yudhoyono had neglected infrastructure-building during his presidency, and many oligarchs close to Jokowi strongly favored investments into upgrading it. There were, however, fierce disputes over how to achieve this ambition, and Jokowi prevailed in those debates. For example, his choice of state-owned enterprises as the main vehicles for infrastructure financing was highly controversial, and the debts incurred by this approach raised eyebrows. The president, however, was undeterred and removed internal opposition to it. Of course, no other case showed his determination to use the full extent of his powers more eloquently than that of

Nusantara. In his struggle to build the new capital, he was virtually on his own—and yet he stayed the course and imposed his will on bewildered politicians and bureaucrats. In the same vein, he sidelined anyone who opposed the Jakarta-to-Bandung high-speed rail line. He sacked his transportation minister, who had expressed doubts about the project: "We can debate, but once I have made a decision, this becomes government policy, and everyone in my government has to stick to it."[4] Later, he used a comparable approach to industrial down-streaming, which he viewed as intrinsically linked to infrastructure-building. Once convinced of the policy's effectiveness, he mobilized his powers to push it through.

Jokowi, however, also quickly gave in to the temptations of power and its insignia. Initially, he seemed bent on transferring his man-of-the-people image into the palace. In November 2014, one month into his presidency, he took an economy-class flight to attend the graduation of his son in Singapore (Gunawan 2014). As this was a private trip, he argued, he did not want to use state resources. But in the end, he did not become another José Mujica, the Uruguayan president (2010–2015), who famously lived in his wife's shabby farmhouse during his rule. Jokowi tried out a few Jakarta properties to live in before settling on the Bogor presidential palace as his residence (he did not like the Jakarta palace because it was noisy). He also rapidly got accustomed to—and fond of—the formality, pomp, ceremony, and privileges attached to his office. He used the presidential plane on most of his trips, and he often changed schedules based on his mood or fluctuating priorities. Most importantly, Jokowi did not resist the lures of power when it came to benefitting his family. His sons became rich under his rule, however fiercely he claimed to have nothing to do with it (Salam 2020). They began their father's rule as small-scale caterers and fried banana sellers, and emerged from it with vast business networks involving some of the country's biggest oligarchs. Jokowi had paved their way into politics, too—Gibran found himself as vice president and Kaesang as head of a party. This made Jokowi one of the most successful, and fastest, dynasty builders in Indonesian politics. Jokowi thus used power not just as an instrument of achieving policy goals—he deployed it in the same self-interested way that is so well known from other rulers around the world.

A Transformative Figure?

With the power at his disposal, however qualified in nature, was Jokowi a transformative figure? The answer to this question is not clear-cut. He trig-

gered essential change in some areas and none in others. Unsurprisingly, his impact was greatest in the area he cared most about, and where he concentrated the use of his powers. Visitors to Indonesia who saw the country both in 2014 and 2024 will have easily recognized the change in its infrastructural capacity. Jokowi built Jakarta's subway system, which Suharto had first planned but none of his successors moved on until Jokowi pushed ahead with it—first as governor, then as president. Jokowi also developed a homemade LRT in Jakarta and revamped the commuter rail system. He brought Indonesia its first high-speed rail, against much opposition, and while it is unlikely to be profitable, it turned into a symbol of national pride. Outside of Jakarta, he built an unprecedented number of new ports and airports to better integrate the various parts of the vast archipelago. History, then, is most likely to remember him as Indonesia's infrastructure president, and he happily embraced this label.[5] As noted, however, his infrastructure push was "only" a significant step forward—it was not a quantum leap. Infrastructure spending remained below the peaks of the Suharto period and below that of many regional peers, including China. Similarly, while Jokowi modernized key segments of the economy, Indonesia's global reputation as a moderate-growth country with prudent fiscal policies but limited high-return opportunities did not change much under Jokowi. Staying below his own GDP growth ambitions, Jokowi preserved Indonesia's status as a potential rather than an actual economic tiger.

Just as Nusantara was the best indicator of how commanding Jokowi's selective deployment of power could be, it was also the closest to an example of truly transformative impact. This was *his* project, and his alone. He had played his cards on Nusantara very close to his chest, informing very few people in his inner circle before making the 2019 announcement. Even Basuki, his infrastructure tsar, was not consulted on the broader question of *if* the capital should be moved—he was only asked later *how* it could be done.[6] With this decision, Jokowi took considerable risks, highlighting an important element of his character. It will take many years to ascertain whether that risk-taking paid off for him and Indonesia. In his last year in office, Jokowi tried to build as much as he could in Nusantara to make it impossible, or at least very difficult, for his successor to abandon it. As he retired, Nusantara had a presidential palace, ministerial offices and residences, a hotel, some apartment towers for civil servants, and a soon-to-be-finished hospital. Should Nusantara, after all the efforts Jokowi put into it, take real roots and become operational as Indonesia's politico-administrative center, history will record Jokowi as the man who made it happen. But until Nusantara reaches this stage of irreversible functionality, it will remain under

a cloud of skepticism. For many of his critics at the time of Jokowi's retirement from office, the future of Nusantara either lay in becoming a glorified conference center or an attraction for tourists specialized in deserted ruins. Only time will tell which version of history is going to prevail and stick.

In the political realm, Jokowi's footprint was clearly visible, but its long-term persistence is much less certain. While he successfully developed techniques and strategies to dominate political institutions, he did not fundamentally change them. As a consequence, the *formal* political system he left behind in 2024 strongly resembled the one he found in 2014. This was both troubling and a source of some relief. It was troubling because it meant that Jokowi had not repaired any of the defects in Indonesia's patronage-dominated society and politics—as noted, he even used them to his advantage. This, in turn, was disappointing to the liberals among his 2014 voters, who had hoped—based on his promises in the campaign—that he would become a prodemocracy reformer. It is hard to think of a single institutional reform he initiated during his presidency that would have strengthened Indonesia's democratic resilience and unsettled its deep-seated clientelistic actors. In this, he was far behind his post-Suharto predecessors, who all had passed reforms that at least endeavored to advance the effectiveness of democracy. In his 2024 Independence Day speech, Jokowi proudly mentioned as a major achievement the promulgation of the new Criminal Code in 2022 after decades of debate. But many critics viewed this legislation as more evidence of Indonesia becoming increasingly conservative, with religious morals and ideas of controlling free speech intruding into civil law (Butt 2023). Consequently, it is obvious that Jokowi won't be remembered as an ambitious political reformer whose legislative and executive projects changed Indonesia's democratic regime for the better. What is more, he will not even be remembered for trying and failing.

But Jokowi's lack of imagination in the field of institutional change not only paralyzed progressive political reform—it limited his autocratic imprint, too. In other words, while he launched no reforms to stabilize democracy, he did not introduce watershed changes to destroy it, either. There was no autocratic revamping of the regime from one format to another, as under Erdoğan in Türkiye. There was no change to the constitution, let alone the writing of a new one, as under Putin in Russia. Jokowi built no party, nor did he acquire an existing one, to underpin his regime—as Hugo Chávez did in Venezuela. Instead, Jokowi focused on smaller steps that weakened some oversight institutions—like the KPK—and disbanded others—such as the KASN. This led to democratic backsliding, but left the institutional foundations of democracy standing. Jokowi's only attempt at formal auto-

cratic change—that is, a constitutional revision that would have allowed him to run for a third term—failed. He dropped the idea because of elite opposition and popular rejection, but also because he shied away from the large organizational effort that would have been required. In fact, it was surprising how little thought Jokowi's apparatus put into technically pulling the revision off. They believed that the president's grassroots popularity and control over elites would be sufficient to get it accomplished. Ultimately, however, Jokowi's failure to institutionalize his regime dominance beyond his official powers as president showcased the more encouraging side of his disinclination to transform the body politic. For all of Jokowi's power over it, Indonesia's minimalist democracy entered the post-2024 era with its formal institutional features virtually unchanged.

However, while Jokowi was a lazy reformer of political institutions—in both the progressive and autocratic directions—his influence on Indonesia's democratic *culture* was strong and primarily detrimental. As mentioned, he utilized state agencies as instruments of political coercion, and he weakened existing institutions through personal interventions and erosion of their authority. He went to the very limits of the powers the constitution gave him as president, and he occasionally overstepped those boundaries. None of his democracy-undermining acts were institutionally irreversible, but they set a negative precedent for his successors. This was even more consequential because of the specific successor Jokowi had chosen and worked so hard to put into his seat. Prabowo, with his history of neo-authoritarian campaign proposals, was likely to continue or even aggravate some of the practices Jokowi made palatable. By anointing Prabowo and opting against Ganjar, who would have offered at least the chance of a more reform-leaning post-2024 government, Jokowi made probably the most impactful call of his presidency. Indonesia's path under Prabowo will be to no small extent of Jokowi's making. Asked what he would do if Prabowo revived his original agenda of abolishing direct presidential elections and returning them to the backroom deals of the MPR, Jokowi passionately waived his index finger and proclaimed that "I will fight Prabowo if he does that. I will be at the frontline [of the protest]."[7] It is unclear whether that would matter. Should Prabowo want to proceed with such a plan, he could align with established politicians—many of them nurtured under Jokowi—whose unpopularity makes them weak contenders in direct elections.

Jokowi's legacy in the field of civil society was similar to his interaction with politics: his regulatory innovations were rare but his personal interventions frequent. His most enduring legacy was the ban on two Islamist organizations that he viewed as threatening Indonesia's pluralist religious

identity. For this move, he received applause from many NGOs that shared Jokowi's concerns, but it also raised the specter of an overbearing government repressing the parts of civil society it did not like (Fealy 2020b). Outside of the bans, however, Jokowi's attempts to steer civil society were more ad hoc and fragmentary. The police and attorney general's office pursued some persons accused of insulting Jokowi and other elites in order to frighten the rest of society, and this approach was successful. As noted, a majority of Indonesians believed that freedom of expression had declined under Jokowi. But his government did not build a comprehensive apparatus of censorship, societal monitoring, indoctrination, and day-to-day intimidation. Jokowi did not ban newspapers or online reporting platforms—in contrast to Duterte in the Philippines—and he rarely demanded that content be taken down from international social media platforms. Of course, one could argue that he didn't have to: his allies owned most media outlets and the occasional persecution of dissidents was sufficient to disincentivize opposition. But while this is true, it is also the case that civil society remained inherently obstreperous. Like its political counterpart, the space of civil society experienced regular attempts at domination by Jokowi, but he did not transfigure its foundations. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why democracy under Jokowi—however weakened—did not die.

Jokowi, then, was a builder of infrastructure, but not an institution builder. He leaves behind toll roads, airports, ports, dams, and a new capital, and many Indonesians will fondly commend him for this legacy. But in other areas, his influence was tactical and short-term in its aspiration. He will enter the country's annals for perfecting a pre-existing Indonesian regime format: that is, one in which a president rules with an oversized coalition to maintain power. He was a master of this concept, but he did not invent it—indeed, he had initially agitated against its very existence. In politics, he enhanced some of the illiberal techniques used by previous presidents, but he didn't create a new system around these practices. Recall that at the heart of his power were his popularity, his cunning use of constitutional privileges, and his ability to induce partners. But all these assets were time-limited: his popularity was set to wane once his daily media presence as president stopped; his institutional powers ceased the second he handed them over to Prabowo; and his resources to co-opt allies vanished, too. Hence, the foundations of his political authority—as strong as they appeared while he was in office—were borrowed and transient. As such, they were unlikely to survive his retirement. His attempts at dynasty-building were designed to compensate for this weakness. It is not implausible that they will pay dividends one day, but they carry huge risks of failure. Facing these uncertain-

ties, Jokowi found a major premise of his life confirmed once again: as in his general preference for the tangible over the abstract, he felt that it was a lot easier to point to physical structures as his legacy than to rather amorphous developments in the political realm.

Indonesia's Global Standing

Has Jokowi increased Indonesia's standing in the world? His aides believed that he did, and significantly so. According to Luhut, "one of Jokowi's biggest achievements is that Indonesia is now a lot more respected in the world. We are no longer looked down at. We are now someone."[8] But in assessing a country's global standing, and changes in that standing over time, statistics matter. In the case of Jokowi and Indonesia, the numbers are rather sobering. This is the case even in the arena in which he had the most impact: that is, the economy. As highlighted earlier, some agencies project Indonesia to be the 4th-largest economy in the world by 2050. But the path to such a top ranking has been slow, and Jokowi did not accelerate it much. In 2014, when he took office, Indonesia was 16th in the world in terms of its nominal GDP, producing 1.1 percent of global output. By 2021, the country was still 16th, and its share of the world's GDP was 1.2 percent (Global Economy 2021). In the same time frame, China's share in the world economy grew from 13.1 to 18.5 percent, and India's from 2.6 to 3.3 percent. The latter climbed from 10th place in 2014 to 5th place in 2021. While there is no doubt that Indonesia has massive economic potential, and that it draws global importance from this potential, its economic performance has been unspectacular. Under Jokowi, Indonesia grew solidly but did not achieve a growth breakthrough. Some institutes have therefore moderated their expectations. For instance, the UK-based Centre for Economics and Business Research (2023) projected in late 2023 that Indonesia will be the world's 11th-largest economy by 2038. Clearly, Jokowi modernized Indonesia's economy, but it continues to struggle for a global top spot.

We recognized earlier that Jokowi made a deliberate decision to not substantially upgrade Indonesia's military, citing the lack of threats and the need to invest in the country's economic infrastructure. As a result, Indonesia's military weight in the world did not increase under Jokowi. Despite some modernization efforts and equipment purchases in his second term—mostly driven by Prabowo—Indonesia's military spending to GDP remained at around 1 percent. This made it hard for the country to be anything other than the benign middle power it has been for much of its history. Jokowi,

after making peace with the middle-power concept, used it to justify his continued spending in nonmilitary areas. Global power indexes have reflected this positioning. Lowy's 2023 Asia Power Index, as noted, ranked Indonesia's military capacity 13th out of 26 regional countries, putting it in the middle of the pack. Significantly, it held this rank in all Lowy indexes between 2018 and 2023, with its score gradually declining. The Global Firepower index, used by military and geopolitical analysts around the world, recorded more fluctuations in Indonesia's rankings. In the long term, however, it did not detect much movement either. In Jokowi's first year in office, in 2015, Indonesia was placed 12th, and in 2024, as he departed, it was in 13th. Consequently, there was little to suggest that Jokowi meaningfully altered the position Indonesia has held in the international system since the 1970s. Back then, Suharto had terminated Sukarno's adventurism of the 1960s and established Indonesia as a primarily inward-looking nation focused on development rather than external military ambition. His successors maintained that posture, and so did Jokowi.

Jokowi experienced the limits of Indonesia's global standing in his few attempts to showcase it. In June 2022, Jokowi embarked on a mission to Russia and Ukraine to lobby their respective leaders to reduce the economic impacts of their war. As Jokowi's government stated bluntly, "Indonesia does not have any interest but to see the war [come] to an end and [that] food, fertilizer, [and] energy supply chains be recovered immediately" (Sekretariat Kabinet 2022a). Concretely, Jokowi wanted Russia to stop its blockade of Ukrainian grain exports, because it had driven up the price of instant noodles in Indonesia and thus contributed to national inflation. But while Putin was polite to Jokowi, he did not promise any measures on the grain issue. Similarly, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was cold on Jokowi's suggestions to weigh peace talks with Russia. Jokowi left Russia and Ukraine without any concessions, and the world media devoted little coverage to his trip. A few weeks later, Türkiye's entrepreneurial leader Erdoğan brokered a grain export deal between Russia, Ukraine, and the United Nations. The deal was signed in Istanbul, giving Erdoğan much international exposure. Indonesia was not mentioned as having played a role in the negotiations. To be sure, Türkiye was directly affected by the arrangement as the exports had to pass through its waters, but Erdoğan had also thrown his full international weight into the talks. Ranked eighth in the Global Firepower index, Türkiye's standing in world affairs exceeded that of Indonesia, and it showed in this episode. On the global stage, then, Indonesia remained a welcome but marginal presence, much in contrast to its status as the world's fourth-largest nation.

In the eyes of the world's great powers, the United States and China, Jokowi's Indonesia was important—but neither went the extra mile to demonstrate that it was. While China was happy to invest heavily in Indonesia—as it did in other countries—Beijing's leaders were unwilling to give up on major strategic interests to gain Jakarta's favor. Most importantly, China hardened, rather than softened, its stance on disputed boundaries in the North Natuna Sea. It increased the intensity of its incursions into Indonesian waters, and insisted that its claims on parts of the archipelago's EEZ were well founded. In essence, these actions reflected China's assessment of Indonesia's military and geopolitical weight as peripheral. Similarly, the United States did not spend much strategic capital on Jokowi's Indonesia. It lobbied Jakarta for its support against China, but without offering strong inducements. Washington committed to no sizeable military or development aid, as it had done in the 1950s and under Suharto's New Order. It did not push its private sector to deepen its investments in the country, much to Jokowi's frustration. Then President Biden even refused to give Jokowi concessions on America's nickel import restrictions, which he knew to be of great importance to Jokowi. America's global priorities could be seen in the direction of its aid flows: in 2022, most of its global defense and other assistance went to Ukraine and Israel, and in Southeast Asia, the Philippines was the biggest recipient. Overall, the great powers recognized that Indonesia under Jokowi was a part of Asia-Pacific's strategic puzzle. But its current power wasn't compelling enough for them to reach deeply into their pockets or to surrender key interests.

None of this means that Jokowi was an ineffective manager of Indonesia's international affairs. Indeed, in a world facing rapid and often dangerous change, the fact that Indonesia did not abruptly seek a revision of its international status helped stabilize the Asia-Pacific region. Jokowi offered Indonesia as a reliable, predictable, nonconfrontational, and open-for-all partner. He did not unsettle international politics through radical oratory or moves, and maintained Indonesia's image as a "good citizen" on the global stage. In many ways, he embodied this stability: by the end of his second term, he was the longest-serving leader in ASEAN, with the exception of Brunei's Sultan Bolkiah. While the Philippines performed two international policy reversals in his time—Duterte moved away from the country's traditional US alliance, and Marcos Jr. restored it—Jokowi stayed the course with his insistence on equidistance from the great powers. As emphasized before, this constituted a continuation of Indonesia's traditional "free and active" foreign policy, repackaged in Jokowi's vocabulary of economic interests and transactions. He leaned on China for investments in his priority projects,

but was careful not to steer it into a relationship of dependence. Partly, this was due to his interest in the West's continued investments, but also because China's actions in the North Natuna Sea ruled out closer ties. All this made Jokowi and Indonesia anchors of stability in a world region prone to potentially catastrophic tensions. In short, Indonesia's inability to break out from its old middle-power corset—woven by its moderate economic growth and its underspending on the military—had a system-stabilizing effect on the regional security architecture.

At the same time, it is clear that Jokowi was no foreign policy visionary. While he succeeded in imposing his economy-first approach on the foreign ministry and its representatives, he produced no inspiring narrative for Indonesia's place in the world. Limited in his speech-giving skills and uninterested in intellectual debates, he lacked the imagination to develop a concept for what Indonesia's future in the international arena could be. Asked where he saw Indonesia in the next decades in terms of its international posture, Jokowi did not envision significant change.[9] To be sure, he had huge ambitions for Indonesia to turn into a modern, industrialized society by 2045, and he presumably believed that this would change its global standing, too. But as Sukarno had proven, powerful visions and narratives that are eloquently presented in the international arena can develop a magic attraction and allow a country to punch above its material weight. In the 1950s—before he took Indonesia on a path of destructive foreign policy radicalism—Sukarno had a seat at the table of global leaders because he drew people into his vision of what the world and Indonesia should look like. This compensated for Indonesia's lack of material assets, and gave the country immense soft power before the term was even invented. Jokowi made some attempts to be a leader of the Global South, but he did not invest much in claiming that role for himself. This was regrettable: as discussed earlier, his focus on economic development, his belief that the West in particular misunderstood this prioritization, and his downplaying of ideology in deciding his country's course *were* representative of the attitudes of many Global South figures. Once again it appeared that Jokowi was—In Habermas's words—representative without deploying representation.

Jokowi in Comparison

How does Jokowi's legacy compare to that of his Indonesian predecessors and of other world leaders? We noted on several occasions that Jokowi was the most powerful (and popular) president of post-authoritarian Indonesia.

No other president after 1998 was so successful in co-opting elites to achieve strategic goals; no other was so dominant in the minds of the populace; and no other was able to engineer the election of a handpicked successor. But this does not necessarily mean that Jokowi was the president with the greatest and most enduring legacy for Indonesia's future trajectory. Habibie, in power for only a year and a half in 1998 and 1999, achieved major institutional advances: he dismantled the formal framework of autocracy and put Indonesia on the path toward decentralization (Liddle 2021). His successor, Wahid, ruled only a little longer, from 1999 to 2001. He was an erratic leader, but he challenged Indonesian orthodoxies in dealing with the ethnic Chinese minority and separatist movements in Aceh and Papua (Barton 2002). Megawati, who governed until 2004, presided over extensive revisions of the constitution (Smith 2003). This constitutional framework remained in place unchanged throughout the Jokowi period. Yudhoyono, president for a decade until 2014, implemented the political reforms mandated by the new constitution and arranged a peace deal for Aceh, which still holds today (Liddle and Mujani 2006). It is less clear what will remain from Jokowi's rule. Given his disinterest in building institutions, he does not leave behind a new or reformed political setup. His interventions in democracy had a weakening and destructive impact, but he did not formalize those interventions either. The most visible of his legacies, then, are an unfinished new capital and modernized infrastructure elsewhere.

Yet contemporary Indonesians ranked Jokowi not only higher than his post-1998 predecessors, but saw him at par with Sukarno and Suharto—the towering leaders between the 1940s and 1990s. In a 2020 survey, 23.8 percent of respondents picked Suharto as their favorite president, followed by Jokowi with 23.4 percent, and founding president Sukarno with 23.3 percent (Jakarta Post 2020). It remains to be seen whether this perception will change over time as Jokowi's presidency becomes part of history for Indonesians rather than a day-to-day experience. Should Jokowi's dynastic plans come to fruition at some point in the future, the collective memory of his rule is likely to be more persistent. If not, it is possible that Jokowi will face the same fate as Yudhoyono, who was wildly popular during much of his presidency but then disappeared to the margins of the political system and the nation's recollection. However, there is one weighty legacy Jokowi produced that Yudhoyono and other presidents didn't: as pointed out, by actively enthroning his successor, Jokowi became politically liable not only for his own decade in power, but also for whatever Prabowo would or would not deliver. Jokowi certainly hoped that this would add to his (self-perceived) positive legacy rather than harming it. But his protestations to

fight Prabowo if the latter returned to his old authoritarian ideas suggested that he had his doubts, too. In other words, Jokowi's overall legacy will have to be reevaluated, including against that of his predecessors, once the shape of the Prabowo presidency has firmed, and once the feasibility of Jokowi's dynastic scenarios has been tested.

In Southeast Asia, Jokowi stood out for the *stability* he brought to his country. But some of his regional peers claimed their place in history by bringing substantial change and the upheaval associated with challenging existing orders. Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra is a case in point. He built a powerful party for the 2001 elections, offered innovative populist policies that changed Thailand's electoral map, and challenged the monarchy and the military as the country's traditional power-holders. The latter overthrew him in 2006, highlighting just how seriously they took the "Thaksinization" of Thailand's regime (McCargo and Pathmanand 2005). Since then, Thaksin's party has survived several dissolutions and one more coup; three of his relatives have been prime minister (including his daughter, who took the post in 2024); and his brand of politics remains influential. Thus, Thaksin transformed Thailand by entrenching his party and introducing a particular style of populist appeal. In neighboring Cambodia, the influence of longtime leader Hun Sen was even stronger. Building his career since the Khmer Rouge era and the Vietnamese occupation, he ruled Cambodia for decades. Swaying between periods of democratic opening and autocratic hardening, he tailored the political system to his needs. This ultimately led to unrest and the banning of the opposition (Sutton 2018). Without blinking, Hun Sen installed his son as his successor to rule a country recovering from long phases of internal conflict. Hence, as creators and reformers of regimes, Thaksin and Hun Sen left enduring legacies, for better and for worse.

As indicated before, Jokowi also grabbed fewer headlines than some of his fellow middle-power leaders in the rest of the world. In Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva was a key figure of Brazil's economic and political rise. In his first stint in office, between 2003 and 2011, he presided over accelerated GDP growth and poverty reduction, and he turned his Workers' Party into a formidable political machine (Power 2014). In 2022, he returned to end the rule of populist president Jair Bolsonaro. For more than 20 years, therefore, Lula was a defining protagonist of Brazilian politics and society. In India, Narendra Modi marked an era of religio-populist rule, developing his politicized Hindu movement and party into India's new power base (Aiyar 2019). Taking office in the same year as Jokowi, Modi reached higher GDP growth rates than Jokowi, allowing India—as we recognized—to claim a larger

share of the world economy. Modi also gained more notoriety than Jokowi for producing a more impactful decline in democratic quality—India featured in almost all global democratic backsliding studies, while Indonesia only occasionally received a mention (Carothers and Hartnett 2024). We also repeatedly referred to Erdoğan, who single-handedly changed Türkiye's institutional landscape from parliamentarism to presidentialism, built his party as the country's predominant political organization, and kept NATO on its toes with frequent interventions (Bechev 2022). Like Modi, he was a poster boy for global democratic backsliding, presenting a model for how personalized autocratization in formerly functioning parliamentary democracies worked. In sum, Lula, Modi, and Erdoğan are more likely than Jokowi to be remembered for their era-defining and regime-changing impact on their countries and the world.

But while Jokowi's inconspicuousness cost him a spot in the exclusive club of limelight movers and shakers, it made him arguably more representative of his time than many of his more prominent peers. Indeed, his proud averageness and ability to voice his society's prioritization of development over institutional deepening embodied the majority of 21st-century leaders in the Global South and beyond. Both at home and abroad, Jokowi worked quietly. At home, he managed to consolidate his grip over the political system without creating the kind of news-making turmoil that Modi or Erdoğan caused. Abroad, Jokowi carved out a space of reliability for Indonesia that did not translate into much geopolitical weight but allowed the country to be a respected member of the international community. Understanding a political actor like Jokowi, therefore, was crucial for other world leaders, especially in the West. They did not always do a good job at it. In Western capitals, governments often believed that Jokowi's Indonesia would side with them against China and Russia simply because of their joint identity as democracies. Jokowi, echoing other leaders in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, could not have cared less about this imagined ideational bond. Instead, he wanted to see meaningful commitments to Indonesia's development. However, Jokowi was misunderstood in the non-Western world, too. In Beijing, there was a misguided belief that loans and investments could "buy" Jokowi and make him tolerate China's aggressive actions in the North Natuna and South China Seas. But while Jokowi did not protest loudly, he ensured that Indonesia would continue to keep its distance from China, much to Beijing's dismay.

Jokowi also encapsulated the main trend marking the world's democracies today. In that trend, democracies no longer lose their supremacy through coups, mass mobilization, or sudden breakdowns. They also rarely deterio-

rate through spectacular acts of executive aggrandizement, as in Türkiye. Rather, they erode without the country's citizens or international observers even noticing (Bermeo 2016). In Indonesia, Jokowi weakened democracy while expanding his own political control, but citizens not only approved but found his actions to be compatible with democracy. Working within the existing institutional parameters of democracy rather than supplanting them, Jokowi succeeded in upholding the image of continued democratic competitiveness. With this approach, he also largely escaped the attention of concerned democracy watchers abroad: indexes identified a decline in the quality of Indonesian democracy, but mostly found no democratic collapse. Hence, Jokowi's political mastery lay in systematically increasing his authority without making it look like a power grab and provoking destabilizing protest. But unsurprisingly, Jokowi's success created hubris, too. He misread the room when pushing for an extension of his term and had to withdraw silently. He then cashed in his political capital to install a successor he could not trust and invest in a dynastic future that was uncertain. His presidency, then, was a rich laboratory to study the current state of global democracy and geopolitics. Jokowi's story of power and hubris, democracy and autocratic temptation, developmental obsession and institutional indifference, was an Indonesian story—but it was also a story of a world in which once-firm categories have become increasingly blurred.

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IN CONCLUDING, we must return to Habermas's premise of historical evaluation that we laid out at the beginning of this chapter. Political actors, he argued, must be taken for what they were *and* for what they were not. The same has to apply to Jokowi. He was a Machiavellian mechanic of power whose actions undermined democracy—but he was no dictator who had his adversaries thrown out of windows or put into labor camps. He was, in the Indonesian context, no Suharto. He was narrowly focused on the economy in his foreign policy and thus failed to develop a more value-based international identity for Indonesia—but he refrained from ultranationalist posturing and cared for the stability of the regional and global order. In that sense, he was not the late-stage Sukarno of the 1960s. In combating COVID-19, he was initially attracted to quackery—but unlike some of his populist peers, he was prepared to learn from and listen to his scientific advisers. On that account, he was not Trump or Bolsonaro. Jokowi clearly wanted a third term and tried many things to achieve it—but he dropped the idea when he sensed solid opposition. He was, therefore, not Bolivia's Evo Morales, whose insistence on staying in power beyond constitutional limits triggered

his own fall and threw the country into disarray. All this made Jokowi a less flamboyant figure than many of his colleagues, whose prominence bordered on notoriety. It was Jokowi's particular blending of a stubborn focus on goals and a strategic willingness to moderate that made up the core of his political persona. In Jokowi's decade, Indonesians liked what they saw. Whether they will still be so kind to him in the future will largely depend on what Jokowi's handpicked successor will do to them.

EPILOGUE

"Just Sit Tight"

Jokowi in the Early Prabowo Presidency

In February 2025, I had dinner in Jakarta with an Indonesian researcher who wanted to apply for the PhD program at my university. The place was a traditional seafood restaurant on the margins of Jakarta's central elite suburb of Menteng. It had operated since 1960, and now had a slightly run-down feel to it. As we were enjoying fish and other delicacies, Jokowi's son Gibran—who at that point had been vice president for about three and a half months—walked in. I expected a commotion to ensue, as I had seen so often when Jokowi entered a public space: there would be shouts of "Jokowi!," excited hand-waving, and pushing and shoving to greet the president or even get a selfie with him. For more than a decade, this had been a standard routine of his rule, and one that was fundamental to the endurance of his rock-solid popularity. But Gibran's appearance couldn't have been more different: none of the diners said anything; nobody got up to greet him or ask for a photo; there wasn't even a sudden moment of silence that often results when a celebrity enters a public venue and patrons are unsure what to do. What's more, Gibran strategically avoided eye contact with the restaurant's guests and staff. Far from exhibiting the trait of a professional politician—like his father—who would self-confidently make an entry and lap up the public's excitement, Gibran avoided it like an inconvenient burden. For an hour, he sat down with his family and ate, with his guards standing in the back—not once did they have to prevent people from approaching the vice president. When Gibran left the restaurant, he again did so without looking at anyone; the guests reciprocated.

Gibran's deflated and deflating outing on that evening was an accurate reflection of how the vice president and his father had fared during the first few months of the Prabowo presidency. Just two weeks earlier, an opinion poll had established that if a presidential election had been held then, 69 percent would have voted for Prabowo—and only 4 percent for Gibran. Gibran even finished behind Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo. The sobering numbers indicated that the scenario that Jokowi had envisaged for Gibran's role in the Prabowo government wasn't working. In July 2024, he had told me that "Prabowo will focus on international developments and the formulation of broad policy outlines for the government, and as president, he will be the sole decision-maker; but Gibran can go to the grassroots, where the people are."[1] In other words, the plan for Gibran was to build a rapport with the people, which would add to the popularity that Jokowi as head of the dynasty had already built. But Prabowo's assistants had anticipated this plan and successfully forestalled it: when Gibran launched a self-promoting online application called "Report to Your Brother Vice President" in November 2024, Prabowo's aides called him to order. The application, through which citizens could report problems and ask for a resolution, was clearly designed to boost Gibran's popularity as a quasi-independent political figure. After the reprimand, Gibran had turned to some senior political figures and asked for advice about what to do. As one such figure told me, "Gibran visited my house and said he was confused about what he could and could not do as VP. I told him to just sit tight, and only do what Prabowo tells him to. I said: 'you're still young.'"[2]

Moreover, Prabowo had marked his early presidency with some significant policy reversals. While he continued to emphasize his good relations with Jokowi, frequently appeared with him in public, and still heaped praise on him, Prabowo threw many of his predecessor's signature policies overboard. One related to infrastructure. Prabowo declared in January 2025 that he wanted the private sector to take the lead on infrastructure projects—replacing the state-owned enterprises that had driven infrastructure building under Jokowi. Indeed, Prabowo cut the budget of the public works ministry by more than half. Most importantly for Jokowi, the new president reduced the government's commitment to Nusantara. In January 2025, it was announced that 48 trillion Rupiah (US$3 billion) would be spent on Nusantara in the next five years—or just under 10 trillion per year (US$600 million). In comparison, Jokowi had spent 27 trillion Rupiah (US$1.7 billion) in 2023 and 43 trillion (US$2.7 billion) in 2024 alone. Crucially, Prabowo also altered the narrative on the project: he now talked about the completion of Nusantara as a "political capital" and no longer as an ultramodern

city of 1.9 million people by 2045. Prabowo, it seemed, saw Nusantara as a useful site in which occasional parliament sessions could be held away from the protest-prone and unruly megacity of Jakarta, but he had no intention of permanently moving there. Consequently, Prabowo also announced that civil servants would no longer start relocating to Nusantara in early 2025—that plan was postponed indefinitely. Watching these changes from the sidelines, Jokowi stayed quiet.

Prabowo also made key revisions to Indonesia's foreign policy stance under Jokowi. For example, he announced Indonesia's entry into the BRICS alliance in early 2025. Recall that Jokowi had refrained from joining the group because he saw no benefits in such a move, and on the contrary, feared reprisals from the West. Prabowo dismissed such concerns, saying that Indonesia should be able to become a member of any group it views as potentially beneficial. Even more controversially, Prabowo visited Beijing in November 2024 and agreed to a communiqué with Xi Jinping that called for joint development in areas of "overlapping claims"—such as in the North Natuna or South China Sea. With a stroke of the pen, Prabowo had given away one of Indonesia's most consistent foreign policy positions: namely, that there was no claim in the South China Sea that required negotiations with anyone, including Beijing. Indonesia's possession of its territory, and control of its EEZ, were confirmed by UNCLOS—or so Jakarta had said for decades. To be sure, Prabowo's moves did *not* signify a strategic departure from Indonesia's nonalignment and hedging position vis-à-vis the great powers. It is more likely that Prabowo wanted to put his own mark on Indonesia's foreign policy, and bring movement into the long-stalled discussions between ASEAN and China over the South China Sea. To his inner circle, he had expressed interest in being one of the first foreign leaders to visit Trump in Washington just after the latter's inauguration to a second term. He was persuaded to aim for a mid-2025 visit instead. But it was clear that Prabowo continued to view the United States as an indispensable part of the geopolitical puzzle, and he wanted to stay on good terms.

Jokowi struggled with his apparent loss of influence. Prior to his departure from the presidency, he had publicly stated that he would retire to his hometown of Solo and no longer have a role in politics. And indeed, he did return to his house in Solo as his main residence. But he quickly started a routine of frequent visits to Jakarta to meet with former subordinates. He often used social occasions such as weddings as a pretext for coming to Jakarta. Jokowi would then innocently ask for a meeting with Prabowo, too, pointing out that he "happened" to be in town. Initially, Prabowo engaged in this game. But when Jokowi again asked to see him prior to a wedding in

January 2025, Prabowo excused himself and asked his predecessor to meet with a senior aide instead. Jokowi subsequently resorted to using former associates in Prabowo's government to relay his messages to the president. Perhaps even more frustratingly for Jokowi, Prabowo handled his relationship with him with great Machiavellian cleverness. Prabowo refrained from an open confrontation and upheld the façade of a unique alliance between a sitting president and his predecessor. Behind the scenes, however, Prabowo dismantled key elements of Jokowi's legacy and narrowed the latter's opportunities for continued interventions. In fact, Jokowi felt that the new government was using him as a scapegoat for the country's problems. In a speech in front of Prabowo and his party in February 2025, Jokowi did not hold back: "I don't see anyone who has the courage to criticize [Prabowo]. I have become the target. If there is something wrong, it's Jokowi's [fault]. How about you criticize Mister Prabowo for a change?" (Subarkah 2025), he asked an awkwardly laughing audience.

The ex-president dealt with his frustrations through a mixture of thinly veiled threats, conversations with allies, and attempts to sustain his popularity in his former base. In a sit-down interview with senior journalist Najwa Shihab in Solo in February 2025, Jokowi dropped a hint that he might form his own political party. The fact that he allowed this part of the interview to be broadcast—while other parts were off the record—suggested that he wanted his message to get out to the political elite. It could only be understood as a warning that if the elite continued to marginalize him, he would take action. This came after Prabowo had reportedly asked him not to take over the leadership of Golkar, and after his former nominating party PDI-P had formally thrown him out in December 2024. But the elite's reaction to Jokowi's announcement was mostly indifferent, and Jokowi later poured cold water on the idea of establishing a new party.[3] Another outlet for Jokowi's indignation was frequent phone calls from Solo to his associates in Jakarta. As one of his former ministers recounted, "he often calls and complains that senior politicians now rarely come to see him. And he told me that the palace had warned him not to be too transparent in his efforts to beef up his popularity."[4] The latter was a reference to Jokowi's post-presidency activities: he often visited villages; did a motorcycle tour through the countryside; and attended events headlined as "nostalgic meetings"—all posted on his social media accounts. When Jokowi asked his former minister what to do about the warnings by the palace about these activities, the latter proposed that "you can do all of these things, but perhaps you shouldn't put them up on social media."

Jokowi could take comfort from the fact that many of his grassroots sup-

porters stuck with him. In the first few months after his retirement, there was a constant stream of visitors to his house in Solo: housewives, farmers, villagers, workers. They lined up from early in the morning to greet Jokowi and have a picture taken with him. Jokowi did not always look thrilled when meeting his fans, but he knew that this served his overall goal of maintaining at least some of his influence. Indeed, as long as Prabowo believed that fully cutting off Jokowi would damage his own popularity, the former president could be certain of being given some role in the current regime, however limited. Surely, continued demonstrations of his surviving electoral attractiveness would also protect the seventeen ministers from the Jokowi era who Prabowo had appointed to his own (significantly enlarged) cabinet. In making these appointments, Prabowo had fulfilled one of the most important promises he had made to Jokowi in his famous mid-2023 letter—but he was under no obligation to keep everyone in their positions throughout his first term in office. As president, he could reshuffle the cabinet anytime. Thus, the challenge for Jokowi was to preserve and nurture his popularity in a way that would be visible enough for Prabowo to keep him on board—but wouldn't appear so aggressive that the latter would deem this post-presidency activism a political threat. Gibran's application launch and Jokowi's tours belonged in the latter category—but benign visits by adoring former voters seemed like something that the Prabowo government could live with and even encourage.

What, then, is left of the hopes that Jokowi had harbored for his post-presidency when fighting so strongly for Prabowo as his successor? While the first few months of the Prabowo presidency delivered some disillusionment to Jokowi, it is important to keep things in perspective. As argued in this book, Jokowi himself had viewed Prabowo merely as the best available option after other alternatives fell through. The reality of Prabowo's rule simply drove home this point in a manner that must have been painful, but not terribly shocking to Jokowi. Neither could the reemergence of some of Prabowo's reactionary views—for instance, he again proposed the abolition of direct local elections—have been a major surprise or worry for Jokowi. We noted that Jokowi deemed it unnecessary to seek any guarantees from Prabowo on protecting democratic achievements, highlighting the former's prioritization of other issues. Still, anybody who knew how to read Jokowi's body language would have noticed Jokowi's restlessness and unease when answering Najwa Shihab's questions on how his post-presidency was going. Whatever the extent of gratitude he had expected from Prabowo, it was now clear to Jokowi that the outcome was close to the minimum. Not more, but also not less—given that Prabowo could have chosen to sideline

him even more profoundly. Hence, as in his previous calculations, Jokowi's main investment in the Prabowo regime is still his son Gibran. And while Prabowo has effectively caged Gibran in and made him nearly irrelevant in the realm of policymaking, Jokowi's son continues to be a heartbeat away from the presidency. For Jokowi, this remains as good as it gets, all the setbacks notwithstanding.

Notes

Preface

1. I also conducted one interview with Jokowi in September 2014, a month before his inauguration. I draw from this interview, but obviously it was not part of the series of interviews specifically carried out for this book.

2. Hasto Kristiyanto, an ally-turned-foe of Jokowi, remarked that "actually, Jokowi turns both to the left *and* the right, that's the problem." Interview with Hasto Kristiyanto, Jakarta, January 29, 2025.

3. Cultural observer Sukidi (2024) even described Jokowi as a "Javanese Pinocchio," without mentioning him by name.

Chapter 1

1. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.

2. Sana Jaffrey and Eve Warburton (2025) delivered the first post-presidency volume on Jokowi's period in office, bringing together numerous contributions presented at a conference in Canberra in September 2024.

3. A useful chronological account of Jokowi's first term can be found in Almuttaqi (2020).

4. Even in 1986, a quarter of a century after Jokowi's birth, only 22 percent of Indonesians were born in a hospital (Nababan et al. 2018).

5. Notes during a Jokowi campaign speech, Bogor, June 8, 2014.

6. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.

7. Under Suharto, it was effectively the central regime that appointed local government heads, although formally a vote in their territory's legislature was held. After his fall, between 1999 and 2004 local parliaments freely voted for government leaders in the region, but rampant bribery meant that often the nominees with the biggest financial resources won.

8. Jokowi confirmed that without this switch to a direct electoral system he would not have been able to run. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
9. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, September 9, 2014.
10. Interview with Sandiaga Uno, online, September 30, 2023.
11. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
12. Confidential interview.
13. According to Jokowi, Prabowo, too, asked him to be his running mate: "I told him that he had to talk to my party about this, and it ended there." Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
14. Interview with Jokowi, September 9, 2014.
15. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
16. In a 2020 Indikator poll, 48 percent of respondents agreed with the move, while 45 percent were against it (Indikator 2023, 55). The numbers in the Indikator polls on the new capital later improved somewhat, but other pollsters recorded continuously low levels of support (CNN Indonesia 2023e).
17. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
18. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, June 12, 2024.
19. Interview with Sukardi Rinakit, Balikpapan, September 23, 2023.
20. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
21. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Lampung, March 21, 2014.
22. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
23. Interview with Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta, September 14, 2023.
24. Under Suharto, the MPR consisted of the members of parliament and other delegates appointed by the president. Every five years, the MPR reelected Suharto as president and issued policy guidelines that had a higher status than laws. After 1998, the role of the MPR began to change. It initially still elected the president, but its role was subsequently reduced. With the introduction of direct presidential elections in 2004, its remaining key authority has been to amend the constitution. In today's polity, the MPR consists of the members of parliament and of the senate-style Regional Representative Council (DPD).

Chapter 2

1. Notes by the author, Sanur, April 9, 2015.
2. Notes by the author, Sanur, August 8, 2019.
3. Confidential interview.
4. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, September 9, 2014.
5. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
6. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
7. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
8. For instance, after the 2024 elections, Jokowi pressured PAN and other parties to publicly reject the proposal of PDI-P to establish a parliamentary investigation committee to look at allegations of fraud in the electoral process. The committee was never established.
9. Interview with Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta, September 14, 2023.

10. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
11. Interview with Sandiaga Uno, online, September 30, 2023.
12. Interview with Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta, September 14, 2023.
13. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
14. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
15. Interview with Tito Karnavian, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
16. Interview with Tito Karnavian, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
17. Tito had arrested Rizieq in an earlier case, and they had remained in touch.
18. Interview with Tito Karnavian, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
19. Interview with Tito Karnavian, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
20. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
21. Interview with Teten Masduki, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
22. Interview with Tito Karnavian, Jakarta, September 19, 2023.
23. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
24. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
25. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
26. Interview with Ace Hasan, Jakarta, July 11, 2023.
27. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
28. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
29. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
30. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
31. After the nomination of Prabowo and Gibran, Pramono asked Jokowi to exclude him from events that PDI-P could view as offensive, such as when the president distributed social aid. For PDI-P, and many others, these occasions were hidden campaign events for Prabowo and Gibran. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, June 12, 2024.
32. Pramono resigned in September 2024, one month before the official end of the presidential term, in order to run for the governorship of Jakarta. He won that race.
33. I observed this directly on a three-day trip to Papua with Luhut in June 2016.
34. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, September 15, 2023.
35. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, September 15, 2023.
36. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
37. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
38. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, September 15, 2023.
39. Confidential interview.
40. Interview with Airlangga Hartarto, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
41. Interview with Agus Guwimang Kartasasmita, Jakarta, August 14, 2023.
42. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, September 15, 2023.
43. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
44. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
45. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
46. These views were consistent throughout his presidency. Jokowi expressed very similar sentiments just before assuming office. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, September 9, 2014.
47. Jokowi sent instructions, through his adjutant, to Golkar executives to support Novanto. Interview with Agus Gumiwang Kartasamita, Jakarta, August 14, 2023.

48. We noted earlier that as president, Jokowi held the power to officially recognize new party boards, or to withhold this recognition. As Jokowi had used this power to undermine the previous Golkar chairman, Aburizal Bakrie, it was clear to most party elites that they needed to appoint a leader who enjoyed the backing of the president. This effectively handed Jokowi the right to select the leader of the party. Otherwise, they would have faced more legal battles with the government. This added to a traditional tendency in Golkar to seek close proximity to the incumbent president in order to gain access to resources.
49. As in the case of Novanto's selection, Golkar delegates selected Airlangga because they knew that he was Jokowi's preferred candidate.
50. Interview with Bima Arya Sugiarto, Bogor, June 23, 2022.
51. Confidential interview.
52. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
53. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
54. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
55. Interview with Zulkifli Hasan, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
56. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.

Chapter 3

1. Notes by the author, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
2. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
3. Interview with Budi Karya Sumadi, Jakarta, October 4, 2023.
4. Sandiaga Uno, later tourism minister, and Usman Hamid, a human rights activist, both remembered attending Jokowi speeches on this issue in the early 2010s. Interview with Sandiaga Uno, online, September 30, 2023; and Usman Hamid, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
5. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
6. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
7. Interview with Chatib Basri, Jakarta, October 6, 2023.
8. Interview with Basuki Hadimuljono, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
9. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
10. Interview with Budi Karya Sumadi, Jakarta, October 4, 2023.
11. Interview with Chatib Basri, Jakarta, October 6, 2023.
12. Interview with Erick Thohir, Jakarta, September 18, 2023.
13. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
14. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
15. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
16. Speech by Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023, notes by the author.
17. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, October 5, 2023.
18. Interview with Basuki Hadimuljono, Nusantara, September 21, 2023.
19. Interview with Basuki Hadimuljono, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
20. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
21. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.

22. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
23. Interview with Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Jakarta, October 3, 2023.
24. To make the milestones more palatable to Jokowi, Sri Mulyani explained to the president that availability of money was not the most pressing problem (although of course it was a big issue, too). The more complex difficulty was spending the funds—that is, meeting the milestones. She told him that "with the money we spent on COVID-19 relief, we could have built several new capitals." In 2023, Sri Mulyani made around 30 trillion available for the new capital, but by September of that year, only 10 percent of that had been spent. Interview with Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Jakarta, October 3, 2023.
25. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
26. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
27. *Tempo* magazine listed all these issues in a detailed cover story in June 2024 (Tempo 2024a).
28. Interviews with Bambang Susantono, Jakarta, October 13, 2023; and Dhony Rahajoe, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
29. Interview with Sukardi Rinakit, Jakarta, July 3, 2023.
30. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
31. Interview with Faisal Basri, Jakarta, August 28, 2023.
32. Faisal died in September 2024, and Luhut paid his respects by visiting his house.
33. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, June 6, 2024. Seto was present during the interview as well.
34. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
35. In the literature, "down-streaming" is usually referred to as resource-based industrialization (RBI). This book opted for "down-streaming" because it is closer to the Indonesian term *hilirisasi*, which is the term widely used in Indonesian policy circles.
36. Musk's engagement with Malaysia soon ran into trouble, too. While Tesla opened an office in Putrajaya in October 2023, it subsequently slowed down its expansion project.
37. Interview with Chatib Basri, Jakarta, October 6, 2023.
38. In this and another speech, he compared the EU to the Dutch East India Company (VOC), which had colonized parts of the archipelago in the 17th and 18th centuries. See Anggela (2023).
39. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
40. Interview with Faisal Basri, Jakarta, August 28, 2023. See also China Labour Watch (2023).
41. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
42. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
43. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, October 5, 2023.
44. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
45. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
46. Interview with Hal Hill, Canberra, July 25, 2023.
47. Confidential interview.
48. Interview with Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Jakarta, October 3, 2023.

49. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
50. Visit with Jokowi to a market, Samarinda, September 21, 2023.
51. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
52. Interview with Sri Mulyani Indrawati, Jakarta, October 3, 2023.
53. Interview with Arif Budimanta, August 8, 2023.
54. Interview with Douglas Ramage, Jakarta, July 8, 2023.
55. Interview with Jeffrie Geovanie, Jakarta, October 12, 2023.
56. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
57. In fact, the tax-revenue-to-GDP ratio reached its lowest point in half a century under Jokowi, at just above 8 percent in 2021, in the middle of the COVID-19 crisis. But even prior to the pandemic, it had hit record lows.
58. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, October 5, 2023.
59. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
60. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
61. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, October 5, 2023.
62. Interview with Chatib Basri, Jakarta, October 6, 2023.
63. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
64. Interview with Chatib Basri, Canberra, August 3, 2024.

Chapter 4

1. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
2. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
3. To be sure, Prabowo's concerns about China's rise weren't so much focused on a possible invasion of Indonesian territory by Beijing's forces. Rather, he feared that China's growing power increased the risk of a Sino-American war in Indonesia's neighborhood, with supply lines potentially closed and Indonesian territory used by combatants in the conflict. For him, all of this required a significant upgrade of Indonesia's military capacity.
4. Later explanations pointed out that the plan covered a period to 2044, but the reference of Prabowo's spokesman to a "relatively short time" indicated that the defense minister did not mind the interpretation of an urgent plan for a fast and radical increase in military spending.
5. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
6. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
7. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023. Jokowi mentioned a lower figure in the interview, but this was inconsistent with the finance ministry's data. The official number is therefore used here instead.
8. Interview with Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta, September 14, 2023.
9. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
10. Discussion with a senior Indonesian diplomat, Canberra, July 19, 2023.
11. Notes by the author, Pantai Serangan, Bali, September 16, 2023.
12. Notes by the author, Denpasar, Bali, September 16, 2023.
13. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Pantai Serangan, Bali, September 16, 2023.
14. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.

15. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
16. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
17. Interview with Retno Marsudi, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
18. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
19. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
20. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
21. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
22. Erick Thohir emphasized at that time that Jokowi was interested in an extension to Surabaya, but wanted to discuss better terms on "ownership, interest rates and other things."
23. In both the cases of Luhut and Prabowo, it is important not to overstate their respective leanings. Luhut had close ties to the United States as well, just as Prabowo tended to express anti-American views when talking to Russian and Chinese government officials. He also built anti-American rhetoric into some of his populist speeches. The discussion here is more focused on the roles that Luhut and Prabowo played under the Jokowi government in placating the two sides of the great power divide.
24. Interview with Prabowo Subianto, Jakarta, September 14, 2023.
25. Confidential interview.
26. Confidential interview.
27. An extra hurdle was that firms applying for tax credits could not have significant investment from "foreign entities of concern," which included China. Given the strong investment by Chinese companies in the Indonesian nickel industry, this made most of the country's nickel ineligible for US import tax credits.
28. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
29. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
30. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
31. As we will discuss in this book's epilogue, Prabowo decided to join BRICS upon becoming president in late 2024.
32. Notes by the author, Kyoto, November 6, 2023.
33. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
34. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
35. Interview with Retno Marsudi, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
36. Interview with Retno Marsudi, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.
37. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
38. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
39. Interview with Retno Marsudi, September 12, 2023.
40. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
41. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
42. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023. Sukma said Jokowi came to understand that "ASEAN was important but not hugely important."
43. Interview with Retno Marsudi, September 12, 2023.
44. Interview with Rizal Sukma, Serpong, August 16, 2023.
45. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
46. Interview with Retno Marsudi, Jakarta, September 12, 2023.

Chapter 5

1. Confidential interview.
2. Confidential interview.
3. Interview with Budi Karya Sumadi, Jakarta, October 4, 2023.
4. Interview with Budi Karya Sumadi, Jakarta, October 4, 2023.
5. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
6. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
7. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
8. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
9. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
10. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
11. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
12. Interwiew with Airlangga Hartarto, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
13. Interview with Pramono Anung, September 12, 2023; and Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
14. Interview with Tom Lembong, Jakarta, August 10, 2023.
15. Lembong was arrested by the KPK in late October 2024 over a corruption case related to his tenure in the trade ministry. There was a widespread view in the political elite that Jokowi held a grudge against Lembong over his frequent criticisms of him, and that the former minister's arrest was therefore politically motivated. Lembong was released in August 2025 and all charges were dropped.
16. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
17. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
18. Interwiew with Airlangga Hartarto, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
19. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
20. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
21. Interview with Pratikno, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
22. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
23. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
24. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
25. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
26. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
27. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
28. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
29. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
30. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
31. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
32. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
33. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
34. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
35. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
36. Interview with Budi Gunadi Sadikin, Jakarta, August 23, 2023.
37. The source of Jokowi's claim was a presentation by a health ministry spokeswoman on September 12, 2021, in which she presented data from the "Our World in Data" website. These numbers, in turn, were taken from Johns Hopkins University's COVID-19 database (Antara 2021).
38. Material from the following paragraphs was first published in Mietzner (2022).

Chapter 6

1. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
2. In April 2024, a civil lawsuit against Gerung filed by a Jokowi supporter was dismissed in court.
3. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
4. In 2025, V-Dem put Indonesia into a "grey zone" between electoral democracy and electoral autocracy. It warned, however, that Indonesia's placement in this category carried the risk of "misclassification" (V-Dem 2025, 13).
5. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
6. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
7. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
8. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, September 15, 2014.
9. Interview with Sukardi Rinakit, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.
10. Interview with Amrih Widodo, online, October 1, 2023.
11. Interview with Amrih Widodo, online, October 1, 2023.
12. Interview with Usman Hamid, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
13. Interview with Usman Hamid, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
14. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
15. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
16. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
17. Interview with Usman Hamid, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
18. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
19. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
20. Interview with Andreas Harsono, Human Rights Watch, Jakarta, August 15, 2023.
21. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
22. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
23. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
24. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
25. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
26. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, April 29, 2015.
27. Interview with Abraham Samad, Jakarta, September 11, 2023.
28. Interview with Titi Anggraini, online, October 13, 2023.
29. He was eventually dismissed in July 2024 after being found guilty by an ethics panel of sexually harassing a colleague.
30. Interview with Nuraida Mokhsen, online, April 4, 2024.
31. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
32. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
33. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
34. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
35. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
36. One poll suggested that 45 percent of Indonesians supported the revisions of the KPK law, with 39 percent opposed (Aco 2019). Other polls painted a different picture but still assured the president that a majority did not care: in one survey, only 60 percent of respondents said that they followed news on the issue, and 71 percent of those agreed that the revisions weakened the KPK (Riana 2019). Only 42 percent of the total population, then, were critical of the move.

Chapter 7

1. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.
2. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
3. According to Pramono Anung, Jokowi informed him on a trip to in Beijing a day or two after the court's decision that he decided to support the Prabowo-Gibran pair, and asked him to set up a meeting with Megawati to discuss it. (Megawati replied that she wasn't interested in such a meeting.) This would mean that Jokowi did not wait for the polling numbers on the court decision to make his call. However, other reports suggested that Jokowi became doubtful in Beijing and paused any action on the matter. It was only after his return from his overseas trip on October 21 that he met with his pollsters and made his final decision. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, June 12, 2024.
4. Confidential interview.
5. We noted that Luhut and Pratikno had very different interpretations of what the president wanted. According to his chief of staff, Moeldoko, he learned in the military that superiors can mean three different things when they respond to a question with "yes" [ya]: "It can mean 'yes,' 'maybe' or 'no.' Jokowi was like that, too. But I later understood that if the president really wanted something, he would ask: 'why hasn't that been done yet?'" Interview with Moeldoko, Jakarta, September 18, 2023.
6. Confidential interview.
7. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
8. At the PDI-P congress in 2019 in Bali, the party's internal accountability report lamented that there still was "no correlation between the elected president and vice-president and the party that nominated him" (PDI-P 2019, 4).
9. Interview with Charles Honoris, Jakarta, June 5, 2024.
10. Interview with Mahfud MD, Jakarta, August 18, 2023.
11. I accompanied Ganjar on this tour for five days in late March and early April 2014.
12. Interview with Andi Widjajanto, Jakarta, August 30, 2023.
13. Interview with Ganjar Pranowo, Semarang, June 14, 2022.
14. Interview with Hasto Kristiyanto, Jakarta, June 28, 2022.
15. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
16. Interview with Ganjar Pranowo, Semarang, June 14, 2022.
17. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
18. Interview with Ganjar Pranowo, Semarang, June 14, 2022.
19. In 1962, Sukarno had rejected the participation of Israel in the Asian Games in Jakarta, and Indonesia was excluded from the Olympic Games as a result.
20. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
21. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
22. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
23. Interview with Ganjar Pranowo, Jakarta, September 18, 2023.
24. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
25. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
26. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
27. Interview with Ganjar Pranowo, Sanur, June 17, 2023.

28. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
29. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
30. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
31. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
32. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 10, 2023.
33. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
34. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, June 6, 2024. This vote, however, only occurred in October. It is very likely that Jokowi had already made up his mind on putting Gibran forward at that time. Accordingly, the narrative that Jokowi endorsed Gibran's candidacy because Prabowo's coalition would have broken up if he didn't—which the president himself told visitors, too—appears to be part of the justifications he used to defend promoting his son.
35. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
36. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 16, 2023.
37. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
38. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
39. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
40. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Denpasar, September 15, 2023.
41. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
42. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, June 13, 2024.
43. Interview with Pratikno and Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
44. Prior to 2024, local executive elections were not held at the same time. But in 2016, it was decided that the practice of holding these elections on different dates would be phased out, with the first joint elections to be organized in late 2024. This meant that there were gaps between the end of the terms of many elected officials and the 2024 local election date. This gap was filled by putting temporary officeholders in place, appointed by the president.
45. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, June 12, 2024.
46. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
47. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, February 16, 2024.
48. Interviews with Jokowi, Jakarta, October 14, 2023, and February 16, 2024.
49. Interview with Pramono Anung, Jakarta, June 12, 2024.
50. As noted, V-Dem classified Indonesia in 2025 as being in a grey zone between electoral democracy and autocracy. This decline in Indonesia's V-Dem assessment was largely based on an evaluation of the 2024 elections.
51. Interview with Bahlil Lahadalia, Jakarta, June 13, 2024.

Conclusion

1. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
2. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
3. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
4. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
5. Interview with Jokowi, Bogor, August 11, 2023.
6. Interview with Basuki Hadimoeljono, Jakarta, October 14, 2023.

7. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
8. Interview with Luhut Pandjaitan, Jakarta, June 6, 2024.
9. Interview with Jokowi, Nusantara, September 22, 2023.

Epilogue

1. Interview with Jokowi, Jakarta, July 19, 2024.
2. Confidential interview.
3. He eventually decided to join the political party headed by his son Kaesang, the PSI.
4. Confidential interview.

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