

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **REVIEW OF MARCUS MIETZNER, *REINVENTING ASIAN POPULISM: JOKOWI'S RISE, DEMOCRACY, AND POLITICAL CONTESTATION IN INDONESIA*. HONOLULU: EAST-WEST CENTER, 2015. 74PP.**

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The election of Joko Widodo (or better known by his nickname "Jokowi") as Indonesia's seventh president in the 2014 presidential election marked a milestone in the country's young democracy. For the first time, a businessman-turned-politician who was not related to the usual clutch of political and business dynasties in Indonesia was elected as the president. Furthermore, Jokowi was the first head of state who used to assume the office of local government head. Hence, Marcus Mietzner's monograph is a timely contribution to an understanding of the factors behind the rise of Jokowi to the presidency.

This monograph presents the dynamics of the electoral contest between two populists, i.e. Jokowi and Prabowo Subianto, during the 2014 presidential election in Indonesia. It is divided into nine sections. In the first section, Mietzner introduces three major schools of thought commonly used by scholars to interpret post-Suharto Indonesian politics. The first school focuses on the growing power of oligarchic and predatory forces in the country's politics, economy and society. This school is also known as the oligarchy theory. Most oligarchy theorists argue that the power of oligarchic and predatory forces is so strong and deeply entrenched that it is impossible for substantial reform to take place without oligarchic approval and support. The second school of thought interprets the patterns of post-Suharto Indonesian politics based on the cartelisation model. Cartelisation scholars propose that political parties in Indonesia were collaborating instead of competing against each other in the post-Suharto era. This can be seen from the formation of the great, inclusivist "rainbow" coalitions under the presidency of Megawati Sukarnoputri (2001-2004) and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014). Such coalitions were formed to distribute "the state's

patronage resources among [their] members" (p. 7). This had deprived voters' opportunity to punish incumbents who were not well-performed and to vote in alternative leaders. The third school of thought adopts a "pluralist" approach and perceives post-Suharto Indonesian political sphere as an arena of incessant contestation between oligarchic, predatory forces and pro-reform groups. This contest also takes place "between conservative and reformist elements within the elite itself" (p. 8). Mietzner in the following sections examines these three approaches in interpreting the rise of Jokowi as the first president without any links to Suharto's New Order.

The second section deals with the decade-long rule of Yudhoyono. Mietzner argues that although Indonesia experienced political and economic stability under Yudhoyono's rule, he left many problems unsettled. These included corruption, the violation of religious minority rights, the increasing economic disparity between the rich and the poor, and the underdevelopment of the country's infrastructure. Mietzner points out that Yudhoyono's reluctance to push for major political and economic reforms was due to his oversized, inclusivist presidential coalition. The formation of such a coalition made decision-making tough since "[w]ith a diverse range of parties exploiting their ministries as sources of patronage, policy coordination across departments was close to impossible" (p. 15). This created a fertile ground for an anti-establishment figure to challenge Indonesian democracy. Indeed, Yudhoyono's second term saw the rise of ex-general Prabowo Subianto as a populist, anti-democratic politician who had the potential to claim the presidency in 2014.

The third section focuses on Prabowo's classic, confrontational populism. Mietzner points out that Prabowo believed that democracy was unsuitable for Indonesia as Indonesians were not yet mature enough to deal with democracy. Thus, he wanted to restore the country to its pre-democratic condition by abolishing various democratic innovations "including direct presidential elections and institutional checks and balances" (p. 22). Prabowo tried to appeal to the lower classes to gain power.

In the fourth section, Mietzner discusses the rise of Jokowi as an alternative populist leader who emphasised inclusivism, pragmatism and moderation. Mietzner maintains that the rise of Jokowi was due to the belief of the majority of voters in the existing democratic system and their longing for a renewal leadership that "did not come with authoritarian baggage" (p. 23). Mietzner describes Jokowi as a "polite" populist because the polarising rhetoric that is prevalent among Asian and Latin American populist strongmen is absent in his speeches and actions. During his mayorship in Solo

(2005-2012) and governorship in Jakarta (2012-2014), Jokowi focused on improving public services for the underprivileged. These included the introduction of free healthcare and education scholarship programmes for the poor. This made him increasingly popular among Indonesian voters. Consequently, by December 2014 he registered as the new favourite candidate for the presidential election in national opinion surveys.

However, Jokowi encountered various challenges and difficulties in securing the presidential nomination of his party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP- *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*) led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri. This is the central theme of the fifth section. Mietzner rightly points out that Indonesia's system disallows independent candidates to run for president. Moreover, new parties had to be registered with the Ministry of Justice and Human Rights about three years before the parliamentary election. Therefore, even if Jokowi wanted to form his political party and use it as his political vehicle to run for president, as Yudhoyono and Prabowo had done before the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, all the relevant deadlines for new party formation had passed by the time he wanted to contest in the presidential race. Hence, Jokowi had to rely on securing the nomination by Megawati's PDIP. However, Megawati initially was reluctant to support Jokowi as she and her daughter Puan Maharani were also keen to run for president. To gain Megawati's personal trust, Jokowi had to make use of every opportunity to demonstrate his submission and deference towards the former. Although this had eventually secured PDIP's nomination of Jokowi as its presidential candidate, it had "also damaged Jokowi's image as a tough populist keen to cut through old elite interests" (p. 31).

The sixth and seventh sections turn to the parliamentary elections and presidential contest in 2014 respectively. Mietzner argues that while PDIP received 18.95 percent of the total votes and became the largest party in parliament, it was below the expectations of PDIP leaders and Jokowi himself. Apart from the damage to Jokowi's image caused by his submissiveness toward Megawati, Mietzner attributes the failure of PDIP to gain a stable majority in parliament to Jokowi's lack of a programmatic platform for the parliamentary campaign and the lack of assistance to Jokowi's parliamentary campaign by most PDIP's central board members who did not support him. The lack of support from PDIP's senior leaders led to the organisational chaos that marked Jokowi's parliamentary campaign.

Although Jokowi later faced a concerted smear campaign launched by Prabowo's camp against him during the presidential election, and Prabowo had even overtaken him in some polls before the polling day, he eventually

defeated Prabowo with 53.15 percent of the votes against the latter's 46.85. Mietzner argues that Jokowi's victory was due to his large network of volunteers comprised middle-class professionals, the support from the rural poor as well as some oligarchic figures (such as media tycoon Surya Paloh, his running mate Jusuf Kalla, and Luhut Panjaitan, who was a former minister and general), and also the fact that the majority of voters were not in favour of the radical change in the political system that Prabowo proposed.

In the eight section, Mietzner describes various challenges Jokowi encountered in forming a new government. Apart from facing challenges from the parliament that was dominated by pro-Prabowo members, Jokowi also had to cater to the wishes of Megawati and his other backers by appointing people well-connected to his backers as cabinet ministers. But Mietzner also emphasises that Jokowi eventually decided to set some limits to the influence of his backers. For instance, he dropped the candidacy of Budi Gunawan, who was Megawati's former adjutant, as new police chief as Gunawan was suspected of involving in corruption. Mietzner also notes that Jokowi was willing to "forcefully confront obstacles to his presidential agenda" (p. 53). This can be seen from his decision to cut fuel subsidies in November 2014 to mobilise funds for his health and education programmes.

Therefore, Mietzner in the final section argues that post-Suharto Indonesian politics supports the notion of the "pluralist" approach that "the political arena [...] remains heavily contested by a variety of forces" including "oligarchs, traditional party leaders, civil society groups, and populists such as Jokowi" (pp. 60-61). However, none of these forces "has established dominance over the others" (p. 61). Mietzner also points out that it is difficult to interpret Jokowi's presidency through the lens of the cartelisation theory since Jokowi cabinet "included fewer parties than were needed to control a majority in parliament" (p. 60). However, Mietzner opines that oligarchy theorists have correctly pointed out that post-Suharto Indonesian political, institutional settings make it difficult for those without an organised power base to compete. Hence, Indonesia is still far from a consolidated democracy. Mietzner concludes by urging foreign donors to continue assisting civil society groups, community leaders and activists in defending the democracy in Indonesia.

Overall, *Reinventing Asian Populism: Jokowi's Rise, Democracy, and Political Contestation in Indonesia* presents a well-researched, argumentatively stimulating and timely analysis of Indonesian power relations that led to the rise of Jokowi. It is an important contribution to the studies of post-Suharto Indonesian politics and would be of benefit to scholars and observers with interest in this field.