

Indonesian leftists accuse incoming president Prabowo of ‘crimes against humanity’

Thursday 31 October 2024, by [BOYLE Peter](#), [MAHENDRA KUSUMAWARDHANA Ignatius](#) (Date first published: 23 October 2024).

While mainstream media broadcast images of crowds cheering former Suharto-era general Prabowo Subianto, after he was inaugurated as Indonesia’s new president on October 20, anti-Prabowo demonstrations were being dispersed in the capital, Jakarta.

Protests accused Prabowo of “crimes against humanity” against anti-dictatorship activists and liberation fighters and supporters in Timor Leste, West Papua and Aceh. They also labelled the election of Vice-President Gibran Rakabuming Raka — the son of outgoing President Joko Widodo “Jokowi” — as unconstitutional.

In Yogyakarta, hundreds took part in a “Democracy Platform” that featured theatre, poetry, music, free health checks and “Free Food, Not Prabowo”.

Green Left’s Peter Boyle spoke to **Ignatius Mahendra Kusumawardhana** from Perserikatan Sosialis (Socialist Union), one of the left groups protesting Prabowo’s presidency.

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Why did Prabowo, a notorious general from the Suharto dictatorship era who has committed crimes against humanity, win the presidential elections?

In my opinion, there are at least two major factors in Prabowo’s victory that also describe who Prabowo-Gibran’s voters are. There are his supporters who can be said to be hardliners, namely those who see the “strong” military side of Prabowo as something they like. This is especially from those who previously supported Prabowo in the 2019 presidential election [which he lost to Jokowi].

There was a survey that says that around 50% of Prabowo’s supporters in the 2019 elections continued to support him in the 2024 election.

As well, there were his young supporters who were attracted mainly to Prabowo-Gibran’s *#gemoy* [“cute”] [campaign](#) through social media, television and the internet.

Based on the age of voters, Prabowo-Gibran won in all segments, from Gen Z to Baby Boomers. The largest vote is among Gen Z compared to other candidates, around 65.9%. Gen Z and Millennials make up 56.45% of all voters.

Was Jokowi’s support for Prabowo-Gibran through the state apparatus a big factor?

Yes, especially through the use of social assistance access for campaign tools, the use of state facilities and ministerial events and the appointment of Jokowi's men as temporary regional heads or to other strategic positions in regional governments.

Including the most obvious, influence was shown by the Constitutional Court's decision to allow Gibran to become a vice-presidential candidate [even though he was four years short of the required minimum age of 40].

Do you expect any major changes in direction under Prabowo?

There are unlikely to be any major or significant changes. In the Prabowo-Gibran campaign, they repeatedly said that they will continue Jokowi's program.

What might be slightly different is the free lunch program [Prabowo promised for school children and pregnant women].

Following the 1998 reforms [following the end of the Suharto era] there have been several presidents, but their policies and the perspectives they hold are not much different from each other. The policy of infrastructure development and obtaining capital from imperialist countries has continued. So there will probably be no significant difference in this under Prabowo.

Some people on the left had hopes that Jokowi would be more democratic. What was his actual record?

There was a mistaken analysis of some leftist groups in Indonesia regarding Jokowi. At that time, especially in 2014, there was a lot of campaigning that Jokowi was a *kerayakatan* (populist) president who did not come from the traditional political elite. He was formerly the mayor of Solo and one of his campaign gimmicks was visits to the market to meet with market traders and people in the street, etc.

But if we talk about populism in Indonesia, the standard for truly popular demands already exists within the movement. We can look at the People's Democratic Party (PRD) in the 1990s–2000s. The PRD had a position in the midst of the dictatorship of the New Order Military Regime, they brought up demands such as "Overthrow Suharto", "Revoke the Dual Function of ABRI [the national armed forces]", "Abolish the Five Packages of Political Laws and Referendum for Timor Leste".

So there was a populist program that was advanced and fought for to overthrow Suharto and open up democratic space.

Jokowi does not have that kind of history, just populist gimmicks — more populist on the surface but fundamentally not like the populist conceptions that have previously emerged in Indonesia.

If we look at the composition of Jokowi's supporters in 2014 and 2019 elections, the dominant ones were the remnants of the New Order Military Regime or one of the ruling bourgeois factions, especially PDI-Perjuangan [Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle].

It is not surprising then that from the outset we can see that all of this populism is only superficial. For example, Jokowi said in his campaign that he would create a professional government, that there would be no sharing of seats. But not long after he was elected, there was already a scramble for positions in state-owned enterprises or in his government.

People can say that this is Jokowi's ability to manage the government, but we see that it is his way of maintaining power. He is dividing up political power and economic access to those who support him.

Since Jokowi came to power in 2014, he has issued several anti-labour, anti-farmer and anti-people policies. Perhaps one of the most recent is the *Omnibus Law*, which will take away many basic labour rights such as wages, bargaining positions and negotiations within companies.

Jokowi also introduced laws that facilitate the seizure of farmers' land.

So, in general there is no improvement. Jokowi also issued a program, which is not much different from the previous government, with the aim of maintaining the illusion or support through various kinds of direct cash assistance. So he gave cash to the people, not enough to meet their needs but enough to maintain the illusion that he was providing a lot of assistance to the people.

If some Indonesians hope for a continuation of these token handouts under Prabowo, what can the indigenous people of West Papua expect under Prabowo?

Regarding democratic space, Papua is indeed in a situation that can be said to be relatively different from Indonesia in general. Serious repression in Papua continues to occur. There is also a continuous mobilisation of the army and police.

We have seen how the army has tortured several Papuans who were put into barrels. There are still arrests of activists in Papua who call for the right to self-determination and [rights for] political prisoners.

Prabowo may take an even more repressive approach. On several occasions he has said that he will strengthen the repressive apparatus in Papua — though he coupled it with an emphasis on pursuing economic development there.

Until now, Papua is one of the poorest provinces in Indonesia with a lot of natural resources. There is gold mined by Freeport and various mining companies but Papua remains the poorest province in Indonesia. There is very poor access to education and health is also very poor.

Economic development in Papua is related to the interests of the political elites themselves. They will build roads, they will build infrastructure and all kinds of things. But it will definitely be shaped to suit their interests. So the economic development that has been happening in Papua has never been geared to giving the Papuan people better access to health, education, etc, but more to satisfying the economic interests of the political elites.

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