

# Indonesia: Jokowi's meeting with arrested farmer at Palace seen as democratic paradox

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**Irfan Kamil, Jakarta — Parameter Politic Indonesia Executive Director Adi Prayitno says that summoning poultry farmer Suroto to the Palace to meet with President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo is a democratic paradox.**

Suroto was arrested by police when Widodo was conducting a working visit to Blitar, East Java, on Tuesday September 7 after Suroto held up a poster when Widodo was leaving a vaccination centre. The poster was held up right when the vehicle Widodo was riding in passed through Jalan Moh Hatta.

At the time the vehicle's rear window was open and Widodo was waving in the direction of local people. The poster held up by Suroto read, “Pak [Mr] Jokowi, help livestock farmers buy corn at reasonable prices”.

“This is what I refer to as a paradox of our democracy, on the one hand it is as if it's allowed, but after criticising [the government], expressing [a view], mentioning the name of the Pak President, there's no guarantee whatsoever people won't end up having a brush with the law”, said Prayitno during a discussion titled “The story of Suroto meeting Jokowi” on the Medcom.id YouTube channel on Sunday September 19.

Prayitno said that this democratic paradox has two sides.

On the one hand the government puts forward a kind face such as the statement by President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo that he is open to criticism, which of course is garneted by the 1945 Constitution on freedom of opinion and expression.

“But, but backstage we cannot close our eyes [to the fact that] many people are then faced with legal problems when they [speak out] on issues related to Jokowi”, he said.

Prayitno gave examples of other cases such as a critical mural in Tangerang, West Java, which resembled Widodo which was removed and the artist was immediately hunted down by police.

In addition to this, there were the students who protested in the Central Java city of Solo during a visit by Widodo's who were immediately arrested by police.

“Although they were later released, the repressive action still happened”, said Prayitno.

Nevertheless, according to Prayitno, Widodo's move to summon Suroto to the Palace is a positive step to counter public discourse that the president is anti-criticism.

But the impression that the president is anti-critic, said Prayitno, cannot just be done away with because the public still carries the scars of democratic injuries which have yet to be resolved.

“In this case it was only Pak Suroto who was summoned, what about the others? If [Widodo] wants to be serious, right, [all] the people who have been critical should be summoned, organise a forum of professional presidential critics, that would be far more consistent”, he said.

“So, what happened today, the summoning of Pak Suroto, was just to counter criticism directed at the president and the Palace, including also criticism against the police”, said Prayitno.

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