

Indonesia's "John Adams Moment" by David Day

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There was a moment in US history when our new democracy peaceably and orderly passed the reins of power from George Washington, at the end of his second term, to John Adams. The "John Adams Moment" established the precedent in the new democracy of a presidency limited to only two terms. That tradition lasted until Franklin D. Roosevelt's presidency and was resumed thereafter by a Constitutional amendment. It also marked a leadership transition as the country turned from a military/civilian leader, Washington, to a purely civilian leader, Adams.

Indonesia, following its recent divisive election, is at a similar cross-roads moment in the strengthening of its own democracy. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), a military/civilian leader, will step down after two terms this October and relinquish power to a duly-elected civilian, Joko Widodo (Jokowi). This is a historic, critical step in the development of Indonesia's democratic traditions.

Indonesian democracy developed out of the dark days of violence in the wake of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-98. The implosion of Indonesia's rupiah occurred along with the dismantling of the autocratic and corrupt Suharto regime. Since that time, Indonesia has re-invented itself in a little over a decade and a half, repaired a devastated economy, and has emerged as a robust democracy in Southeast Asia, with a vibrant media, and strong voter participation. It is impressive progress in a relatively short amount of time.

The recent presidential election campaign was a hard-fought battle, but free from violence. And, although religion is never absent from Islam's foremost democracy, this was a contest fought overwhelmingly over secular issues.

Jokowi represents a marked departure from Indonesia's past. He started out as a small business owner, a humble furniture seller, and became a pragmatic, uncorrupt mayor. He is not from the usual clutch of political and business dynasties and their cronies. The 53-year-old is the first of a political generation reaching the national stage since popular protests in the late 1990s toppled Suharto. Jokowi's rise would have been inconceivable without the radical political decentralization that is perhaps the outstanding success of Indonesia's democratic journey. He began his political career as mayor of Solo, a medium-sized city in Java, the most populous island, before becoming an immensely popular governor of Jakarta, the capital, in 2012. There he forged a reputation for competence and clean government that won the admiration of many and propelled him into the presidential race.

Jokowi has a good record of dealing with the concerns of ordinary Indonesians: clogged traffic, poor sanitation and petty, bribe-taking bureaucrats. He is more comfortable working with Christians or ethnic Chinese than most Indonesian politicians. Indeed, his opponents tried to turn his hostility to religious intolerance against him by claiming that he was a Christian. Certainly, Jokowi is a new kind of Indonesian leader, but he is still a devout Muslim. In the three days before the actual election, during which Indonesian law forbids campaigning, Jokowi made a lightning pilgrimage to Mecca. Despite his personal religion, he embraces religious pluralism, showing again Indonesia's departure from the past.

Foreign investors are pleased with the Jokowi victory. He understands the need to cut ruinous fuel subsidies and to boost education. Though no room exists on the Indonesian political spectrum for anything like economic liberalism, he is less of an economic nationalist than his opponent in the election, former Special Forces Gen. Prabowo Subianto, Suharto's son-in-law with a tainted human rights record, a throwback to Indonesia's darker past.

The big worry is that Jokowi might be out of his depth in high politics. That is partly because he lacks experience. His campaign was amateurish, relying mainly on the perhaps naive assumption that honesty and an impressive record would suffice. It turns out that Jokowi was right; Indonesians did not buy Prabowo's slick, orchestrated campaign. Past Indonesian leaders ruled from on high. Jokowi is a man of the streets and neighborhoods. Unlike most of his predecessors, he has no ties to the Suharto regime, representing a clean break.

Indonesia faces geopolitical challenges such as China's claim to the Natuna islands in the South China Sea, ASEAN leadership demands, and international economic issues. While his views on foreign policy are still little known, Jokowi's preference for technocrats and experts should prove beneficial. Rather than appointing political hacks, as has been the tradition in Indonesia, he prefers experts to run the agency or bureaucracy so that the organization can deal with the problems at hand. And because he is seen as a man of the people who really wants to change Indonesia, he has attracted a lot of Indonesia's best and brightest – they see him as progressive and forward thinking, a John Kennedy-like figure. This capacity to attract powerful technocratic advice could see Jokowi pursue a more proactive and internationalist agenda than his predecessors.

Jokowi's endearing trait, his humility, became a liability during the campaign as his image as an outsider was compromised by his reliance on his party's *grande dame*, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the daughter of modern Indonesia's founder and a former president herself. She appeared on occasion to be grudging in her support for Jokowi. This

reliance is likely to fade in time as Jokowi makes his own mark.

One of Jokowi's leadership traits is both visionary and courageous. As the world's fourth largest country, and with a Muslim-majority, ethnic Chinese have often been political scapegoats. During the Suharto years, a drive through Jakarta's Chinatown, Kota, was remarkable for its lack of Chinese characters, symbols, architecture, and even names in English – the ethnic Chinese were literally hidden from view. The bloody anti-Chinese riots (which Prabowo is said to have encouraged) in Kota and elsewhere left deep cultural wounds. Jokowi is the first Indonesian politician to actively begin the healing process. When he ran for the governorship of Jakarta, an ethnic Chinese, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) was his successful running mate. That was a historic first for Indonesia and it bodes well for Jokowi's reputation as a cultural healer, a nation-builder, and a diplomat. Interestingly, Ahok now succeeds Jokowi as governor of Jakarta.

Indonesians made the right choice. Jokowi will be a disruptive figure since he will have to learn to work with, and break up, the old political oligarchy, upgrade the bureaucracy, alleviate corruption, develop civilian control of the military, and continue to strengthen this fledgling democracy. This is indeed Indonesia's "John Adams Moment."

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