



Center for Asian Democracy

# Indonesia General Election 2024 Pre-Election Report

CAD Research Brief

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February 2024 // University of Louisville

Cover Image: Prabowo Subianto and his running mate Gibran Rakabuming at a parade in Jakarta.  
Source: Reuters

# Country Profile

## Overview

Indonesia is a Southeast Asian country comprised of more than 17,000 islands. With over 279 million people, it is the world's fourth-most populous country, and the world's largest Muslim-majority country. After gaining independence from the Netherlands in 1949, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, stewarded the country's transition to democracy. This faltered in the 1960s, however, and after an attempted coup in 1965, Suharto, a prominent Army General, rose to power. His reign began as a military dictatorship, but soon evolved into a personalistic authoritarian regime. Suharto ruled Indonesia for thirty years until his 1998 resignation. Afterwards, Indonesia enacted a series of constitutional reforms to democratize the country. Although categorized as Partly Free by Freedom House, Indonesia today is a presidential republic with a bicameral legislature and vibrant elections.

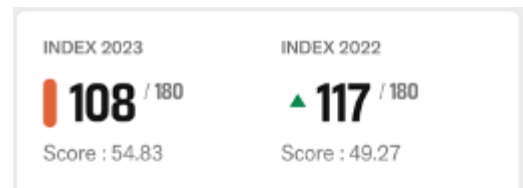


2023 Population: 279,476,346 (CIA World Factbook)

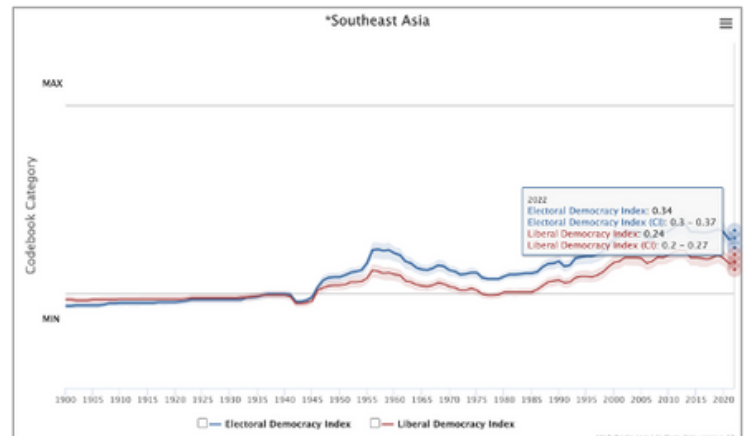
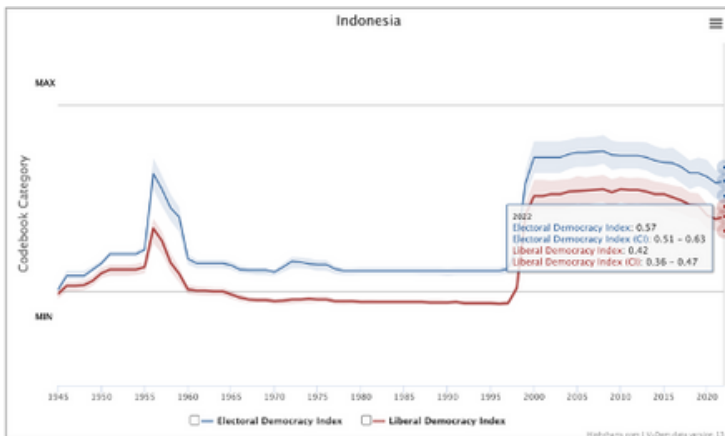
## Measures of Democracy

Since democratization, Indonesia's liberal and electoral democracy rating has modestly declined, while remaining high-performing by regional standards. V-Dem's electoral democracy index of 0.57 for Indonesia is markedly higher than Southeast Asia's rating of 0.34, and stands out from other regional countries like Thailand's rating of 0.21. Indonesia's liberal democracy index score of 0.42 is somewhat diminished recently, but still clearly higher than the Southeast Asian average of .24. At a time of democratic uncertainty across the region, Indonesia remains a relative location of stability.

## Media Freedom



IMedia Freedom (From Reporters Without Borders: <https://rsf.org/en/country/indonesia>)



Indonesia: Electoral Democracy: 0.57      Liberal Democracy: 0.42  
 Southeast Asia Avg: Electoral Dem: 0.34      Liberal Dem: 0.24

# Election Profile: Indonesia's 2024 General Election

## Offices to be Contested

Indonesia's general elections are scheduled for February 14, 2024. The contest will determine the successor to outgoing President Joko Widodo, who is term-limited after ten years in office. In addition to electing a new president and vice president, voters will also elect members of the Indonesian legislature, the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). The MPR is composed of two chambers: the 580-seat House of Representatives (DPR) and the 136-seat Regional Representative Council (DPD). All 716 seats will be contested in the February elections.

## Candidates and Parties

### Presidential and VP Elections

There are three coalitions vying for the presidency and vice presidency. The leading ticket is the Advanced Indonesia Coalition, led by Prabowo Subianto, chairman of the Gerindra Party and current Minister of Defense under President Jokowi. His running mate, Gibran Rakabuming, is the mayor of Surakarta and Jokowi's eldest son. Prabowo is currently polling at 48.6%, a sizeable lead but still under the 50% threshold for preventing a runoff election, which would be held on June 26 in the event no candidate secures a majority.

The next-place ticket is the Coalition of Change, led by NasDem Party candidate Anies Baswedan, former Minister of Education (2014-2016) and Governor of Jakarta (2017 to 2022). Baswedan's running mate is Muhaimin Iskandar, chairman of the National Awakening Party. Their coalition is endorsed by the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS), an Islamist party popular in the Aceh region.

The third-place coalition in polling is the Alliance of Parties, led by PDI-P candidate Ganjar Pranowo, former governor of Central Java (2013-2023). Pranowo's running mate is Mohammad Mahfud, former Chief Justice of Indonesia's Constitutional Court and member of the United Development Party (PPP).

### Legislative Elections

The Indonesian legislature is comprised of the 580-seat House of Representatives (DPR) and the 136-seat Regional Representative Council (DPD). Members of the DPR are elected from multi-member electoral districts, with seats allocated through a party-list proportional representation system. Four DPD senators are elected from each of Indonesia's 34 provinces on a nonpartisan basis. Ballots for DPR candidates are subject to a gender quota, wherein 30 percent of each party's candidates must be women.

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), a center-left secular party led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, currently holds the majority in the DPR with 128 seats. PDI-P's ideologically-diverse ruling coalition also includes Golkar (85 seats), Gerindra (78), NasDem (59), the National Awakening Party (PKB, 58), the National Mandate Party (PAN, 44), and the United Development Party (PPP, 19) for a total of 471 out of 575 seats. The opposition is comprised of the Democratic Party (54 seats) and the Justice and Prosperity Party (50 seats).

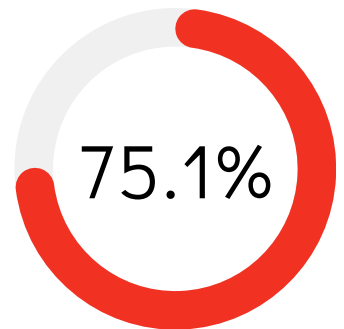
### Key candidates for the Indonesian presidential election

Name (Age, current position)	Prabowo Subianto (72, Defense Minister)	Ganjar Pranowo (54, former Central Java governor)	Anies Baswedan (54, former Jakarta governor)
			
Profile	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Former special forces general</li> <li>Lost to Joko Widodo in 2014 and 2019 presidential elections</li> <li>Leader of the third-largest party Gerindra</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Served as Central Java governor from Aug. 2013 to Sept. 2023</li> <li>Backed by Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the largest party</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political scientist turned politician</li> <li>Served as culture and education minister in Widodo's first term, Jakarta governor from 2017 to 2022</li> </ul>

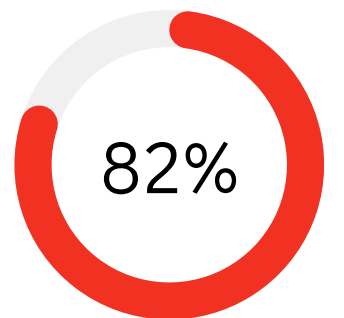
Source: Nikkei Asia research  
Source photos by Reuters and Kentaro Iwamoto

According to the General Elections Commission, there are over 205 million registered voters this cycle.

### Recent Voter Turnout



2014 DPR and DPD



2019 Presidential

Source: IFES ElectionGuide

# The Perils of Personalistic Politics

Personalist politics tied to patronage, rather than policy objectives, remains an obstacle to democratic consolidation in Indonesia. After the 2019 election, a bitter contest that sparked violent protests, Jokowi surprised some by appointing Prabowo as minister of defense. Few saw this move as a gesture of genuine compromise, but rather as a means of placating Prabowo supporters and silencing what would otherwise be a vocal opposition. This was just one of many moves that have led scholars to characterize Jokowi's tenure as a period of mild, but real, democratic decline. The Jokowi-Prabowo relationship is the defining element of the 2024 election, with a Prabowo victory being Jokowi's opportunity to retain influence in the new administration. Moreover, Widodo is expected to vie for the chairmanship of the Golkar Party or even Prabowo's Gerindra Party, the same group that opposed him in the 2014 and 2019 elections.

## Nepotism

In October, Prabowo announced Gibran Rakabuming, Jokowi's eldest son, as his running mate. The dichotomy between the two is stark. Prabowo is a former army general who, until 2020, was barred from entering the United States due to allegations of human rights abuses. Prabowo ran for president unsuccessfully in 2014 and 2019, losing to Jokowi in both contests. In contrast, Gibran is a political newcomer, whose only experience in elected office is serving as mayor of Surakarta, his father's hometown, since 2021. His nomination as vice president was a clear attempt by Prabowo to leverage Jokowi's historic popularity and siphon votes from his opposition. The move sparked added controversy when Indonesia's Constitutional Court issued an exception for Gibran to run, despite not meeting the legal age requirement of 40, which many regarded as an act of political favoritism.

Jokowi has promised that he will "meddle" in the upcoming election to ensure his preferred successor is successful. Many analysts believe Jokowi, who lacks the political pedigree of many of Indonesia's old political guard, is positioning his son Gibran as the successor to his newly created political dynasty using ethically and legally questionable tactics. For his part, Jokowi's younger son, Kaesang Pangarep, was recently appointed chairman of the new Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), aimed at galvanizing youth voters in the upcoming election.



Jokowi, right, shakes hands with Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto during the inauguration ceremony at the State Palace in Jakarta on Oct. 23, 2019. Source: Getty Images

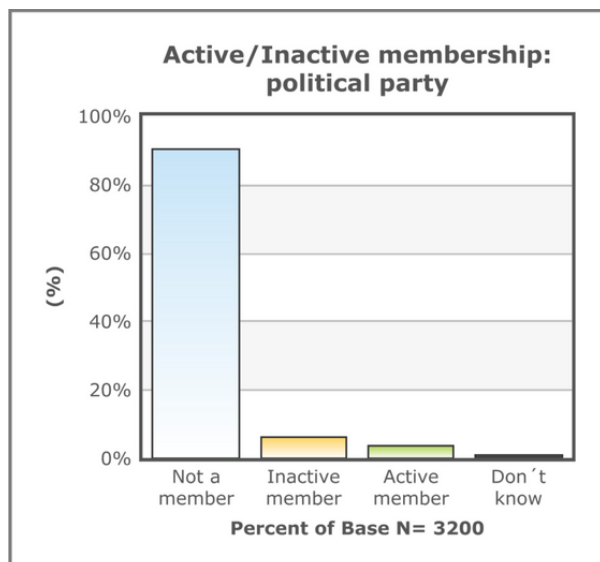
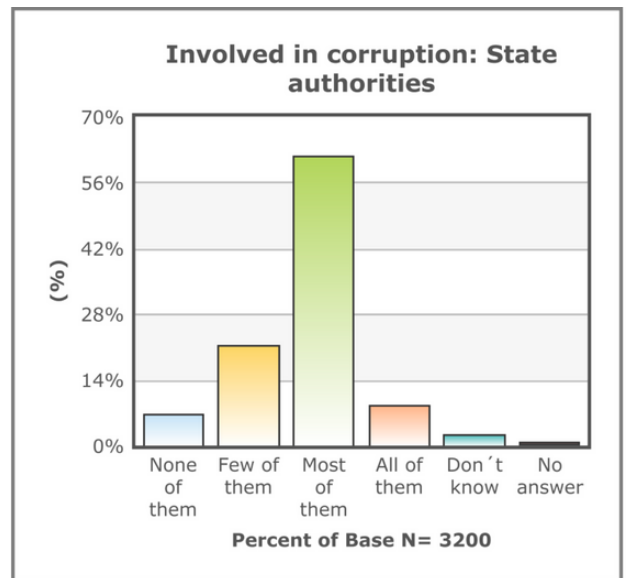


Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming. Source: Reuters

# Public Opinion

## Corruption

A majority of respondents (61.6%) believe that most state authorities are involved in corruption. In total, 91.5% of respondents said authorities are corrupt to some extent, ranging from “few of them” (21.2%) to “all of them” (8.7%). This reflects low levels of public trust in state officials but also indicates that much of Indonesia’s population is aware of the corruption taking place. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Indonesia 34/100, with 0 being highly corrupt. This is similar to Thailand (35/100) and the Philippines (34/100), but worse than Vietnam (41/100) and Malaysia (50/100). Transparency International’s 2020 Global Corruption Barometer found that 30% of public service users had paid a bribe in the previous 12 months.



## Party Membership

An overwhelming majority (90.4%) of Indonesian respondents indicated they are not a member of a political party. This reflects the weakness of Indonesia’s party structure, and the fact that parties are often used exclusively as political vehicles for candidates rather than a means of establishing ideological unity. This percentage of non-affiliated respondents is significantly larger than Thailand (67.3%) and Malaysia (72.8%), and higher even than the Philippines (85.7%), where party ties are also quite weak. Just 3.6% of Indonesian respondents said they were active members of a party, compared to 12% in Thailand, 5.9% in Malaysia, and 6.9% in the Philippines.

## Confidence in the Armed Forces

A plurality of Indonesian respondents (48.1%) said they had “a great deal” of confidence in the armed forces, with an additional 40.6% saying they had “quite a lot.” This reflects the prominent role the military has played throughout Indonesia’s history, including thirty-two years spent under the military rule of General Suharto. This enduring trust may also help explain the popularity of presidential frontrunner and former general, Prabowo Subianto. Indonesian respondents have more confidence in their military than others in the region, with just 14.3% in Thailand, 22.1% in Malaysia, and 33.1% in the Philippines saying they have a great deal of confidence in the armed forces.

	Confidence: Armed Forces				
	TOTAL	ISO 3166-1 numeric country code			
		Indonesia	Malaysia	Philippines	Thailand
A great deal	33.9 (2,442)	48.1	22.1	33.1	14.3
Quite a lot	43.6 (3,148)	40.6	52.4	43.5	42.6
Not very much	16.8 (1,215)	9.2	22.6	19.7	25.7
None at all	3.9 (279)	1.4	2.8	3.7	10.3

# Challenges to Democratic Consolidation

## Power-Sharing and Party Cartelization

Power-sharing agreements between political elites are a fixture of Indonesian politics, although allegiances fluctuate constantly, making it difficult to trace parties' development over time. These unstable arrangements have prevented the emergence of a clearly identifiable opposition, and led to widespread party cartelization. Parties are often founded solely to be used as political vehicles by presidential candidates and lack firm ideological foundations. Once elected, the president often appoints cabinet members with contradictory positions, limiting advancements on policy unless every coalition member receives a piece of the political pie.

## Influence of Suharto-Era Oligarchs

Indonesia is the world's third-largest democracy and home to a vibrant electoral process, as evidenced by the country's consistently high voter turnout. Despite the outward strength of the country's elections, however, Indonesian democracy is still dominated by political, military, and business elites who rose to power during the thirty-two-year authoritarian reign of Suharto. Although Indonesia democratized in 1998 in the wake of the Asian financial crises, these oligarchs successfully manipulated the electoral playing field to entrench their influence and create barriers for new political actors. For example, the shift to direct presidential elections was tempered by a nomination threshold, wherein only parties with at least 20 percent of seats in the legislature could field a candidate. Similarly, the switch to a proportional representation system gave voters more say, but the creation of large electoral districts privileged old parties that had established campaign infrastructure.



## Political Islam

Islamic organizations are a central feature of Indonesia's civil society. The largest is Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), which has over 90 million members and promotes a pluralistic interpretation of Islam that is tolerant of Indonesia's multicultural traditions. The other, Muhammadiyah, has roughly half the members of NU, and champions somewhat more conservative beliefs. NU in particular is highly influential, as it maintains an extensive network of schools, universities, and hospitals across the archipelago, giving it widespread appeal amongst Indonesia's Muslim population. Despite claims of being neutral, both NU and Muhammadiyah have become politicized and tied to Indonesian elections, in what some leaders call "active neutrality." NU was instrumental in the creation of the National Awakening Party (PKB), and many of its members favor PKB candidates.



Prabowo Subianto meets with ulama at an Islamic boarding school in Palembang, Jan. 12, 2024. Source: Shutterstock.

Securing support from religious groups is a vital part of Indonesian electoral strategy; in 2019, Jokowi solidified his re-election after choosing a prominent NU leader as his vice president. The "NU factor" has played out this cycle as well, with Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo both choosing NU-affiliated running mates in a bid to close the gap with Prabowo.

# Spotlight on the Campaign Trail

Presidential & VP candidates from left: Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming, and Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud Mahmodin.

Source: Reuters



Supporters at a rally for Prabowo and Gibran.

Source: Reuters



Outgoing President Jokowi casting his ballot in 2019.

Source: AP



The three presidential candidates, Ganjar Pranowo (left), Prabowo Subianto (center), and Anies Baswedan, pose for pictures after the first presidential debate in Jakarta, Dec, 2023.

Source: General Elections Commission (KPU).



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Candidates from left to right: Anies Baswedan, Ganjar Pranowo and Prabowo Subianto. Source: Reuters



# About the Center for Asian Democracy

The mission of the Center for Asian Democracy, established at the University of Louisville in 2006, is to promote research and teaching about democracy and the prospects for democratization in Central, South, Southeast, and East Asia. Through publications, conferences, workshops, visiting scholars programs, colloquia, and research projects in Asian countries, the Center creates a forum for studying political dynamics in this vital region. The Center is currently led by Dr. David Buckley, Paul Weber Chair of Politics, Science and Religion, and Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Louisville.

## About the Author

The substantive research for this report was conducted by CAD Undergraduate Research Assistant, Tristin Black, under the supervision of Dr. David Buckley. Tristin Black is a senior at the University of Louisville majoring in Political Science and Pan-African Studies. Tristin is a Brown Fellow at the University of Louisville, and his research areas include United States foreign policy and democracy in Asia. He has recently completed an internship with the United States Department of State.

## Acknowledgments

CAD thanks Graduate Research Assistant Taylor Martin for assistance in formatting this report. The conclusions and recommendations of this Center for Asian Democracy publication are solely those of its author(s) and do not reflect the views of the center, its leadership, or other scholars.

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