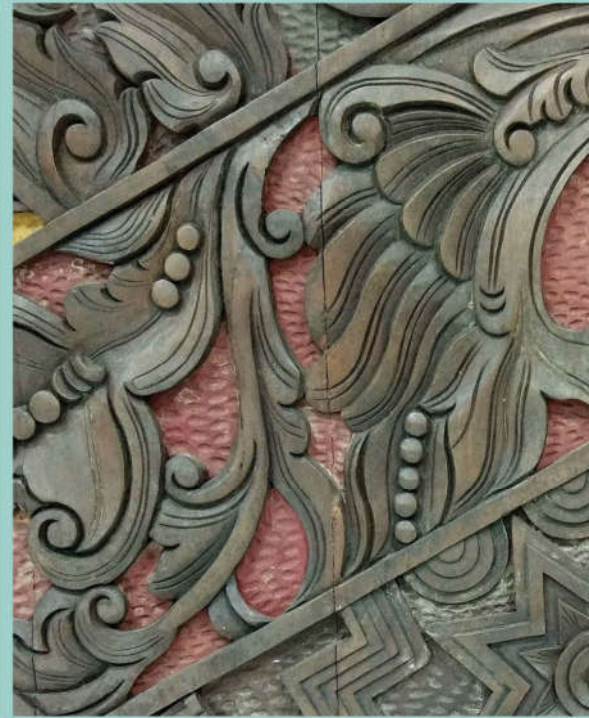


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CENTRE FOR
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STUDIES

**Foreign Policy
and National Elections:
A brief overview
of the public attitude in Indonesia
towards foreign policy issue**



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The CSIS Election Series is a means by which members of the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) research community can quickly disseminate their research findings and encourage exchanges of ideas on elections. The views expressed here are those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to CSIS Jakarta.

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Foreign Policy and National Elections: A brief overview of the public attitude in Indonesia towards foreign policy issues

Shafiah F. Muhibat

Executive Summary

1. During elections, foreign policy is often overshadowed by other pressing domestic concerns. The prevailing consensus is that the public possesses little information and is only concerned about these issues when their daily lives are directly affected.
2. Looking at experiences in some countries, there are differences in how the public responds to international issues. A large number of studies suggest that foreign policy can be of interest of the voters during election time. At present, along with the rise of the number of internet users, the media (in particular social media), is now increasingly influencing public policy.
3. Alongside Indonesia's democratization process, the Indonesian public has become more informed with varieties of issues that may influence their voting behavior, including international issues. International issues entered the debates and public discourse leading up to the 2014 election.
4. For international issues to be at the heart of discourse among the Indonesian voters, they must have direct links with domestic issues, in particular welfare. And even so, international issues are thus far limited to debates and public discourse but would be of little influence on the actual decision of the voters.

Foreign Policy and National Elections: A brief overview of the public attitude in Indonesia towards foreign policy issues

Shafiah F. Muhibat

Introduction

The relationship between domestic pressures and foreign policy has been an almost perennial debate in the study of international relations. Most scholars can agree that interconnection exists, but their precise impact and the direction of causation are disputed.¹ During elections, foreign policy is often overshadowed by other pressing domestic concerns. The prevailing consensus is that the public possesses little information and only a few, ill-formed attitudes about foreign affairs and is concerned deeply about these issues only when their daily lives are directly affected.²

However, looking at experiences in some countries, there have been exceptions. Elections in the United States is a prominent study object on this issue, particularly as the U.S. is a vast democratic state, where most things surrounding the elections are widely reported; thus data is available.

How about in Indonesia? The democracy transition that took place in 1999 has brought about some progressive changes, starting with the democratic election in 1999 whereby new political parties took part in the general elections and followed by the first direct presidential election in 2004. Direct presidential elections have only occurred three times in Indonesia (2004, 2009, and 2014), and the fourth one is forthcoming soon in 2019.

This paper seeks to explore whether, alongside Indonesia's democratization process, the Indonesian public has become more informed with varieties of issues that may influence their voting behavior. More precisely, has foreign policy been an issue that gathered interests during the past elections? This paper begins with an overview of existing literature on public attitude towards foreign policy, followed by elaboration on whether the current era of social media has changed this. After that, it will look into the campaigning period during the 2014 election in Indonesia, to see which foreign policy issues were highlighted during that period. This paper will end with a bold prediction regarding foreign policy issues that would gather attention in the 2019 election, based on news reports and statements from the presidential candidates that were gathered towards the end of 2018.

¹ See, for example, John Doyle and Eileen Conolly, "Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: A Study of the 2002 Election in the Republic of Ireland," *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 13, (2002), p. 152.

² John H. Aldrich, John L. Sullivan, and Eugene Borgida, "Foreign Affairs and Issue Voting: Do Presidential Candidates 'Waltz Before a Blind Audience,'" *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 83, No. 1, (March 1989), p. 125.

Public attitude toward foreign policy

Foreign policy, by its very nature, involves matters that play out far away from most citizens. Traditionally, the so-called “belly issues” are far more influential: the cost of living, the level of employment, the price of corn and hogs, aspects of social security.³ Naturally, the public is likely to have more direct experience with domestic problems. Attitudes based on such behavioral experiences have been found to be highly accessible and more predictive of later behavior than are attitudes based on indirect experiences with the attitude object.⁴

Political parties may include specific foreign policy issues as a factor in party identification, with some consideration. A study by Doyle and Connolly suggests that foreign policy issues are included in a party’s manifesto more because they are part of the party’s self-image, of concern to its core support or perhaps only to a small segment of that support, of importance as part of internal party coalition-building or support-building among interest groups.⁵

A large number of studies, on the other hand, suggest that foreign policy can be of interest of the voters during election time. The election in the U.S. has been an interesting object of study, due to the dynamics of a large and mature democracy. In the U.S., as analyzed by Aldrich et al., foreign issues were as salient as domestic issues in the election of 1980 and 1984, suggesting that rationalization will not differentially affect perceptions on these two sets of issues.⁶ That candidates do campaign on foreign policy themes is itself a source of attitude accessibility for much of the public. Campaigns may temporarily activate foreign policy attitudes, although they may not change many minds.⁷ If candidates emphasize or discuss a particular foreign policy issue, attitudes about other foreign policy issues may also be activated.⁸

Sowmya Anand and Jon A. Krosnick explored the role that foreign policy issues played in determining the outcome of 2000 U.S. presidential election and test whether their involvement resembles that anticipated by the attentive public perspective or that anticipated by the issue public perspective or both.⁹ They found that most foreign policy attitudes were reliable predictors of candidate preferences. Their results indicate that in 2000, people were not unanimous in their support for or opposition to foreign policy goals that the U.S. government might pursue. A great deal of support was expressed for fighting terrorism and protecting the environment, but opinion was divided on other goals, such as protecting and promoting democracy abroad, promoting free trade, enhancing the quality of life in other countries, and defending America through military means. Respondents also differed

³ Gerald M. Craig, “Foreign Policy and the American Election,” *International Journal*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (Summer, 1960), p. 210.

⁴ Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, p. 127.

⁵ Doyle and Connolly.

⁶ Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida, p. 132.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 135.

⁸ *Ibid*.

⁹ Sowmya Anand and Jon A. Krosnick, “The Impact of Attitudes toward Foreign Policy Goals on Public Preferences among Presidential Candidates: A Study of Issue Publics and the Attentive Public in the 2000 U.S. Presidential Election,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 1, (2000), pp. 31-71.

in terms of the personal importance they accorded to each of these policy goals.¹⁰

John H. Aldrich, John L. Sullivan, Eugene Borgida argued in the 1980s that public attitudes on foreign and defense policies are available and cognitively accessible, that the public has perceived clear differences between the candidates on these issues in recent elections, and that these issues have affected the public's vote choices.¹¹ Korean and Vietnam Wars and the Iranian hostage crisis exemplified "intermestic" issues: foreign issues that had a strong domestic component that affected daily life. These cases had a significant impact on electoral behavior only in 1952, 1972, and 1980.¹²

Moreover, Aldrich et al. argued that foreign issues were as salient as domestic issues in the election of 1980 and 1984, suggesting that rationalization will not differentially affect perceptions on these two sets of issues. Three most proximate causes of the vote: attitudes on parties, candidates, and issues.¹³ Specific international problems, or 'hotspots', tend to dominate the public's foreign policy concerns at various times in an ebb and flow not fundamentally different from that characteristic of domestic issues.¹⁴

The role of media (and social media)

In order for foreign policy attitudes to play an important role in voting in presidential elections, they must be available to much of the public, that is, they must be represented in memory. This is where the media plays a great role. Most of the public receives its information about candidates and issues from the mass media, which serve as the key-priming agent for accessibility. As emphasized by Aldrich et al., conventional measures of issues salience should be conceptually related to the concept of construct accessibility.¹⁵ Media emphasis on foreign policy issues may temporarily increase the accessibility of such attitudes for members of the public whose attitudes are not chronically accessible.¹⁶ Certainly, the news media have brought vivid images of distant places into the citizens' living rooms, and very recent history has made the everyday relevance of foreign peoples especially apparent to all.¹⁷

Fast-forward to 2018, along with the rise of the number of internet users, social media, in addition to the conventional media, is now increasingly influencing public policy. Social media and the internet have changed the way that information is disseminated to the public. Previously, information was only accessible through the official institutions; thus the flow of information to the public can be controlled, but this is no longer the case as the costs of recording and distributing information dramatically dropped, and the steady rise of citizen journalists and online activists began.¹⁸

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 66.

¹¹ Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida.

¹² Ibid, p. 124.

¹³ Ibid, p. 132.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 130.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 126.

¹⁷ Anand and Krosnick, p. 32.

¹⁸ "The role of social media in international relations," The Digital Age at the University of New South

While public institutions might use social media to measure the public's interest in certain policy issues, citizens have become more likely to educate themselves on political issues through social media activity. One study suggests that individuals who are highly active with news and political information in social media have the potential to be influential in shaping the political attitudes and behaviors of their online peers can be explained by two phenomena: first, individuals are becoming increasingly reliant on others in their online social networks for news recommendations and political information; and second, their knowledge, opinions, and behaviors are influenced by information stream and social dynamics within these sites.¹⁹

Foreign policy issues in the 2014 election in Indonesia

On 9 July 2014, Indonesia held a presidential election with former army general Prabowo Subianto contesting against the governor of Jakarta, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. The campaigning period during the 2014 election occurred from 4 June to 5 July 2015, but political discourse leading up to the election started since the year before.

On foreign policy, both candidates shared many similarities, which were reflected in the various statements they made, both officially in the documents submitted to the election committee and statements read in the official debate, and informally during media rounds. Both candidates submitted their mission statements to the Election Commission prior to the start of the campaign. In both candidates' statements, the foreign policy only occupied a small percentage from the policy platform. Jokowi detailed four foreign policy priorities: (1) promoting the archipelagic state concept as the main foreign policy identity; (2) active participation in various international forums; (3) expanding the regionalism project by strengthening the Indo-Pacific regional architecture; and (4) widening the public outreach on foreign policymaking. Prabowo, on the other hand, stated the following: (1) maintaining the free-and-active foreign policy; (2) making a more active effort to deal with global climate change; and (3) protecting the rights of Indonesian migrant workers.

Table 1 presents a summary of the main issues raised by both presidential candidates during the campaign period, collected from news reports from national media. Two similarities are prominent: the continuation of the 'free-and-active' foreign policy doctrine and the aspiration for Indonesia to be 'well-respected at the international level.' These two aspects form the basis of both candidates' position on foreign policy.

Maritime issues popped up to be a significant topic during the campaign. Jokowi put a lot more emphasis on the topic,²⁰ culminating with the introduction of a new vision called the Global Maritime Fulcrum.²¹ Prabowo, on the other hand, made the point

Wales (blog), 4 October 2017, <http://blogs.unsw.edu.au/thedigitalage/blog/2017/10/the-role-of-social-media-in-international-relations/>

¹⁹ Brian E. Weeks Alberto Ardèvol-Abreu Homero Gil de Zúñiga, "Online Influence? Social Media Use, Opinion Leadership, and Political Persuasion," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol. 29, Issue 2, 1 June 2017, pp. 214–239, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edv050>

²⁰ "Ini Visi dan Misi Jokowi-JK," *Kompas.com*, 20 May 2014, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/05/20/1421367/Ini.Visi.dan.Misi.Jokowi-JK>

²¹ "Hasto: Indonesia Akan Disegani dengan Poros Maritim Dunia ala Jokowi," *Kompas.com*, 23 June 2014,

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/06/23/0855371/Hasto.Indonesia.Akan.Disegani.dengan.Poros>

on several occasions about the important of Indonesia's waters, both in terms of welfare and security.²² He also stressed the need for continuation of the foreign policy as conducted by the previous (Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) administration.²³

Table 1:
Foreign Policy Issues Raised during the Campaign Period
of the 2014 National Election in Indonesia

Issue	Prabowo Subianto - Hatta Rajasa	Joko Wdodo - Jusuf Kalla
<i>Main idea/initiative</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and active foreign policy • There is no need for significant changes in Indonesia's foreign policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and active foreign policy • Global Maritime Fulcrum
<i>Priorities</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of Indonesian citizens and their welfare • territorial integrity • securing national resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protection of Indonesian citizen • safeguarding natural and maritime resources • maintaining regional security • support for Palestine.
<i>Indonesian Migrant Worker</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis as high on the agenda throughout the campaign period. • Directly involved in freeing an Indonesian migrant worker from a death sentence in 2014. • Emphasis on welfare as a solution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority of Indonesia's foreign policy • Some suggestions raised during the campaign, among others: deploying lawyer in every Indonesia embassy; signing moratorium with countries which do not have regulations on the protection of migrant workers; providing skills and carrying pre-departure selection; administering TKI regularly and comprehensively.
<i>Palestine-Israel</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donated 500 million for Palestine on June 2014. • Hatta read a poem title "Gaza on Fire, UN has no power" on July 2014. • An agreement with one party in the coalition (PKS) to keep supporting Palestine. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of the issue was repeated throughout the campaign • The campaigning team suggested that Indonesia play more active roles, such as becoming the Secretary-General of OIC.
<i>Threat Perception</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic threat is seen as a threat to the welfare of the people. • Foreign threats include illegal claims made by other countries on Indonesian territory. • Suggested the need for military power build-up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial integrity and unity • Cyber and hybrid threats. • Proposed defense modernization. • Suggested that the lack of proper infrastructure was an obstacle for military power.

.Maritim.Dunia.Ala.Jokowi.

²² "Prabowo, Jokowi put welfare at heart of debate on foreign policy, defense," *The Jakarta Post*, 22 June 2014, <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/06/22/prabowo-jokowi-put-welfare-heart-debate-foreign-policy-defense.html>

²³ "Prabowo Akan Lanjutkan Politik Luar Negeri SBY," *Kompas.com*, 1 July 2014, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/07/01/0545582/Prabowo.Akan.Lanjutkan.Politik.Luar.Negeri.SBY>

Source: Compiled by the author from various news reports during the campaign period (4 June to 5 July 2014).

Indonesian migrant workers and the Palestine-Israel conflict were among the issues that most preoccupied both candidates. Migrant workers are a matter that is in the crossroad between foreign policy and welfare, thus would always generate high interest from the public, while at the same time presents a delicate problem for the government. Palestine, on the other hand, has been an issue close to the heart of Indonesians, being a Muslim majority.

Territorial integrity was an issue played by both camps as well, with Prabowo seen as having the upper hand being a former army general. Prabowo stated during the televised debate that there were serious foreign threats in the form of illegal claims by other countries on Indonesian territory. He specifically asked Jokowi what he would do about the rising tensions in the South China Sea, to which Jokowi replied that Indonesia was not directly involved in the dispute and would continue to work toward a diplomatic solution.²⁴ Jokowi, on the other hand, played his cards on territorial integrity using his maritime doctrine, through which he called for strengthening Indonesia's security and economic interests in the maritime domain, defending the country's outer islands, protecting natural resources within its exclusive economic zone, and strengthening Asian regional architectures.

Looking at the portion of the discussion of international issues as compared to the overall topics in the discourse during the campaign period, even though foreign policy issues were included in both camps' agenda, these issues were not seen as significant as those directly related to welfare issues. Most importantly, international issues that made it to the public discourse had a link to a significant domestic element, i.e. migrant workers with welfare, Palestine with Muslim identity, and the South China Sea with nationalism and territorial integrity.

Looking towards the 2019 election

The 2019 election is predicted to be even bigger than 2014. For the first time in the country's history, the president and vice president, 575 members of the powerful House of Representatives, and 136 members of the national regions house will be elected on the same day with over 190 million eligible voters. Over 2000 provincial level member of parliaments from 34 provinces will also be elected. And most importantly, the 2019 election will occur at a time when identity politics is rampant,²⁵ while selected foreign policy issues have entered the discourse among the publics, both through conventional media and social media. Jokowi will be pitted against Prabowo once again, but this time around partnered by different vice-presidential candidates: Ma'ruf Amin for Jokowi and Sandiaga Uno for Prabowo.

There are a number of international issues that have entered the public discourse leading up to the 2019 election. Pros and cons regarding the Chinese investment in Indonesia, the 2018 World Bank – IMF annual meeting, Indonesian workers abroad,

²⁴ "Soal Laut China Selatan, Jokowi: Bisa Masuk Tapi Mesti Bermanfaat," *Liputan6.com*, 22 June 2014, <https://www.liputan6.com/indonesia-baru/read/2067115/soal-laut-china-selatan-jokowi-bisa-masuk-tapi-mesti-bermanfaat>

²⁵ "Pilpres 2019 dan Ancaman Eksploitasi Politik Identitas," *CNN Indonesia*, 19 July 2018.

and the latest one regarding Australia's policy towards Palestine-Israel are some of the issues covered by the media and gaining interests among the public. International relations as a topic has also been included in the agenda for the forthcoming official debates. As per the information issued by the election committee, there will be five official debates, and international relations will be one of the topics for the fourth one, set to take place on 30 April 2019.

Jokowi as the incumbent has enjoyed good relations with other countries throughout his presidency and has generally been hailed in a positive manner by his counterparts. This is a privilege for Jokowi as he is in the position to respond to international issues directly as needed. Prabowo, on the other hand, needs to actively seek international recognition. Prabowo attended the celebration of China's 69th Independence in Jakarta in September 2018 and gave a public statement that China is very important for Indonesia.²⁶ His attendance and statement came as a surprise, as his camp has repeatedly criticized the government concerning the influx of Chinese foreign workers to Indonesia and Chinese investment.²⁷

Prabowo also attended the commemoration of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabian National Day in September 2018, on which occasion he saluted: "Long Live the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia."²⁸ Previously, Prabowo made a public statement during King Salman's visit to Indonesia in March 2017, that he "warmly welcome our honorable important *guest*. I was mandated by the vice chairman of the House of the Representative (DPR) to be present here."²⁹

Palestine remains an issue that garners strong interest to the Indonesian public, at present even more so due to the rise of identity politics, as mentioned. Solidarity with another Muslim country is an issue close to the heart of the Indonesian public, thus would continue to be in the agenda of campaign at every election. This year, Australia became a subject to this issue due to the shift in its policy regarding its bilateral relations with Israel. Jokowi and the Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi contacted their respective Australian counterparts to encourage further reconsideration before moving its embassy to Jerusalem.³⁰ Prabowo's camp, on the other hand, has taken a different approach. Speaking on the 2018 Indonesia Economic Forum, Prabowo stated that "acting as Palestine's supporter, we have our own opinion. But Australia is also an independent and sovereign state. Therefore we need to respect their sovereignty."³¹ As expected it triggered another domestic debate

²⁶ "Prabowo: China Penting Bagi Indonesia, Hubungan Harus Ditingkatkan," *Kompas*, 28 September 2018, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/09/28/11193861/prabowo-china-penting-bagi-indonesia-hubungan-harus-ditingkatkan>

²⁷ "Gerindra Tantang Debat Aturan Tenaga Kerja Asing, Ini Tanggapan Istana," *Liputan6.com*, 19 April 2018, <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/3468190/gerindra-tantang-debat-aturan-tenaga-kerja-asing-ini-tanggapan-istana>

²⁸ "Doa Prabowo Subianto di Antara Foto Raja Arab Saudi," *Gatra*, 25 September 2018, <https://www.gatra.com/rubrik/nasional/348054-Doa-Prabowo-Subianto-di-Antara-Foto-Raja-Arab-Saudi>

²⁹ "Hadir di Penyambutan Raja Salman, Prabowo Harap Ada Penambahan Kuota Haji," *Republika*, 2 March 2017, <https://www.republika.co.id/berita/nasional/umum/17/03/02/om6a7r396-hadir-di-penyambutan-raja-salman-prabowo-harap-ada-penambahan-kuota-haji>

³⁰ "Jokowi Kontak Australia, Klarifikasi soal Yerusalem," *CNN Indonesia*, 16 October 2018, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/internasional/20181016132106-106-338875/jokowi-kontak-australia-klarifikasi-soal-yerusalem>

³¹ "Pemindahan kedutaan ke Yerusalem, Prabowo hormati kedaulatan Australia," *BBC Indonesia*, 22 November 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-46299203>

surrounding the issue. Ma'ruf Amin conveyed his disagreement with Prabowo and insisted that "the Islamic society would reject any country's intention to move its embassy to Jerusalem."³²

Looking at the ongoing discourse prior to the official start of the campaign period (as per end of December 2018), the public is now more aware of foreign policy issues and has become more so in the past several years due to the increasing number of online media and the spread of social media. Nonetheless, it is still the case that foreign policy is dominantly elites' domain and society is rather poorly informed. Therefore, compared to issues related to welfare and economy, international issues are still in the lower priority of the voters' attention, and consequently matter only little to their decision when casting their vote. Similar to 2014, for international issues to be at the heart of discourse among the Indonesian voters, they must have direct links with domestic issues, in particular, welfare. And even so, international issues are thus far limited to debates and public discourse but would be of little influence on the actual decision of the voters.

³² "Respons Ma'ruf soal Pandangan Prabowo Terkait Pemindahan Kedutaan Australia ke Yerusalem," *Kompas.com*, 24 November 2018, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/11/24/23200341/respons-maruf-soal-pandangan-prabowo-terkait-pemindahan-kedutaan-australia>

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She has special interest in issues of regional security in East Asia, maritime security, Indonesia's foreign policy, and regional cooperation. In addition to her interest in security issues, in the recent years she has also looked into issues related to development cooperation. She was the Chief Editor of *The Indonesian Quarterly*, a quarterly academic journal published by CSIS, from 2013 to 2016. She was also a lecturer at two private universities in Jakarta from 2005 to 2009. She obtained a Master's degree from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) and a PhD in Political Science from the University of Hamburg.