

Third Time's the Charm:

The Youth Vote and Prabowo's Victory in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election

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ABSTRACT

After previous failed attempts, Prabowo Subianto won the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. In this article, we outline the events that unfolded in the run-up to the election before analyzing the drivers of Indonesian voting behaviour based on original survey data. Our analyses underscore the importance of transformations in the generational composition of the Indonesian electorate: younger voters, especially those born after the return of democracy, are fuelling its erosion with their support of a former general accused of human rights abuses. In addition to benefitting from the support of incumbent President Joko Widodo, we argue that Prabowo's victory was underpinned by a sophisticated social media campaign, the waning memory of Indonesia's authoritarian past, and a young populace anxious about their economic prospects.

Keywords: Indonesia, election, young voters, youth, economic anxiety, voting behaviour

DOI: 10.5509/2024973-art6

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Acknowledgments: We gratefully acknowledge the support of the Singapore Ministry of Education Tier 2 Grant for the Hi-Res SIKAP data collection (MOE-T2EP40123-0001). The Hi-Res SIKAP data collection protocols were approved by the National University of Singapore Institutional Review Board (NUS-IRB-2023-798). Abdul Aziz and Putri Hening Graha at the National University of Singapore, as well as Edith Bradshaw at Wake Forest University, provided excellent research assistance. All remaining errors are ours.

Introduction

On February 14, 2024, Indonesia held its fifth presidential election since the return of electoral democracy. In the weeks building up to the election, pollsters and prominent analysts were divided on whether the defense minister and repeat contender, Prabowo Subianto, would secure the 50 percent of votes necessary to win the election in one round. Three credible public opinion surveys released in the week before the election estimated Prabowo's national vote share at 50.8 percent, 51.8 percent, and 51.9 percent—all of which had margins of error that dipped below the threshold needed for the former special forces commander to secure a mandate in one round.¹ In the event, Prabowo and his running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, son of the outgoing President Joko Widodo (or Jokowi, as he is popularly known), won an unexpectedly decisive 58.8 percent of the popular vote, defeating Anies Baswedan, the former governor of Jakarta, and Ganjar Pranowo, the former governor of Central Java.

Prabowo's victory merits comment for both its scale and its scope. According to initial exit polls, across virtually every major demographic category and salient cleavage in Indonesian society, Prabowo secured an outright or near majority of votes.² There was little evidence of educational polarization, for instance, with Prabowo winning 51 percent of votes from Indonesians with at least a tertiary degree—approximately equivalent to his support among those who received only a primary education (56 percent).³ Across all but two provinces, Prabowo won a majority of the votes, including in both DKI Jakarta and Central Java—the provinces from which Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo hailed as governors, respectively. Even more surprising, a majority of non-Muslim Indonesians supported Prabowo, as well, evidently overlooking his history of incendiary religious rhetoric during the 2019 campaign and his well-documented alliance with Islamist groups.⁴

There are at least two productive perspectives from which to understand the 2024 Indonesian general election. The first is to see the outcome as a function of elite conflict.⁵ From this perspective, it is not a stretch to suggest

¹ "Survei Indikator: Elektabilitas Prabowo-Gibran 51,8 Persen, Anies-Muhaimin 24,1 Persen, Ganjar-Mahfud 19,6 Persen" [Indicator survey: Prabowo-Gibran electability at 51.8 percent, Anies-Muhaimin at 24.1 percent, Ganjar-Mahfud at 19.6 percent], *Kompas*, 9 February 2024; "Hasil Survei LSI Terbaru Jelang Pencoblosan Pilpres 2024, Siapa Pemenangnya?" [Latest LSI survey results ahead of the 2024 presidential election, who is the winner?], *Detik*, 25 February 2024; "Poltracking: Prabowo-Gibran 50,9" [Poltracking: Prabowo-Gibran at 50.9 percent], *Detik*, 9 February 2024.

² Eve Warburton, "Explaining the Indonesian Election Result," presented at the Southeast Asia seminar, Singapore Management University, Singapore, 19 February 2024.

³ "Rilis Exit Poll Pemilu 2024: Basis Demografi dan Perilaku Pemilih" [Release of the 2024 election exit poll: Demographic basis and voter behaviour] (Jakarta: Indikator, 2024), <https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Rilis-Exit-Poll-Pilpres-2024-Indikator.pdf>.

⁴ Syafiq Hasyim, "Prabowo's Shifting Strategy on Indonesian Muslim Voters," *Fulcrum*, 9 June 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/prabowos-shifting-strategy-on-indonesian-muslim-voters/>.

⁵ Marcus Mietzner, "The Limits of Autocratisation in Indonesia: Power Dispersal and Elite Competition in a Compromised Democracy," *Third World Quarterly* (March 2024): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2024.2317970>.

that the organizing cleavage of the 2024 Indonesian election was actually one that revolved around politicians not on the ballot: between the term-limited Jokowi and Megawati Sukarnoputri, the long-time head of Jokowi's party, Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P), and the daughter of one of Indonesia's founding fathers, Soekarno. The relationship between the two has long been riven with tensions that erupted into open conflict in early 2023 in a series of speeches at the 50th anniversary of the PDI-P, where Megawati sought to crush Jokowi's fledgling and failed attempt to amend the constitution to hold a third presidential term.⁶ In the end, Jokowi turned against his own party by securing a position for his son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as the vice-presidential candidate on Prabowo's ticket. One interpretation of this series of events is to view it as a power struggle between Jokowi's aspiring dynasty and the waning influence of Megawati.

The second way to understand the 2024 general election is from the perspective of the voters and their preferences. Indeed, the foundation of this elite conflict is rooted in Jokowi's impregnable popular support: it is precisely because he has an approval rating that approaches 75 percent that he was emboldened to challenge existing elites and subvert democratic norms.⁷ When Jokowi implicitly endorsed Prabowo, then, he undoubtedly boosted Prabowo's electoral prospects. But this is not to say that Prabowo did not possess a strong electoral appeal to voters in his own right. Recall that 48 percent and 45 percent of voters supported Prabowo in head-to-head contests against Jokowi in 2014 and 2019, respectively, with voters drawn chiefly to his appeal as a decisive strongman. In these earlier contests, Prabowo historically drew stronger support from younger voters than older ones. But one of the most surprising features of Prabowo's victory in 2024 is the depth of his support among young voters, in particular. According to exit polls, nearly 71 percent of Gen Z voters (< 27 y.o.) supported Prabowo—significantly above and beyond his support among voters from older generations such as Gen X (50.6 percent) and Baby Boomers (47.1 percent).⁸

In this article, we start by reviewing the sequence of events that shaped the build-up to the February 14, 2024 Indonesian general election. We take seriously the manoeuvres of political elites—the candidates and the oligarchs from which they draw support. Doing so reveals the extent to which Jokowi

⁶ Da Costa quotes Megawati as saying, “[the Constitution stipulates] it is 2 periods. Yes, I am sorry, just 2 periods. It does not mean that Jokowi is not smart. Why do you think I made him president if he is not smart.” See Gusty da Costa, “Megawati says no to idea of President Jokowi's third period,” *Indonesia Business Post*, 10 January 2023, <https://indonesiabusinesspost.com/insider/megawati-says-no-to-president-jokowis-third-period>.

⁷ “Rilis exit poll pemilu 2024,” *Indikator*.

⁸ Gen Z voters are those born after 1996, Millennial voters are those born between 1981 and 1996, Gen X voters are those born between 1965 and 1980, while Baby Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964. See Kim Parker and Ruth Igielnik, “On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know About Gen Z So Far,” *Pew Research Center*, 14 May 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2020/05/14/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far-2>.

marshalled and directed the state apparatus to aid in the election of Prabowo and Gibran, actions that represent a low point for Indonesia's fledgling democracy. We also caution that dynastic politics has taken hold in Indonesian politics and will likely continue to increasingly colour the electoral landscape as Reformasi-era norms against nepotism have weakened due to the precedent set by Jokowi's actions.

Our chief aim in this paper is to diagnose the drivers of Prabowo's substantial support among Indonesian voters. Here, we draw on the newly available Hi-Res SIKAP online public opinion surveys, focusing specifically on the data collected between November 2023 to February 2024.⁹ Our analysis is primarily interested in diagnosing Prabowo's strength among young voters, which reveals four insights. First, we investigate the extent to which Prabowo's strong support among young voters was a function of his sophisticated social media campaign and rebranding, finding evidence in support of the idea that TikTok was an especially influential platform: young voters on TikTok were significantly more likely to support Prabowo than those who were not on the platform. We detect no such differences according to usage of other social media platforms. Second, we explore the impact of Prabowo's history of human rights violations during his time as a general, examining whether young voters' weak memory of such episodes explains the strength of their support. Here we find modest support: voters who indicated that they recollected episodes of human rights abuses were, in general, less likely to support Prabowo—although this difference does not hold for the youngest voters, suggesting that Prabowo's history of orchestrating violence against civilians was not especially important to those born after the return of democracy. Third, we turn our attention to the role of economic precarity in nudging young voters to cast their support for a strongman, again finding modest support: among young voters, although not with other age groups, income negatively correlates with an intention to vote for Prabowo. Finally, fourth, we detect no evidence that young voters, on average, hold more illiberal attitudes than their older peers, suggesting the strength of their support for Prabowo was not a function of underlying changes in support for democracy itself.

Context, Candidates, and Cleavages

The Context

The 2024 Indonesian general election occurred against the backdrop of Jokowi's two-term presidency, which despite its focus on economic growth, social services, and infrastructure development, has also been marred with

⁹ Nicholas Kuipers and Nathanael Gratias Sumaktoyo, *High-Frequency Surveys on Indonesians' Knowledge of and Attitudes on Politics (Hi-Res SIKAP)*, accessed 5 March 2024, <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/6E9SM>.

various illiberal measures. Observers and activists have raised alarms over Jokowi's manoeuvres. As early as 2016, his administration arrested Islamist figures who criticized both Jokowi and his former running mate-turned-candidate in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial race, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (known as Ahok).¹⁰ In 2017, the government issued a new decree on mass organizations, which granted it the right to disband organizations considered to contradict the state ideology of Pancasila. This decree was in turn used to ban the transnational Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI), an organization that supported the creation of a Sharia-based government. Critical civilians were targeted as well. By one count, 18 civilians were tried and convicted for insulting Jokowi between 2014 and 2019.¹¹

Related to the 2024 presidential election specifically, Jokowi made several manoeuvres to undermine the viability of rival candidates. After Surya Paloh, chairman of the NasDem Party, endorsed Anies Baswedan for president in July 2023, it was alleged by some that Jokowi and his supporters had instructed state-affiliated firms to strategically avoid patronizing firms that were part of Paloh's media conglomerate to undercut his revenue flow and undermine his support of Anies' campaign.¹² Ade Chandra, Baswedan's campaign spokesperson, described how some of their campaign events were cancelled or not approved by various local governments in February, just two weeks shy of the election.¹³ Potentially to weaken Ganjar Pranowo, Jokowi made multiple visits to various regions to distribute up to five different types of social assistance packages, including rice, fertilizer, and cash to residents in Central Java, Ganjar's provincial base.¹⁴

Yet, voters hardly seem to care: a May 2023 poll pegged Jokowi's approval rating at 81.7 percent.¹⁵ This popularity continued even when, in flagrant violation of Indonesia's electoral law that requires candidates for national

¹⁰ Thomas P. Power, "Jokowi's Authoritarian Turn and Indonesia's Democratic Decline," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 54, no. 3 (September 2018): 307–338, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2018.1549918>; Marcus Mietzner, "Fighting Illiberalism with Illiberalism: Islamist Populism and Democratic Deconsolidation in Indonesia," *Pacific Affairs* 91, no. 2 (June 2018): 261–282, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2018912261>.

¹¹ Edward Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner, "Indonesia's Democratic Paradox: Competitive Elections amidst Rising Illiberalism," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 55, no. 3 (September 2019): 295–317, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00074918.2019.1690412>.

¹² "Dibongkar Habis-habisan! Anies Baswedan Beber Situasi Bisnis Surya Paloh Pasca Dukung Dirinya: Iklan dari BUMN Drop" [Completely exposed! Anies Baswedan reveals Surya Paloh's business situation after supporting him: Ads from state-owned enterprises dropped], *Warta Ekonomi*, 19 June 2023.

¹³ Kanupriya Kapoor, "Who Is Anies Baswedan, Ex-Jakarta Governor Running for Indonesia President?" *Reuters*, 12 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/indonesias-anies-enjoys-late-uptick-presidential-race-2024-02-08>.

¹⁴ Kate Lamb, "Jokowi Effect: How Indonesia's Outgoing Leader Shaped Election to Succeed Him," *Reuters*, 12 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/jokowi-effect-how-indonesias-outgoing-leader-shaped-election-succeed-him-2024-02-12>; "President Jokowi Denies Politicizing Social Assistance," *Jakarta Post*, 5 February 2024, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/indonesia/2024/02/05/president-jokowi-denies-politicizing-social-assistance.html>.

¹⁵ "Survey Shows 81 Percent Public Approval for Jokowi," *Tempo*, 19 May 2023, <https://en.tempo.co/read/1727587/survey-shows-81-percent-public-approval-for-jokowi>.

office (president and vice-president) to be at least 40 years old to be eligible to be nominated, Jokowi secured a position for his 36-year-old son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, on the ticket of his former rival turned defense minister, Prabowo Subianto, thus spurning his own party by implicitly endorsing an alternative candidate. To enable this move, the Constitutional Court created a loophole that allowed for Gibran, the current mayor of Solo, to run on the ticket on the grounds that he is a regional leader. While democracy watchdogs cried foul, noting that Jokowi's brother-in-law is the chief justice of the Indonesian Constitutional Court, his popularity ratings in polls remained high. A poll by the Lembaga Survei Indonesia in early December 2023, just two months shy of the presidential election, indicated that 76 percent of respondents approved of Jokowi's performance.¹⁶ In January 2024, the same organization reported an approval rating of 78 percent, an exceptionally high figure, even for an outgoing president.¹⁷

The Candidates

Three candidates appeared on the ballot to succeed Jokowi as president of Indonesia. Anies Baswedan, along with his running mate Muhaimin Iskandar, occupied the first position on the ballot. Baswedan rose to national prominence by challenging Ahok, Jokowi's former running mate and vice governor of Jakarta, in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. Although Baswedan himself espouses moderate Islam, he leveraged the endorsements of Islamist groups and benefitted from the divisive Islam-based appeals that mobilized thousands to protest against Ahok, on the grounds that Ahok, an ethnic Chinese and a Christian, had blasphemed against the Quran in a viral video.¹⁸

Baswedan declared his candidacy for president of Indonesia in October 2022, with endorsements from the secular nationalist Nasional Demokrat (NasDem) Party, along with the Islamist Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) and the Islamic Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB).¹⁹ Baswedan's support thus drew primarily from a population of urban and well-educated voters who were motivated chiefly by his commitment to both a corruption-free style of governance while also advancing a religious agenda.

In the number two ballot position was the front-runner Prabowo Subianto and his running mate, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's son and mayor

¹⁶ Chairul Fikri, "Jokowi's Approval Rating Hits 76% in LSI Survey," *Jakarta Globe*, 10 December 2023, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/jokowis-strong-approval-rating-shapes-voter-preferences-for-prabowo>.

¹⁷ Nabel Gibran El Rizani and Yustinus Paat, "Jokowi's Strong Approval Rating Shapes Voter Preferences for Prabowo," *Jakarta Globe*, 11 January 2024, <https://jakartaglobe.id/news/jokowis-strong-approval-rating-shapes-voter-preferences-for-prabowo>.

¹⁸ Risa Toha and S. P. Harish, "Electoral Violence in Indonesia 20 Years after Reformasi," in *Democracy in Indonesia: From Stagnation to Regression?* eds. Thomas Power and Eve Warburton (Singapore: ISEAS: Yusof Ishak Institute, 2021), 346–370.

¹⁹ "NasDem Resmi Deklarasikan Anies Baswedan Jadi Capres 2024" [NasDem officially declares Anies Baswedan as the 2024 presidential candidate], *Kompas*, 3 October 2022.

of Solo. Prabowo served as the minister of defense in Jokowi's final cabinet, and is the former son-in-law of Indonesia's long-time strongman Suharto, as well as a former commander of the Indonesian special forces. Born to one of Indonesia's elite families and educated abroad, Prabowo built his career in the military with stints in East Timor and Papua. He has been accused of human rights abuses, including the slaughter of civilians in Papua and East Timor, the torture and disappearances of pro-democracy activists, and the instigation of riots in 1998.

Since the return of democracy in Indonesia, Prabowo has repeatedly pursued high political office through his political party, Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra). In both, 2014 and 2019 presidential races, Prabowo's campaigns centred on his efforts to project a vision of right-wing nationalism—an image he sought to shore up with divisive rhetoric and through coalitions with Islamist parties and adjacent groups. In both elections, voters were sceptical of his vision, with many instead focusing on his ties to the Soeharto family, his human rights violations, and his image as a volatile former military commander. In both elections, Prabowo refused to accept the official election results.²⁰ In 2014, he brought his case to the Constitutional Court, where it was overruled. In 2019, Prabowo invoked his supporters to mobilize a people power movement and reject the results. Riots and protests occurred for two days in major cities in Indonesia in May 2019, killing 8 people and injuring at least 700.²¹ In a bid to restore national unity, Jokowi appointed Prabowo to serve as his minister of defense in 2019.²²

In the 2024 election, Prabowo portrayed himself as an experienced statesman and military commander. Central to this strategy was Prabowo's claim as Jokowi's chosen successor. Although Jokowi avoided an explicit endorsement, Prabowo's decision to select Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as his running mate was widely understood to carry the weight of Jokowi's support for the ticket. In keeping with this strategy, Prabowo promised to continue with Jokowi's big-ticket plan to develop Indonesia's new capital city in East Kalimantan. Other campaign promises included bread-and-butter promises like free milk and lunch for school children, a commitment to create 19 million new jobs, to restrict the inflow of foreign workers, to lower individual income taxes, and to increase defense spending to modernize the military.

The final contender, in the number three ballot position, was Ganjar Pranowo, the two-termed governor of Central Java, and his running mate Mahfud MD, the former coordinating minister for political, legal, and security

²⁰ In 2014, Jokowi won 53.15 percent of votes, whereas Prabowo garnered 46.85 percent. In 2019, Prabowo lost with an 11 percent margin.

²¹ I Made Supriatma, "Prabowo's Last Game: How Far will he Go?" *ISEAS Commentary*, 28 May 2019, <https://sealionplus.iseas.edu.sg/nodes/view/23944>.

²² Dan Slater, "Party Cartelization, Indonesian-Style: Presidential Power-Sharing and the Contingency of Democratic Opposition," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 18, no. 1 (January 2018): 23–46, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2017.26>.

affairs. Ganjar was nominated by PDI-P, the party to which he has been a member for the entirety of his political career. Prior to winning the 2013 gubernatorial race in Central Java and securing re-election for the same position in 2018, Ganjar was a PDI-P representative for the House of Representatives from 2004 through 2013.

On paper, Ganjar was characterized as “strikingly similar” to Jokowi.²³ He came from a humble background, championed pro-poor policies in his term as governor, and consistently preferred a hands-on approach with maximum accessibility to the community. His coalition and campaign success team (*tim sukses*) drew heavily from PDI-P rank-and-file members, and had fewer Islamic figures relative to his rivals.²⁴ In theory, Ganjar sought to appeal to the core constituency of the PDI-P: the large share of the Indonesian electorate that supports secular-nationalist politics focused on development and unity in diversity. This is the constituency from which Jokowi has historically drawn support.

The Cleavages

The composition of the Indonesian electorate, and the cleavages that characterize it, presented significant headwinds for both Anies and Ganjar. The organizing cleavage of Indonesian politics since Reformasi has historically revolved around religion, with a share of the electorate supporting candidates who advance a modernist and Islamist agenda.²⁵ While meaningful, this is a comparatively small tranche of the Indonesian electorate, around 25 percent. When joined with other segments of the Indonesian electorate, however, the Islamist vote can be powerful—as seen in Prabowo’s previous attempts to win the presidency in 2014 and 2019. Anies’ attempt to win a national election based on a narrowly religiously themed message thus provided a strong test of the extent to which identity politics are persuasive on a large stage.

In the aftermath of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, the 2019 presidential election, and the mobilization of Islamist groups around these elections, scholars and observers offered analyses that variously pointed to the enduring potential of identity-based appeals, suggesting that such political strategies might be here to stay.²⁶ Yet, across the world, the popularity of

²³ “Indonesia’s Ganjar Faces Battle to Overcome Jokowi’s Election Betrayal,” *The Straits Times*, 12 February 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/indonesias-ganjar-faces-battle-to-overcome-jokowis-election-betrayal-0>.

²⁴ Alex Arifianto and Aisah Putri Budiatri, “From Polarisation to Opportunism: Organised Islam and the 2024 Elections,” *New Mandala*, 22 January 2024, <https://www.newmandala.org/from-polarisation-to-opportunism-organised-islam-and-the-2024-elections>.

²⁵ Edward Aspinall et al., “Mapping the Indonesian Political Spectrum,” *New Mandala*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.newmandala.org/mapping-indonesian-political-spectrum>.

²⁶ Leonard Sebastian and Adri Wanto, “Identity Politics Aren’t Going Anywhere in Indonesia,” *East Asia Forum*, 25 June 2019, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2019/06/25/identity-politics-arent-going-anywhere-in-indonesia>; Deasy Simandjuntak, “Identity Politics Looms over Indonesia’s Presidential Election,” *East Asia Forum*, 10 November 2018, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2018/11/10/identity-politics-looms-over-indonesias-presidential-election>.

Islamist politics and parties have receded from their high water mark in the aftermath of the Arab Spring—possibly reflecting the extent to which these parties' messages have been co-opted by more traditional parties. Indonesian voters are perhaps also spurned by the inability of these parties, when elected, to genuinely deliver on their campaign promises of cleaner governance.

The Indonesian electorate in 2024 was also unique as it represents the first time that a majority of voters were either Gen-Z or Millennials.²⁷ Prevailing theories of comparative politics would suggest that the growth of young voters in the Indonesian electorate should move candidates' platforms and messages in directions that capture the interests of the younger generations. While some scholars have noted lower participation in electoral politics and disillusionment toward democracy among young voters in many mature democracies,²⁸ more recent evidence from the United States and Western Europe suggests that young people are more likely to protest, write petitions, boycott, volunteer, or engage in digital activism.²⁹ That is to say, they engage in politics, but they do so with modes that are different from those of older voters.³⁰ They are also more likely to champion specific policies and issues that pertain to their interests, such as health and environmental protection.³¹ However, these expectations derive from European, North American, and South American contexts, where the axis of political competition falls along traditional left-right lines and where young voters disproportionately support candidates on the political left.

Youth mobilization in countries across Asia may look different: young voters in Pakistan recently turned out in droves for Imran Khan while a majority of Gen-Z voters in South Korea supported the conservative People Power Party. In Thailand, a surge of youth voters propelled the Move Forward Party to a strong plurality of votes in the 2023 general election.³² The closest analogue to the 2024 Indonesian election is the 2022 Philippines presidential election, in which dynastic politics and the fading memory of an authoritarian

²⁷ Rachel Wilson and Rosa de Acosta, "How Indonesia's Future Is in the Hands of Young Voters," CNN, 10 February 2024, <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/11/asia/indonesia-election-young-voters-dg/index.html>.

²⁸ Roberto Stefan Foa and Yascha Mounk, "Youth and the Populist Wave," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45, nos. 9–10 (October 2019): 1013–1024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453719872314>.

²⁹ Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97–113; James Sloam, "New Voice, Less Equal," *Comparative Political Studies* 47, no. 5 (2014): 663–688, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453441>.

³⁰ Eva Fernández Guzmán Grassi, Martín Portos, and Andrea Felicetti, "Young People's Attitudes towards Democracy and Political Participation: Evidence from a Cross-European Study," *Government and Opposition* 59, no. 2 (June 2023): 582–604, <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2023.16>.

³¹ Gabriel M. Ahlfeldt, Wolfgang Maennig, and Steffen Q. Mueller, "The Generation Gap in Direct Democracy: Age vs. Cohort Effects," *European Journal of Political Economy* 72 (March 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpolco.2021.102120>.

³² Napon Jatusripitak and Jacob Isaac Ricks, "Age and Ideology: The Emergence of New Political Cleavages in Thailand's 2566 (2023) Election," *Pacific Affairs* 97, no. 1 (March 2024): 117–136, <https://doi.org/10.5509/2024971-art6>.

legacy featured prominently in Bongbong Marcos' victory.³³ Here, there were few generational divides in terms of support for the two candidates.

Analyzing the drivers of Prabowo's landslide 2024 presidential victory from the perspective of generational politics is thus motivated by both historical and comparative cases. Surely, given the scale of Prabowo's victory, a significant proportion of young voters supported his candidacy. But to what features of his candidacy were they drawn? In the Philippines, many pointed to a fading memory of the experience of authoritarianism under Bongbong Marcos' father that stopped young voters from turning away from his candidacy; to what extent was a similar mechanism at work in the Indonesian election? In South Korea, the uptick in youth support for the conservative PPP Party is driven by young men, especially, prompting a gendered investigation in the extent to which Prabowo's support among young voters similarly cleaves along gender.

The SIKAP Data

To understand Prabowo's victory, especially his appeal among younger voters, we analyze high-frequency surveys on Indonesians' knowledge of and attitudes on politics (Hi-Res SIKAP) data.³⁴ The SIKAP project is an initiative to run 58 weekly online surveys from November 27, 2023 to January 5, 2025, capturing the evolution of voters' attitudes as they unfold over a period of political tumult and change.

Since the first wave, each SIKAP wave has sampled at least 1,650 voters aged 18 or above. In advance of the election, the SIKAP sample was suspended for the period of February 12–14, 2024, to comply with Indonesian electoral laws around the quiet period in advance of balloting. Thus, the final survey conducted in advance of the election was between February 4–11, 2024. Following the election, the SIKAP project merged weeks 12 and 13, with data collection covering a period of February 15 to February 25, 2024. In the ensuing analyses, we refer to our samples as pre-election or post-election with the former referring the sample up to February 11 whereas the latter refers to the sample collected between February 15 and 25.

Given the online nature of the data collection, the SIKAP project shares with other online surveys limitations concerning sample representativeness. For example, SIKAP respondents are significantly more educated than the general population (and thus wealthier). On other margins, the SIKAP project is surprisingly representative, including with respect to three demographic quotas concerning gender, age, and geographic region. Although SIKAP data does not implement a religion quota, the samples are

³³ Dean Dulay et al., "Continuity, History, and Identity: Why Bongbong Marcos Won the 2022 Philippine Presidential Election," *Pacific Affairs* 96, no. 1 (March 2023): 85–104, <https://doi.org/10.5509/202396185>.

³⁴ Kuipers and Sumaktoyo, "High-Frequency Survey."

generally representative of the broader population in terms of religion. Table 1 presents a comparison of the SIKAP sample and the population of voters above 18 on key indicators.

The imbalance on education between our sample and the broader Indonesian population merits comment. In general, researchers ought to be cautious when making population-level inferences from convenience samples, especially unweighted ones. Indeed, it is worth stressing that our theoretical interest in this paper is to examine the drivers of youth support

Table 1
Sample characteristics

Categories	SIKAP W1-W13	Population
Gender (quota)		
Male	50.4%	49.8%
Female	49.6%	50.2%
Age (quota)		
18–24	18.50%	17.9%
25–34	25.86%	26.3%
35–44	23.82%	22.4%
45–54	18.92%	16.4%
55+	12.90%	17%
Region (quota)		
Sumatera	19.96%	20.4%
Java and Bali	60.17%	61.1%
Central and eastern provinces	19.86%	18.5%
Religion		
Islam	82.22%	87.4%
Christian	14.14%	9.3%
Others	3.64%	2.8%
Education		
Less than high school	3.61%	67.4%
High school	36.52%	25.3%
Higher than high school	59.87%	7.2%

Source: Kuipers and Sumaktoyo, “High-Frequency Survey.”

for Prabowo—rather than the population writ large. And there is reason to believe that online samples of young voters in Indonesia are decent approximations of the populations from which they are drawn, as internet penetration among this subpopulation is near universal. Yet, there is surprisingly little educational or class-based polarization in Indonesia—a feature that bolsters our confidence in the inferences we draw from our sample. Indeed, exit polls show very little variation in vote choice according to whether respondents hold primary, secondary, or tertiary educations.³⁵

To bolster our confidence in the data on which we conduct our analyses, we compare the vote preference estimates drawn from (1) the SIKAP pre-election survey, (2) the SIKAP post-election survey, and (3) the Indikator exit poll (see figure 1). The simulated vote share results from the SIKAP pre-election survey are virtually indistinguishable from the Indikator exit poll, even though the latter employed a more sophisticated stratified random sampling of 2,975 Indonesian voters. Owing to the SIKAP project's strict regional, gender, and age-based quotas, the final survey predicted a 56.5 percent vote share, which is statistically indistinguishable from the final result reported by the Indonesian electoral commission (58.8 percent). Even more impressively, decomposing estimated vote shares from the SIKAP data according to generational cohort shows virtually indistinguishable shares to those obtained from the Indikator exit poll.

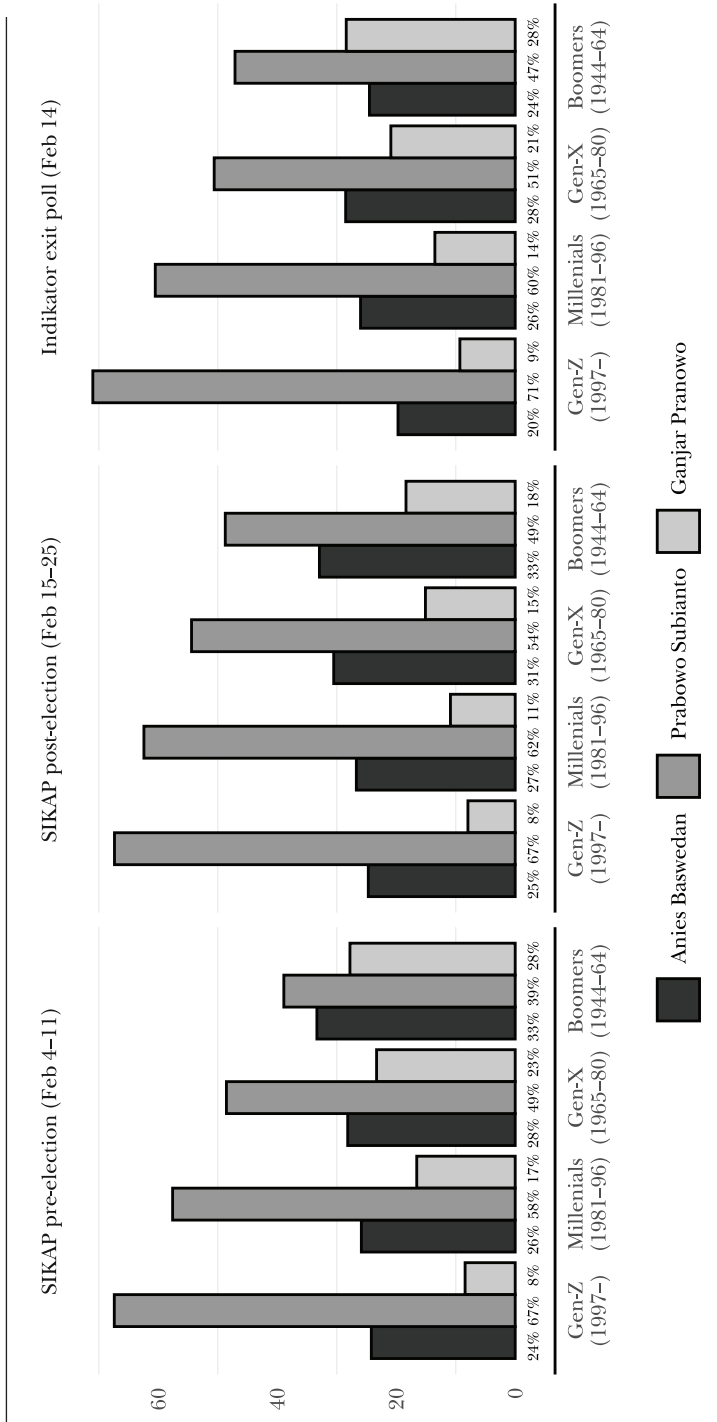
Prabowo's Landslide and the Youth Vote

One puzzle for observers of Indonesian politics has been Prabowo's surprising appeal among young voters, in particular. According to both pre- and post-election estimates obtained from the SIKAP project, 67 percent of Gen-Z voters (i.e., born after 1996, currently 27 years old and younger) indicated either an intention to vote for, or having voted for, Prabowo in the election. This is nearly 20 percentage points higher than the 49 percent of Baby Boomers who indicated that they had voted for Prabowo after the election. The observed support is not an artifice of the online sample from which the SIKAP data draws, either. According to the Indikator exit poll, 71 percent of Gen-Z voters supported Prabowo in the 2024 election—again, higher than the estimated 47 percent of Baby Boomers in the same survey who indicated having cast a ballot for Prabowo.

For students of comparative politics, this phenomenon is surprising: historically and globally, young voters tend to support liberal political positions and candidates more than their older peers—often eschewing more conservative candidates. In the United States, Gen-Z and Millennial voters hold more liberal attitudes across a range of issues, compared with

³⁵ “Rilis exit poll pemilu 2024,” *Indikator*.

Figure 1
Vote preference, by age group



Note: Data drawn from week 11 (February 4–11, 2024) and weeks 12 and 13 (February 15–25, 2024) of the SIKAP project. Vote share estimates exclude respondents who indicated that they “did not know” or “did not vote,” scaling percentages accordingly. The Indikator exit poll draws on a stratified random sample of 2,975 voters drawn from as many polling stations and was conducted on election day (February 14, 2024).

their older peers.³⁶ Similar results hold true in the United Kingdom, where young voters are much more likely to support Labour than the Tories.³⁷ To be sure, the Western conceptualization of left-right ideological politics does not easily map onto the Indonesian case, where alternative axes of disagreement produce more coherent coalitions.³⁸ But Indonesian youth have a long history of advancing causes thought to be liberal, including most recently the pro-democracy movement in 1998 that was chiefly led by university students around Indonesia. In the ensuing analyses, we probe several possible explanations for the generational patterns emerging in Indonesians' voting behaviour: collective memory, economic concerns, and views of democracy.

It is worth emphasizing that our results are circumscribed by Prabowo's comparative advantage on social media, in which he engineered a sophisticated digital campaign that successfully reinvented him as a leader sympathetic to young people's concerns. Prabowo's rebranding involved casting himself as a cuddly (*gemoy*) grandpa to soften his image, especially in the eyes of young voters who may have otherwise felt alienated or socially distant from a 72-year-old candidate.³⁹ This effort took place principally on social media, especially TikTok, with many widely circulated videos of Prabowo dancing (*joget*) on stage in front of supporters and cartoonized renderings of an uncharacteristically bubbly and friendly Prabowo. In contrast to all other modes of information consumption, and consistent with this explanation, our survey data shows that respondents who used TikTok at least daily for the consumption of political information were significantly more likely to support Prabowo—as compared with those who used TikTok less than daily.

Collective Memory

One explanation of Prabowo's strength concerns the role of fading collective memory. The most disqualifying feature of Prabowo's candidacy, and the aspect of his forthcoming presidency most concerning to international observers, is his ties to the Suharto family and alleged history of brutality and human rights violations that were characteristic of the Suharto regime. Throughout his career in public service, Prabowo was a soldier and military

³⁶ Parker Kim, Nikki Graf, and Ruth Igielnik, "Generation Z Looks a Lot Like Millennials on Key Social and Political Issues," *Pew Research Center*, 17 January 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues>.

³⁷ James Tilley, "Hard Evidence: Do We Become More Conservative with Age?" *The Conversation*, 4 October 2015, <https://theconversation.com/hard-evidence-do-we-become-more-conservative-with-age-47910>.

³⁸ Diego Fossati et al., "Ideological Representation in Clientelistic Democracies: The Indonesian Case," *Electoral Studies* 63 (February 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2019.102111>.

³⁹ Virdika Rizky Utama, "Will the 'Gemoy' Tactic be Effective in Wooing Gen Z Voters?" *The Jakarta Post*, 6 December 2023, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/opinion/2023/12/06/will-the-gemoy-tactic-be-effective-in-wooing-gen-z-voters.html>.

lieutenant in the Indonesian special forces (Kopassus). During this time, he was involved in episodes of alleged human rights violation, including massacres in Papua and East Timor.⁴⁰ In the final years of the Suharto regime, Prabowo was reassigned as commander of the Jakarta-based garrison, the Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), and deployed to locations across the island of Java to quell protests and unrest. The period of unrest included a series of high-profile confrontations in which Prabowo was alleged to have been directly involved, such as the so-called Trisakti tragedy on May 12, 1998, in which four students were shot during a peaceful protest on Trisakti campus grounds. The perpetrators of this shooting are unknown to this day.⁴¹ During this time he was also accused of overseeing the abduction and torture of at least 22 pro-democracy activists in 1998, 13 of whom are still missing.⁴² Prabowo has also been accused of instigating the May 1998 riots that led to the death of approximately a thousand people and to the rape of hundreds of Chinese women.⁴³ Although several of his lieutenants were tried and convicted, Prabowo has continued to deny any involvement, though he was dismissed from military duty in August 1998 on charges of related insubordination.⁴⁴ When pressed by a rival candidate at one of the 2014 presidential debates about his role in the 1998 abductions of activists, Prabowo retorted that he is “a former soldier who did his duty as best as I could.”⁴⁵

These events were widely publicized and have cast a shadow over Prabowo's attempts to win public office during Indonesia's democratic era. But with an electorate increasingly comprised of voters who did not live through reformasi and who may not recall the violence of Suharto's New Order, Prabowo may face fewer headwinds from his involvement in the worst moments of Indonesia's authoritarian past.

The SIKAP data offers an opportunity to explore these possibilities in greater depth to see whether—and to what extent—waning collective memory among the Indonesian electorate is driving Prabowo's support among young voters. Starting in our combined week 12 and 13 surveys, fielded between

⁴⁰ Gerry van Klinken, “Prabowo and Human Rights,” *Inside Indonesia*, 27 April 2014, <https://www.insideindonesia.org/editions/elections-2014/prabowo-and-human-rights>.

⁴¹ “25 Tahun Krisis: Mahasiswa Trisakti Tewas, Dalang Terungkap?” [25 years of crisis: Trisakti students killed, mastermind revealed?], *CNBC Indonesia*, 12 May 2023.

⁴² “Ibu Korban Tragedi Semanggi: Jokowi dan Prabowo do not side with human rights issues,” *Kompas*, 13 December 2018.

⁴³ Jemma Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence in Indonesia, 1996-1999* (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia in association with Singapore University Press, 2006), 92; Eunike Mutiara Himawan, Annie Pohlman, and Winnifred Louis, “Revisiting the May 1998 Riots in Indonesia: Civilians and Their Untold Memories,” *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs* 41, no. 2 (March 2022): 240–257, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034221084320>.

⁴⁴ “Wiranto explains rumor on Prabowo's dismissal from military,” *Antara News*, 19 June 2014, <https://en.antaranews.com/news/94527/wiranto-explains-rumor-on-prabowos-dismissal-from-military>.

⁴⁵ “Prabowo ‘Ordered by Suharto to Kidnap Activists,’” *The Jakarta Post*, 11 June 2014, <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/06/11/prabowo-ordered-soeharto-kidnap-activists.html>.

February 15 and 25, 2024, the SIKAP survey included questions that asked respondents how well they remembered significant political events surrounding the downfall of Suharto and his New Order: (1) the Semanggi shootings, which referred to two incidents in November 1998 and September 1999 where members of Indonesia's security apparatus shot at students demonstrating against the regime and killed at least 28 people, and (2) the anti-Chinese riots that preceded Suharto's resignation. These questions were included in a broader module capturing respondents' collective memory, including less germane topics such as the period of Dutch colonization.⁴⁶ To be clear, Prabowo was not directly involved in the Semanggi shootings. The recollection of these events should thus instead be viewed as an active memory of the violence characteristic of Indonesia's authoritarian past.

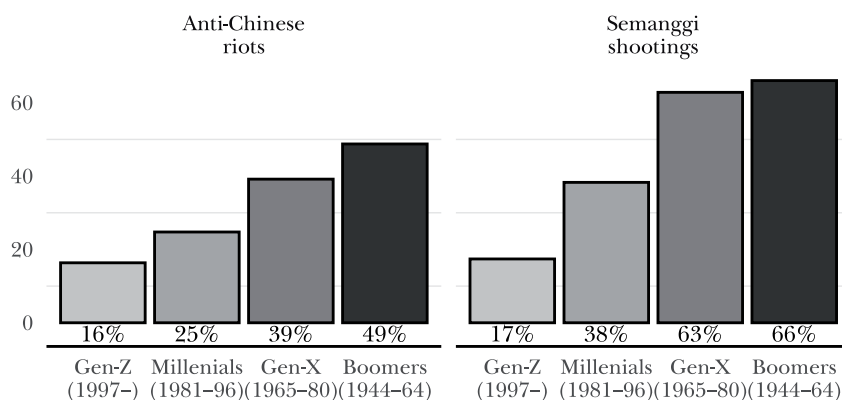
We conduct two analyses to investigate the interaction between collective memory, demographics, and vote choice. First, in figure 2, we examine the percentage of respondents in each age group who indicated that they somewhat or clearly remembered each of the two events. Two features of this figure merit comment. To begin, it is clear that a greater share of respondents from older generations—especially those born before 1985—have a sharper recollection of these episodes, compared to those born afterwards. For example, 68 percent and 63 percent of respondents born in the Baby Boomer generation and the Gen-X generation either somewhat clearly or clearly recall the Semanggi shootings, nearly quadruple the level observed for those born after 1997. The second feature of this figure that merits comment is that the Semanggi shootings are, across all age groups, recalled with greater accuracy than the anti-Chinese riots. This is despite the fact that there were an estimated 1,000 casualties from the anti-Chinese riots,⁴⁷ compared to the 28 students killed in the Semanggi shootings.

To what extent does the collective forgetting on the part of the younger generations explain their disproportionately high support for Prabowo? One way to examine this question is to look at whether younger and older respondents' vote choices look different depending on whether they remember the events or not. We conduct this analysis in figure 3. Each panel shows the share of respondents who supported Prabowo in the 2024 election, according to generational cohort and whether they remember the specific event. The left-hand panel investigates respondents according to whether they recall the anti-Chinese riots, finding little-to-no differentiation, perhaps reflecting the overall small share of the population that recall the events. The right-hand panel, however, shows a stark divergence in support for

⁴⁶ The exact question related to collective memory is worded as follows: "How clearly do you remember the following moments?" In Bahasa Indonesia: "Seberapa jelaskah ingatan/memori anda tentang momen2 di bawah ini?" Respondents can choose between: (1) "I did not experience this event" (Saya tidak mengalami peristiwa ini); (2) "I have forgotten it completely" (Sudah lupa samasekali); (3) "Not that clearly" (Kurang ingat); (4) "Somewhat clearly" (Lumayan ingat); (5) and "Very clearly" (Ingat sekali).

⁴⁷ Purdey, *Anti-Chinese Violence*.

Figure 2
Collective memory by age group



Note. Percentage of respondents in week 12 surveys (February 15, 2024–February 25, 2024) who indicate that they “somewhat clearly” or “very clearly” remember the anti-Chinese riots of 1998 and the Semanggi shootings. Proportion of respondents indicating that they remember broken down by age. The direct translation of our survey questions asks respondents if they “remember” (*ingat*), which also carries the connotation of “knowing” in this context. Hence, although no Gen-Z respondents could plausibly “remember” an event that took place in 1998, they may instead “know” about them.

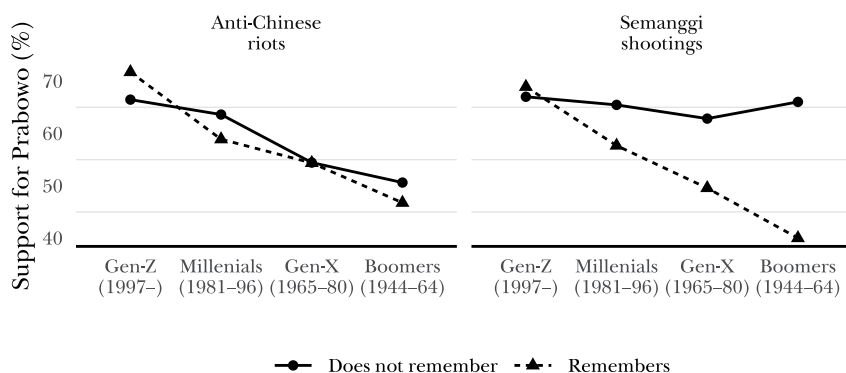
Prabowo across generational cohorts according to whether they remember the Semanggi shootings. Looking across all age groups, approximately 65 percent of voters who do not remember the Semanggi shootings supported Prabowo in the election. Meanwhile, voters who remembered the Semanggi shootings were less likely to support Prabowo—especially among the older generations, who were perhaps more likely to remember these events more acutely.

Dominating Economic Concern

Indonesia’s economy has mounted a strong recovery since the COVID-19 pandemic, with national unemployment at 5.3 percent as of August 2023. However, economic concerns loom large for young people in Indonesia, many of whom are unemployed or underemployed, with approximately 19.4 percent of job seekers between the ages of 15 and 24 unemployed.⁴⁸ These headwinds may generate an appetite for illiberal political appeals or a

⁴⁸ Linda Yulisman, “Indonesia’s Youth Want Jobs and Lower Cost of Living From the Next President,” *The Straits Times*, 9 February 2024.

Figure 3
Collective memory and support for Prabowo



Note: The y-axis shows the percentage of respondents in week 12 surveys (February 15–25, 2024) who indicated that they voted for Prabowo Subianto in the presidential election, where the linetype breaks down by whether they also “somewhat clearly” or “very clearly” remember the anti-Chinese riots of 1998 and the Semanggi shootings. Proportion of respondents further broken down by age on x-axis.

strongman candidate, especially one that gives voice to individual-level economic frustration.⁴⁹ Consistent with this possibility, a national survey conducted in 2021 by Indikator found that, when forced to choose between the two, 59 percent of voters aged 17 to 21 regarded economic development as more important than democracy.⁵⁰

One way to examine this question is to see if young people disproportionately care about economic concerns, above and beyond older generations. Questions from the SIKAP project probed respondents to rate the importance of several issues facing the country; here, we find very little variation. Virtually all respondents rated economic development as an important or very important issue. Hence, we instead focus on individual respondents’ reported income levels as a proxy for economic concerns and anxiety. If heightened economic concerns are driving young voters’ support for Prabowo, we would expect to see more pronounced voter support among young voters with lower incomes.

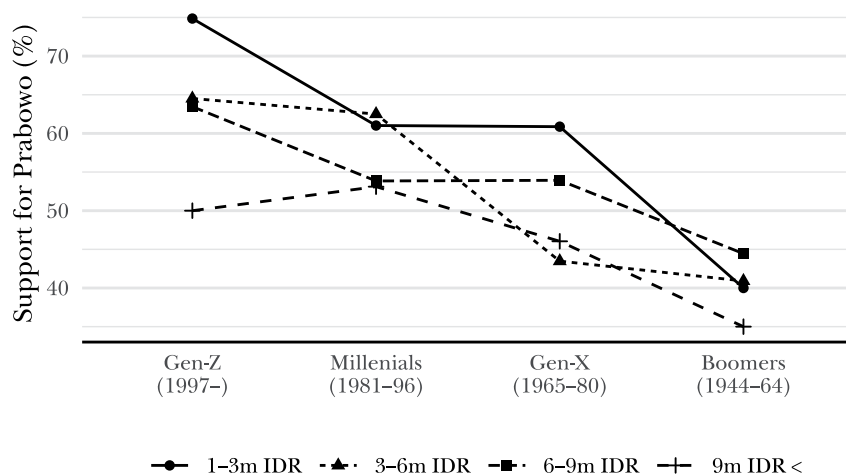
Figure 4 presents the percentages of respondents in each age group and income level who indicated a pre-election vote intention for Prabowo. To start, the highest share of Gen-Z voters who supported Prabowo were those

⁴⁹ Italo Colantone and Piero Stanig, “The Trade Origins of Economic Nationalism: Import Competition and Voting Behavior in Western Europe,” *American Journal of Political Science* 62, no. 4 (April 2018): 936–953, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12358>.

⁵⁰ “Survei Nasional Suara Anak Muda Tentang Isu-Isu Sosial Politik Bangsa” [National survey of young voices on national socio-political issues] (Jakarta: Indikator, 2021), https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Rilis-Survei-Indikator_21-Maret-2021.pdf.

who earn less than 3 million IDR a month (approx. 200 USD): nearly 80 percent of such voters indicated an intention to vote for Prabowo. This is an increase of over 30 percentage points from the richest voters in the Gen-Z cohort—those who make greater than 9 million IDR a month—of whom only 50 percent indicated an intention to vote for Prabowo. Although poorer voters across other generational cohorts appear more likely to vote for Prabowo (i.e., Millennials and Gen-X), economic concerns seem to loom largest for the youngest voters, as the differentiation in likelihood to support Prabowo across income categories is highest for this age group.

Figure 4
Support for Prabowo, by income level and age group



Note: The y-axis shows the share of respondents that indicated a pre-election vote preference for Prabowo. The x-axis shows respondents' age category, while the different line types capture income levels. For reference, as of March 2024, 1 USD $\approx$ 15,565 IDR.

Authoritarian Conceptions of Democracy?

A final potential explanation for Prabowo's strong showing among young voters relates to how they might view and understand the meaning (and value) of democracy. Around the world, most voters adopt a minimalist definition of democracy, linking its content chiefly to elections and, to a lesser extent, civil rights.⁵¹ However, there exists significant variation in how people understand democracy.⁵² This variation is germane to our study of

⁵¹ Jon Chu, Scott Williamson, and Eddy Yeung, "People Hold Consistent Understandings of Democracy Across and Within Six Very Different Countries" (unpublished manuscript, March 2024), Microsoft Word File.

⁵² Russell J. Dalton, C. Sin Doh, and Willy Jou, "Understanding Democracy: Data from Unlikely Places," *Journal of Democracy* 18, no. 4 (October 2007): 142–156, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2007.a223229>.

young voters precisely because they may imbue democracy with meanings that downplay the risks associated with supporting a strongman candidate. Young voters may regard democracy as desirable in the abstract, but this might be driven by cognitively associating democracy with concepts such as public order or security.⁵³

To explore this potential explanation, we leverage four questions from the SIKAP survey that were adapted from the World Values Survey. These questions asked respondents to rate on a 6-point scale the extent to which they regarded four characteristics essential for democracy: (1) free and fair elections; (2) civil rights that protect citizens from abuses by the state; (3) that the military takes over when the government is incompetent; and (4) that citizens obey the government. To probe whether young voters are adopting different conceptions of democracy, we compare the distribution of responses to these questions in figure 5 across different generational cohorts.

Figure 5 presents density plots of the four issues. The height of the peak for each response point is proportional to the number of respondents in each age group who chose the response.

Importantly, there is virtually no variation across generational cohorts when it comes to the value they attach to the importance of (1) elections, (2) civil rights, (3) civilian obedience, and (4) military takeovers for respondents' conceptions of democracy. Together, the analysis suggests that there is little evidence for a disproportionately strong orientation towards order and authoritarianism in young voters' understandings of democracy. As figure 5 shows, younger generations are not meaningfully different from their older peers in holding these views, suggesting they hold little promise in explaining young voters' disproportionate support for Prabowo in the 2024 presidential election.

Conclusion

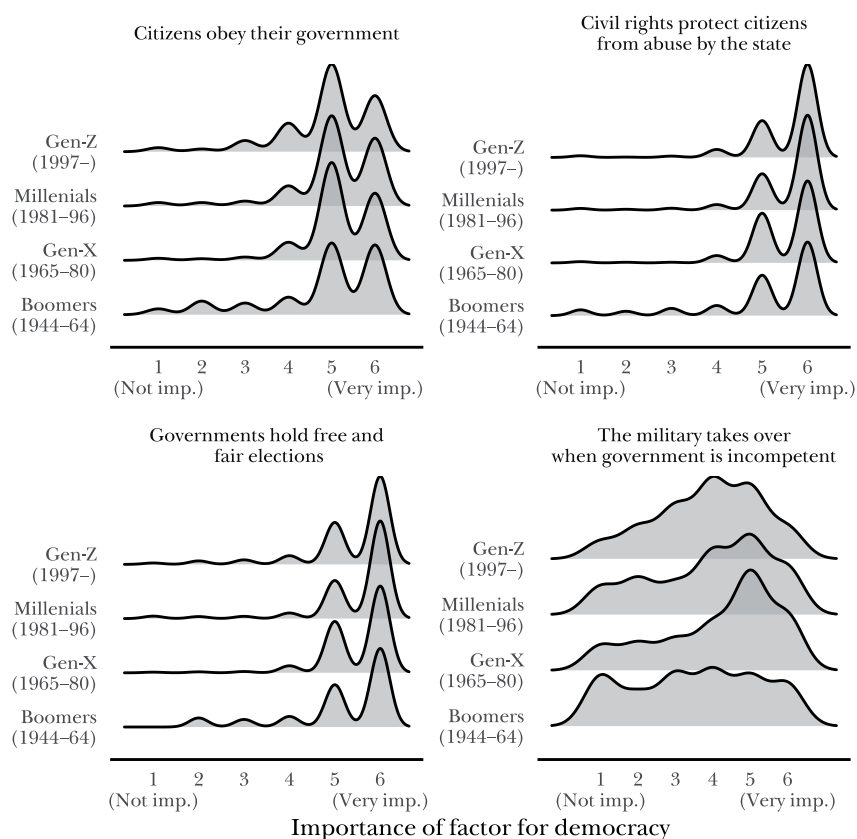
Prabowo's victory in the 2024 election continues the erosion of Indonesia's young and fragile democracy. Worryingly, these trends are being fuelled—although not necessarily championed—by the youngest voters in the electorate who are now poised to inherit a diminished democratic Indonesia. Consistent with exit polls, our data suggest that 67 percent of Gen-Z voters cast their ballots for Prabowo, nearly 20 percentage points higher than Baby Boomer respondents in our data. The analyses contained in this article have sought to diagnose the drivers of young voters' otherwise puzzling support of an aging former general widely accused of human rights abuses. The results home in on the enduring appeal of a strongman at moments of

⁵³ Darren W. Davis and Brian D. Silver, "Civil Liberties vs. Security: Public Opinion in the Context of the Terrorist Attacks on America," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 1 (January 2004): 28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519895>.

economic anxiety, especially for young people with uncertain futures. But we also uncover evidence of new trends, such as the waning memory of Indonesia's authoritarian past, as well as the potency of economic concerns.

It is worth underscoring, however, that Indonesia's 2024 general election featured some noteworthy successes. With 204 million registered voters and 820,000 polling stations, voters simultaneously cast their ballots for president and vice president, members of the House of Representatives, and their local councils. The election was the largest same-day voting exercise in human history. By and large, this election proceeded smoothly and peacefully,

Figure 5
Importance of Various Characteristics to Democracy



Note: Data drawn from weeks 1 to 13 of the SIKAP project. Respondents were asked, “There are many things that people desire for their society, but not all things are ideal for democracy. To what extent are the following features important for democracy.” The x-axis shows the six-point Likert scale on which respondents could answer and the y-axis shows the generational cohort.

especially relative to the 2019 election that was followed by two days of widespread protests after the results announcement. While both Ganjar and Anies complained regarding the lack of state neutrality and irregularities during the election, they submitted these complaints to the Constitutional Court.⁵⁴ There was comparatively little misinformation circulating during this election cycle, in a sharp departure from the 2019 presidential election.⁵⁵

One of the striking developments in the 2024 election was the relative absence of ethnoreligious polarization. Tensions between nationalists and Islamists have long coloured Indonesia's political landscape, and identitarian appeals were a mainstay of Prabowo's strategy in his 2014 and 2019 campaigns. What, then, accounts for its relative absence in this most recent election? One possibility relates to the competitive nature of the 2014 and 2019 elections, in which no clear frontrunner emerged until election day. The marginal benefit of galvanizing voter support using ethnoreligious rhetoric might have thus been higher in contests where every vote would matter more. With pre-election surveys consistently showing a Prabowo victory, ethnoreligious appeals may have been perceived as a liability not worth the cost of potential backlash. For Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan, meanwhile, primordial appeals may have appeared counterproductive to their goal of broadening their support. In other words, while religious cleavages remain salient in Indonesian politics, the extent to which they are politically relevant appears to depend on the strategic calculations of political elites.

Indonesia's 2024 election bears similarities and differences to its regional peers who have recently held elections, and suggests some implications for those facing upcoming contests and for the prospects of democracy in Southeast Asia. In the Philippines, Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos Jr. won the 2022 election by a landslide with 40 million votes, with many analysts similarly citing the waning memory of the authoritarian excesses of his father. But there appeared to be little generational polarization at the ballot box, unlike Indonesia.⁵⁶ Thailand and South Korea have both seen recent national elections in which generational cleavages emerged as the central axis on which voting behaviour spun, albeit in opposite directions: the Thai Move Forward Party offered a progressive vision that disproportionately appealed to young voters while the Korean People Power Party proposed a regressive anti-feminist platform that drew in young voters, especially men, who are frustrated with their economic prospects. In Malaysia's 2022 general election, young Malay Muslims turned out in droves to support the conservative

⁵⁴ Associated Press, "Indonesian presidential rivals allege fraud, plan to contest official election results," *PBS*, 14 March 2024, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/indonesian-presidential-rivals-allege-fraud-plan-to-contest-official-election-results>; Sebastian Strangio, "Indonesia's Anies Baswedan To File Election Complaint at Constitutional Court," *The Diplomat*, 14 March 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/03/indonesias-anies-baswedan-to-file-election-complaint-at-constitutional-court>.

⁵⁵ Saiful Mujani and Nicholas Kuipers, "Who Believed Misinformation during the 2019 Indonesian Election?" *Asian Survey* 60, no. 6 (November 2020): 1029–1043, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2020.60.6.1029>.

⁵⁶ Dulay et al., "Continuity, History and Identity," 94.

Perikatan Nasional (PN) coalition.⁵⁷ Neighbouring Singapore saw an 8-point drop in voters' support for the People's Action Party in the 2020 general election, a decline which party insiders attributed in part to the impact of pandemic-induced economic hardships and the opposition parties' effective campaigns. At the time, Deputy Minister Lawrence Wong rejected the idea that young voters were driving this shift away from the PAP; he did recognize that the party needs to improve its digital campaign.⁵⁸

As in Indonesia, we see similar patterns across Southeast Asia where younger voters have distinctive preferences from their older cohorts, and they do not always lean more democratic and popular as prior theories have predicted. In fact, in both Indonesia and the Philippines, young people appear to be helping to drive the return of leaders with close ties to the countries' authoritarian past. Indonesia's most recent election further reiterates the power of economic uncertainties in shaping voters' preferences, and the increasingly pivotal role of digital campaigns in shaping election outcomes across Southeast Asia. These trends call for future work to theorize and investigate how these factors shape young people's political preferences and engagements, and lead to further polarization.⁵⁹

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National University of Singapore, Singapore, May, 2024

⁵⁷ Imran Said and Alexander Berghaus, "Why Are Southeast Asia's Young Voters Turning to Illiberal Populists?" *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/02/why-are-southeast-asias-young-voters-turning-to-illiberal-populists>.

⁵⁸ Ng Jun Sen, "Middle-aged Voters, not Youths, Accounted for National Vote Swing Against PAP, Says Lawrence Wong," *Today Online*, 18 July 2020, <https://www.todayonline.com/singapore/ge2020-middle-aged-voters-not-youths-accounted-national-vote-swing-against-pap-says>.

⁵⁹ Jatusripitak and Ricks, "Age and Ideology," 117–136.