

Survival of climate action under new president

Uncertainty associated with the changing of Indonesia's leadership besets more than just the climate community. Many investors and international policy actors are in "wait-and-see mode". Whoever the new president is, he may change many policies and introduce a new political agenda. This wholesale change between presidents has been well renounced domestically, but rules likely change when the leader changes. The Agrarian Law and land reform constitute an epic, consistently inconsistent policy agenda across political leadership. Instead of revisiting the basic and principal land policies of the 1960 Agrarian Law, as aspired by former president Megawati Soekarnoputri, under current President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), the National Land Agency (BPN) completely changed this set of policies.

Significant change on land issues has created overlap and confusion among farmers, customary (adat) communities, mining and palm businesses, and climate and development practitioners, who take initiatives in forest conservation and renewable energy such as the geothermal power supply. Will this experience mean the existing climate directive will be washed away with the changing tide? In 2009 at the Group of Twenty (G20) Pittsburgh Summit, Yudhoyono told international leaders that Indonesia was committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 26 percent by 2020. Moreover, he committed Indonesia to reaching a 41 percent reduction if appropriate levels of international finance were provided. However, neither the President's commitment, nor the action plans in place to achieve it, are legally binding. Both can be changed overnight under the directive of the new president.

It is therefore important to acknowledge the significant and substantial national investments to support the country's shift toward a low carbon development trajectory. These include the establishment of the National Council on Climate Change (DNPI), the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Agency and the Indonesia Climate Change Trust Fund. Key international support has also been secured, the most prominent of which is Norway's financing to support Indonesian efforts to combat deforestation. Germany and the UK have also assisted with strengthening public financial management for climate activities and the development of low carbon fiscal policies. There is also emerging support from multilateral climate funds. Grants and a mix of capital are slowly replacing hefty debt and loan arrangements under different development aid agreements. All of these are combining to create positive momentum for change in Indonesia, placing the country as a critical voice in climate debates. The question being raised among existing and potential donors and investors is will the new president echo Yudhoyono's 2009 exemplary commitment or reconsider and reposition Indonesia's climate directive? Manifestos from both presidential tickets — Prabowo Subianto-Hatta Rajasa and Joko "Jokowi" Widodo-Jusuf Kalla — do not clearly acknowledge the incumbent's legacy and his political standpoints, including the emissions reduction commitment, despite Yudhoyono's recent position as co-chair of the High Level Panel on post-2015 development goals at the UN.

Prabowo states his intention to be actively involved in global efforts to mitigate climate change, but this target may be deemed too limiting when positioned alongside ambitions of achieving 10 percent gross domestic product (GDP) growth per annum leading to high emission growth. The grand "big push strategy" of Prabowo, converting deforested lands into space for agricultural and bio energy production, may not guarantee a slowing deforestation rate. On the contrary, this strategy may lead to accelerate deforestation due to competing needs between food security and bio energy supply. Jokowi-Kalla express aspirations related to international climate action in a more subtle way. Given Jokowi's experience in local and regional development it may be too early to decide his international political standpoint on various, complex global issues. He and Kalla simply state their aspiration to "reposition the role of Indonesia in addressing global issues". These issues presumably include climate change. Exploring maritime strategy and lifting up Indonesia's identity as an archipelagic and an emerging middle-income country becomes the backdrop of Jokowi-Kalla's international aspirations. How these aspirations link with national carbon development is not self-evident.

The manifestos of both candidates refer to national low carbon development strategies separate from the international political agenda and the linkages between climate and key development priorities such as addressing inequality — something which has become a pressing issue in the imbalanced economy. Jokowi-Kalla's seventh priority touches upon promoting national energy use; supporting national exploration, improving the efficiency of state-led companies and supporting the development of renewable energy. They commit to designing strategies that reduce fossil fuel subsidies. One of the stated means is by transforming the transportation sector and promoting a shift of 30 percent energy use in transport to biofuel. Inter alia, budget reallocation from oil subsidies for imports to improve the provision of biofuel is briefly explained in Jokowi-Kalla's manifesto. The implication of this policy on domestic oil prices is vast and an appropriate road map that assists this transition is key in achieving the intended transition successfully. Prabowo-Hatta proposes to use financial and economic tools to realize low carbon development. Examples see fiscal incentives used to promote industrial development on agricultural production and build an energy subsidy system that is better targeted to those that need it. They also express commitment to building geothermal and hydro power plants. Some major strategies related to energy policy may not be considered as climate friendly but they address basic energy needs, such as building infrastructure for energy production and distribution by public and or private companies. Despite some scattered concrete climate-related policies, it is clear that for both candidates the utmost concerns are national issues such as integration, national identity, food security, energy security and the economy. Predicting whether Indonesia's climate policies will survive, or be washed away by the incoming president is filled with uncertainty. Nevertheless, both candidates show that their different strategies to pursue low carbon development have foundations in national priorities: answering people's needs and delivering on issues that are closest to the hearts of most Indonesians — although the price is to put Indonesia's international reputation at stake.

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