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The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast
Indonesia, an unlikely democracy
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(MUSIC)

DEWS: Welcome to the Brookings Cafeteria, the podcast about ideas and the experts who have them.

I'm Fred Dews. I'm joined in the Brookings Podcast Network studio once again by Senior Fellow, Jonathan Stromseth, the Lee Kuan Yew Chair in Southeast Asian Studies here at Brookings.

On today's program, Jonathan shares another in a continuing series of his conversations with leading experts on issues related to this important region of the world.

Also, on today's show, Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds offers her regular insight into what's happening in congress.

You can follow the Brookings Podcast Network on Twitter @PolicyPodcasts to get the latest information about all of our shows, and links to all of our shows. If you have any questions for me or for the scholars who appear on the show, send your emails to BCP@Brookings.edu.

Jonathan, welcome back to the Brookings Cafeteria.

STROMSETH: Thanks, Fred. It's great to be here.

DEWS: Last September on this program you interviewed Bilahari Kausikan, the Former Permanent Secretary of Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Who do you have for us this time?

STROMSETH: Well, today we're going to be speaking with Tom Pepinsky about the upcoming elections in Indonesia, which will take place in mid-April in the world's third largest democracy, with a population of 270 million people. Indonesia is sometimes

called the most consolidated democracy in Southeast Asia, but it's also facing political headwinds, which suggest maybe some fragility or possible democratic decline. To many, these elections are seen as a bellwether for the state of democracy in the region and perhaps globally.

DEWS: Okay. And can you just briefly tell us Tom's background, where he's from?

STROMSETH: Yeah. I'm very pleased to announce that Tom was recently appointed as a Nonresident Senior Fellow here at Brookings and he comes to us from Cornell University, where he's a professor of government. He specializes in comparative politics and international political economy with a focus on emerging markets in Southeast Asia in particular. He has published widely on authoritarianism, democratization, financial politics, religion, and identity in the Muslim world, focusing especially on Indonesian and Malaysian politics.

DEWS: All right. We look forward to listening to your interview with Tom Pepinsky.

Jonathan, the microphone is all yours.

STROMSETH: Thanks, Fred. Tom, welcome to Brookings.

PEPINSKY: Thanks. I'm really glad to be here.

STROMSETH: We're really pleased with your appointment as a Nonresident Senior Fellow, and it reflects our efforts to really expand Southeast Asian studies, both at Brookings and in the Washington policy community generally.

Also, the topic is really an ideal one for this current period here at Brookings where we've just launched an institution wide initiative, called "Democracy and

Disorder", focusing on the current state of democracy in the world in the context of an increasingly contested international order and growing assertiveness of authoritarian powers.

But before we talk and take our deep dive into Indonesia and the coming election there, tell us a little bit about your own personal and professional journey. How did you get interested in Southeast Asia, and Indonesia in particular?

PEPINSKY: Sure thing. I think, like many of us, it's easier to ascribe structure or organization or a logic to my journey to Southeast Asia than was actually there at the time. So, I'll try to be honest in this response. The fact of the matter is proximate reason why I became a Southeast Asianist is because I had a really influential college professor.

When I got to college, I took classes about all regions of the world that seemed interesting to me. I was particularly interested in places that seemed more peripheral. So instead of Europe I was interested in Turkey, instead of Russia I was interested in Central Asia, and instead of China and India I was interested in Southeast Asia. And the instructor for the Southeast Asia class I took, anthropologist named Patricia Symonds, was just a really wonderful instructor. And she as part of the class organized field trips to the local Lao refugee community in North Smithfield, Rhode Island.

STROMSETH: And where did you go to college?

PEPINSKY: I went to Brown.

STROMSETH: Okay.

PEPINSKY: And so, as part of these experiences, it really personalized the Southeast Asian community for me and it struck a note with me that stuck with me ever

since.

I went to grad school thinking that I was going to write on – try to explain once and for all why the United States lost the Viet Nam War. My plan was to study Vietnamese intensively and game theory intensively, and it quickly became clear that while my Vietnamese may be okay, my game theory is not. And so, I had this interest in the region, I was casting about for other topics to write on, and I settled on the Asian financial crisis. And in particular I was interested in the ways in which political change had unfolded in Indonesia but had been sort of hamstrung in Malaysia. The convenient thing about those two countries is that if you learn the language of one, you pretty much can speak the language of the other.

And so, that led me to take Indonesian starting in my third year of graduate school and the rest, as they say, is history.

STROMSETH: Very good. And have you spent a lot of time in the region and in Indonesia in particular?

PEPINSKY: Yeah, I have. Unfortunately, Southeast Asia is pretty far from the East Coast of the U.S. and I can't get there as frequently as I like, but I spent a year in Southeast Asia doing fieldwork for my dissertation. And then I've returned several times a year ever since then.

STROMSETH: Yeah. Let's talk about Indonesia. And I think one term one often hears about the country is that it's complex on many different levels – geography, population density, ethnicity, religion. Can you sort of help break this down for us so our listeners can better understand the country?

PEPINSKY: Sure. I'll just take those issues in order. We'll start with geography.

Indonesia is a country of 17,000 islands spread over a territory which is roughly as wide as the continental United States. And so, if you just stop and think about how diverse the United States is geographically, imagine taking that and dividing it into a set of islands that are as far apart from one another at the extremes as Orange County is from Boston.

So, this is a big country in terms of geography. Each island historically has had one or more ethnic groups associated with it, different languages, different religions, as I'll talk about in a second. And so, in sheer geographic terms, we've got real diversity here.

Move onto ethnicity. So, Indonesia is not only diverse, it's diverse in a particularly complicated way. There is no majority ethnic group in Indonesia. There is a plurality ethnic group, the ethnic Javanese, which is about 40 percent of the country's population, so north of 100 million people. But even that means that there is a majority of non-Javanese in Indonesia. Javanese are from the Island of Java, but they're not even the only ethnic group on the Island of Java. There are others; there is a complex ethnic mix in the capital city of Jakarta. The Sudanese ethnic group found in the western part of the island is another 30 million people or so. And then as you move out from the central Island of Java, you got to the west to the Sumatra. You have dozens of ethnic groups there. And as you go east, different ethnic groups as well.

Some of these ethnic groups are large, most of them are quite small. And if you overlay onto that Indonesia's religious diversity as well, you've got yet another way to think about the complexity of Indonesia. So, Indonesia is about 88 percent Muslim by population, which means that it's a majority Muslim country – a clearly majority Muslim

country. But within the country that means that there are north of 40 million non-Muslims. This is among the largest non-Muslim populations in Southeast Asia as well. And so, these are divided among Christians, Catholics and Protestants, Buddhists, Hindus – the Island of Bali is famously majority Hindu, and practitioners of Confucianism, animists, and many others.

Indonesia is a complex country moreover because of the way that these things are regulated. So, Indonesia is a country that does not have an ethnic group which is the favorite ethnic group in law. In practice, given their numerical dominance, Javanese tend to be at the center of national politics, but that's not constitutionally so, and it's not ordained to be so. Indonesia also though regulates religion in a particular way. Indonesia is officially a multi religious state, and so Indonesians are required to be in adherence of one of the country's official religions. And because of this, it is both not the case that Indonesia is a secular country and it's not the case that Indonesia is an Islamic country. It is a Muslim majority country that has a diversity of Muslim populations, defined both territorially and ethnically, as well the diversity of non-Muslim populations as well.

STROMSETH: Thanks, Tom. Well, that is all very interesting background.

And now kind of moving into the question of the political system and political developments in Indonesia. I find that Indonesia is sometimes characterized as an unlikely democracy. Why do observers sometimes see it that way? And how did Indonesian democracy sort of get to where we are today? Give us a little sense of the history.

PEPINSKY: That's a great question. So, there's a couple of reasons why

Indonesia's considered an unlikely democracy. One is just its history. Indonesia became independent in 1949 and had a brief democratic experiment that came to an end with the regime of guided democracy under Sukarno, which was then replaced by the harder, more conservative, new order regime under Suharto. So, for most of Indonesia's history it has not been a democracy.

So, Indonesia watchers are eager to remember the lessons of Indonesia in history. It's hard to make democracy work in this very diverse country, as I've described previously. But also, comparatively, Indonesia did not inherit a lot of preconditions which are generally associated with democracy across the world. There are not very many Muslim majority democracies, and so regardless of whether you think that Islam is in and of itself an obstacle to democracy or to democratization, there are not many other cases like Indonesia. So, this makes it unlikely.

It's an ethnically very divided country, as I've described before, and there's evidence that ethnic heterogeneity in some cases can be an obstacle to democratic consolidation. Indonesia started off as a very poor country at independence. It's since developed into a solid middle-income country, but low levels of economic prosperity are not generally associated with democracy around the world.

And, finally, Indonesia is a presidential democracy. And presidentialism, combined with multi-party democracy – so Indonesia has about eight political parties of significant size in the current legislature – and combine that with ethnic diversity and religious diversity, those combinations don't go together very frequently. And so, there's a lot of reasons to think that Indonesia would be a low performing democracy, which in turn would undermine our prospects for believing in the country's ability to be a

consolidated democracy.

STROMSETH: So, Tom, tell us a little bit about the timeline. How did we get from independence through the Sukarno and Suharto periods to where we are today?

PEPINSKY: Right. So, Indonesia became independent, as I said, in 1949 officially. That's when the Renville Agreement was concluded that ended the war of independence with the Dutch. From '49 until 1957, Indonesia was governed under a period of liberal democracy, as it is called, with multiple different political parties, including the world's largest non-governing communist party by population, the Communist Party of Indonesia, a nationalist party, and then two Islamic parties, as well as a series of political parties. They competed as well, but there were four main political parties, each of which had somewhere less than a quarter of the seats in parliament.

This type of complexity in ideological diversity led to instability, which was brought to a close by Sukarno's proclamation of what he called guided democracy in 1957. From 1957 until 1965-66, Sukarno ruled over and attempts to use a more top down corporatist model to control this type of ideological diversity and to bring the different elements of an Indonesian society together under a generally nationalist, leftist, religious, non-aligned banner. This unfortunately came to a close in 1965 with the September 30 movement, with is an event which has spawned half a century of analysis, and I won't pretend to be able to summarize it here, but the long and the short of it is an abortive attempted coup led to the murder of six generals from the Indonesian military, which was met with a swift response from the military under General Suharto, who by 1966 had replaced Sukarno as the head of government. And in the ensuing year the Indonesian military oversaw, and in some cases was complicit in, the mass murder

of somewhere between half a million to two million people and the complete annihilation of the Indonesian Communist Party.

So, between that period, 1966-67 to 1998, Suharto ruled what he called the new order regime. The new order regime was a staunchly non-community, western looking, developmentalist dictatorship. Under Suharto political parties were merged into two main official opposition parties, one which was more nationalist in orientation, the other was more Islamic in orientation, but both of which were competing with the party of functional groups. It was an actual political party at the time, it was simply called Golkar, or functional groups, which was a mass organization which contested elections on behalf of the Suharto regime, which occupied the sort of center of Indonesian politics.

Golkar would rule as the main political party, developing in strength over time, until 1998. At the same time, the military retained a very strong position in Indonesian politics. Remember, Suharto was a general before he was a president, and so this became an important tool that he used to protect his rule. And this system persisted until the Asian financial crisis, which began in 1997 with the collapse of the thai baht several hundred miles north, and ultimately ended with Suharto's resignation amidst the massive economic crisis and mass mobilization at the end of May of 1998.

After Suharto's resignation, we've seen the story of Indonesia's steady transition toward democracy. Suharto was replaced by his vice president, B.J. Habibie. Habibie oversaw democratic elections. These were indirect elections that saw the election of Abdurrahman Wahid as president. Abdurrahman Wahid was in turn replaced by Megawati Sukarnoputri. Actually, the daughter of Sukarno. In 2004 she stood for Indonesia's first direct presidential elections against Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who

won, in 2004 and then again in 2009. In 2014 we saw the election of Joko Widodo and he is who is running for election in 2019.

STROMSETH: Well, it's interesting. And thank you very much for that historical capsule, which really brings us up almost to the present period. And before we take a dive and look at the upcoming election in some depth, as I mentioned in the introduction, Indonesia is already considered to many as a consolidated democracy, but there are also growing concerns today that democracy may be eroding in some ways and even on the verge of collapse.

So, is the truth somewhere in between? How worried should we be?

PEPINSKY: It's a great question. And I'm going to give you a typically complicated answer. And to do so I'm going to distinguish between democracy as a system and democracy as a performance in office.

In terms of democracy as the system through which leaders are elected in Indonesia, I'd say that Indonesia has been consolidated since 2004 as a democracy – certainly since 2009 and remains a consolidated democracy today. What everyone thinks about either the candidates for election or growing sense of discontent with how democracy is actually operating, there is no debate that the way one becomes the leader of Indonesia is to win the next election.

So, in the terms of democracy as a system for choosing leaders, Indonesia's democracy is quite consolidated.

In terms of democratic performance and how we should evaluate the functioning of democracy and the outputs of the system which it is led by, free, fair, and irreversible elections, Indonesia has always seemed to observers as being somewhere in a crisis of

democratic performance and consolidation ever since 1999. So, I don't think that the concerns about the performance of Indonesian democracy are new. I think that what's particularly notable right now instead, that issues having to do with inequality do not seem to be getting much better. And in the last five years we've seen the rise of concerns about identarian politics being invoked by certain factions in order to shape the outcome of elections. And what this may lead to, and this an issue we should talk more about, is increasing dissatisfaction among the part of Indonesians themselves with whether or not democracy is a system worth preserving.

STROMSETH: Okay. Well, let's come back to that, as you say, but the issue of the day, the news story really, is the upcoming election in the middle of next month. And I was wondering if you could set the scene for this election. Who are the candidates, where did they come from, and what are the main issues that are animating the campaign?

PEPINSKY: So, Indonesia is a presidential democracy, as I mentioned before, and so the main election is the election for the office of president, which features the incumbent, Joko Widodo, who I and other Indonesians refer to as Jokowi, with vice presidential candidate Ma'ruf Amin as the incumbent ticket. And the opposition is headed by a presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto with vice presidential candidate Sandiaga Uno. So, I'll talk about Jokowi/Ma'ruf versus Prabowo/Sandi. That's the short way to refer to the two tickets.

As I mentioned, Jokowi is the incumbent, Ma'ruf Amin, his vice presidential nominee is not the incumbent vice president, but for reasons having to do with political interest and also possibility that the limits on the ability of the current vice president to

stand for office. Again, he was actually vice president once before. Jokowi has decided to sure up his ticket with Ma'ruf Amin. That's his vice-presidential nominee. Jokowi's campaign focuses on his record of performance in office. When he was elected in 2014, he campaigned on what I would consider to be a broadly populous but comparatively mild version of this populism. It was inclusive in orientation and focused on making Indonesian government work better and work more in the interests of the Indonesian people.

In 2014 he also ran against Prabowo Subianto. So Prabowo is back for another bite of the apple. Prabowo Subianto represents a very different form of populism. He is a former general, he is the ex-son in law of the former dictator Suharto, he is the brother of billionaire Hashim Djojohadikusumo, and he's the son of an elite family. Prabowo represents a promise of a more muscular nationalism, one that focuses not so much on clean governance, but more on effective governance and strong governance. More so in 2014 than today perhaps, he invoked the idea of a strong leader who is willing to put Indonesia's house back in order.

So, the choice for Indonesians in 2014 was very clear between Jokowi, who was at the time a very popular governor of Jakarta, Indonesia's capital city, who was campaigning on his record of governance in office in Jakarta, clean capable government, versus what many feared was a return to strong men rule, under the former southern law of a former dictator. Today the choice is a little bit less stark. Prabowo's campaign is rather more anemic than it was in 2014 for reasons which are not exactly clear, but might have to do with his brother's unwillingness to pay for it, but also having to do with the fact that Jokowi remains fairly popular in office and he's

worked very hard to project himself as having been a faithful steward of Indonesia's economy and having worked hard to do basic things, infrastructural development, and so forth, that an Indonesian president needs to do.

STROMSETH: So, in terms of his performance, the citizenry of Indonesia is fairly supportive, or they recognize that he's accomplished something in the last five years? I'm sure there's a diverse sense of that.

MR. PEPINSKY: Yes, there's a diverse set of views. And certainly, Jokowi has some detractors. For example, he is very unpopular among former residents of informal urban settlements in Jakarta who object to the fact that they're removed from where they used to live and sort of resettled in places that were perhaps easier to govern.

And many believe that Jokowi is insufficiently respectful of the position of Islam in Indonesian society, which explains his choice to name Ma'ruf as his vice-presidential nominee. But in general, Jokowi earns fairly good marks among the average Indonesian for his record in office. And that's his pathway to victory right now.

DEWS: Let's take a short break to hear about what's happening in congress with Senior Fellow Molly Reynolds.

REYNOLDS: I'm Molly Reynolds, a Senior Fellow in Governance Studies at the Brookings Institution.

More than two years into his presidency, President Trump has yet to veto a bill passed by congress. Given that Republicans controlled both the House and Senate until January, it's not surprising that all the legislation sent to the White House was met with presidential approval. But thanks to action in the Senate this week, the President is positioned to likely reject not one, but two separate pieces of legislation moving through

the legislative process on Capitol Hill.

The first of these measures that's likely to generate a veto is a resolution that seeks to end the involvement of the United States in the Saudi led war in Yemen. Seven Republican senators: Mike Lee of Utah, Susan Collins of Maine, Steve Daines of Montana, Jerry Moran of Kansas, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Rand Paul of Kentucky, and Todd Young of Indiana, joined all 47 democrats in support of the resolution.

The Senate adopted a similar measure in December 2018, but the House, then controlled by republicans, did not take it up. With Democrats now holding a majority in the lower chamber the legislation faces a much smoother path. Indeed, the House passed its own resolution on the issue in February and the Senate's version is likely to be successful when it's brought up in the lower chamber.

The second piece of legislation likely to draw a veto involves the national emergency declared by President Trump related to the situation on the southwestern border. Twelve Republican senators voted with the democrats on a resolution that would terminate the national emergency that the President declared last month. And effort to limit the number of Republican defections by schedule a separate vote on stand-alone legislation that would require congress to affirmatively approve a declaration of emergency fell apart, leaving at least one senator, Lee, to publicly commit to supporting the original underlying disapproval resolution.

Both of these pieces of legislation illustrate some important dynamics about contemporary congressional politics. In particular, the handwringing among Senate Republicans about how to vote on the national emergency resolution demonstrates how politically difficult it can be for members of the President's party to break with him

publicly in a political system that is increasingly centered around the Chief Executive.

North Carolina's Thom Tillis, for example, has been threatened with a primary challenge next year in part because he had indicated he opposes the emergency declaration and that he was considering voting to disapprove it. Ultimately, he stayed on the Republican team and voted against the resolution.

In addition, the attempt, which was ultimately unsuccessful, to provide an alternative vehicle for which senators could vote to express their positions, but in a less politically consequential way, is a common feature of the contemporary congress. Members sometimes value the opportunity to take messaging votes they can use to sell their positions to their constituents in a more politically palatable way.

Finally, a number of wavering Republican Senators came out in favor of the disapproval resolution only after four of their colleagues, that is enough to approve the resolution when combined with the Democrats, had already come out in support. On politically consequential votes, especially ones that involve a break with the party, members are often reluctant to be the deciding vote.

Importantly, the resolutions also teach us some important lessons about congressional procedure in today's congress. In both cases the measures path to the floor in the Senate was eased by the fact that they were eligible for special expedited procedures that make it much harder for the legislation to be obstructed. As we've seen repeatedly over the past several years, Senators can use the existence of these special expedited procedures to achieve a number of different goals. On one hand, the Yemen resolution illustrates how individual senators who care deeply about a particular issue can leverage certain special procedures that apply to some bills to force a vote on those

matters, especially when the majority party leadership does not support the legislation. On the other hand, the measure related to the national emergency demonstrates how certain congressional procedures can make it easier for legislators to take even symbolic actions. In this case, an action that helps the democrats make a political point, but also for the institution collectively to assert some sense of institutional authority in the separation of power system.

Proponents of both pieces of legislation likely lack the votes to override probably vetoes by President Trump, so the substantive policy consequences of congress' actions are likely to be low. But they are politically consequential and serve as an important reminder that congressional procedure can matter a great deal for what's happening in congress.

DEWS: And now back to Jonathan Stromseth's interview with Tom Pepinsky.

STROMSETH: Can you tell us a little more about how Islam plays into this election in particular?

PEPINSKY: Sure. So, recall that I said before that Indonesia is 80 percent Muslim, so it's a majority Muslim country. But it's also not an Islamic country. The Indonesia constitution puts no official role for Islam in governing the country. And this has been a continual source of tension, not just since independence, but even before that, about what is the proper role for Islam in Indonesian public life. Now, after Suharto eliminated communism as one of the radical opponents of Indonesian democracy or of a kind of centrist vision of what Indonesian politics should be like, the remaining force in Indonesian politics has been Islam. Under Suharto Islam was suppressed as a mobilization force until the very end, and even then he nurtured it as a strategy to kind

of sure up his support among a particular segment of the population.

But among Indonesian Muslims today there is a diversity of views. Certainly, there are radicals and fundamentalists who wish to implement Sharia law across Indonesia, perhaps for all citizens, perhaps only for Muslims, in some way. Maybe perhaps probably the model that we see in Malaysia, in which Sharia law is obligatory for family matters for Muslims only, or perhaps something more complete. There are also tens of millions of Indonesian Muslims who believe that Indonesia's multi religious character is a key source of its strength and was the foundational principle for Indonesian independence and remains relevant today.

But one particular way that Indonesians understand, and Indonesian politics conceptualizes religion, is that rights are held not at the individual level, religious rights are held at the communal level. And so, there's an important book by Jeremy Menchick entitled, "Tolerance Without Liberalism", which talks about the ways in which Indonesian politics regulates religion. But the essence of the point is that it is legitimate for Indonesian Muslims as a class to demand protections qua Muslims as a class and for Islam itself. Same is true of Christians, Buddhists, Confucians, in principle, Hindus, and so forth, but Muslims are the largest group.

And so many believe that in country which is 80 percent Muslim in which Islam is properly regulated but under Indonesian law, it ought to be the case that Muslim politician rules over Muslims and that non-Muslims must be particularly careful not to address issues having to do with the religion of their non co-religions, so of Muslims.

All of this is to say that there is increasing concern among the countries more secular minded or more multi religious mainstream Muslims that to respect Indonesian

Islam is to ensure that there is a voice for Indonesian Islam in politics. And Ma'ruf, as a spiritual head of the country's largest Muslim mass organization, called Nahdlatul Ulama.

STROMSETH: He is Jokowi's vice-presidential candidate?

PEPINSKY: Right, he's the vice-presidential nominee. He is a very prominent and unquestionably Muslim voice who is going to represent the interests of Indonesian Muslims. He is I would hasten to add, not a representative of a radical or fundamentalist fringe in Indonesian Islam, but rather a more centrist version of it. But clearly his nomination signals Jokowi's intention to occupy this central space in Indonesian politics as an effective administrator, a clean and moral leader, but also a Muslim.

STROMSETH: And how was his appointment or selection as the vice-presidential nominee sort of greeted by the voting public?

PEPINSKY: The voting public appears to have responded well to this candidacy. It also appears that Jokowi, and also the forces within his coalition, which angled to put Ma'ruf in this position, had done some polling and were pretty clear that Ma'ruf was at least not going to be a hindrance. There may have been other people that Jokowi would have preferred to have as his vice-presidential nominee, but Ma'ruf has proved to be certainly not a particularly controversial figure among most Indonesian Muslims. And, as a consequence, it does effectively close down the allegation that Jokowi does not care about Islam or is he somehow secretly not a Muslim or something like this.

STROMSETH: I see. Well, are you prepared to venture any predictions about the outcome of the election?

PEPINSKY: Yes. And so, I'm prepared to predict that Jokowi will win the election,

he will be reelected. I'm not going to give firm predictions about the margin, but I suspect it will actually be a smaller margin than his reelection the last time. But I do think that the polls are clear that he's going to be reelected, unless something really dramatically changes, or unless there's a real error in the polling industry in Indonesia.

I think partially this is due to the savvy choice to bring Ma'ruf into the ticket. This may not have been Jokowi's first choice, but it appears to have done the job. Also, Prabowo has run a fairly anemic campaign for reasons, again, which aren't exactly clear to me as an observer from afar. But in the presidential debates, which as in other presidential democracies, don't always seem to be really substantive debates about important issues that allow voters to distinguish between one ticket and the other, Prabowo did not fair particularly well.

STROMSETH: I see. Kind of widening the aperture here, as we look at the prospects for democratic resilience or decline around other parts of Southeast Asia, and in fact globally, do you see Indonesia as a bellwether of sorts for the world, the Muslim world more specifically?

PEPINSKY: It's an important question. And I want to preface it by saying that I myself resist the temptation to believe that Indonesia has to be the standard bearer for Islam around the world, although I do think we learn a lot from the fact that the world's most populist Muslim country is also one of the world's only democracies.

So, separating the question of how this fares for Islam versus how it fares for the rest of the world, I think it would be a fairly substantial setback for global prospects for democracy were Indonesia to elect Prabowo. Prabowo does not have a reputation for tolerance, certainly has no reputation for liberalism, and the mode of governance that he

would implement I predict would be rather more unfriendly towards the world's established democracies and rather more along the lines of Rodrigo Duterte or Bolsonaro in Brazil. And these would be concerning sides for democracy around the world.

That said, were he elected, he would be elected in, it would certainly be a democratic election. So, his election in and of itself is not the threat to democracy, it would be the way that he would likely govern in office.

And I think that in the Southeast Asian context, where there are not a large number of consolidated democracies, the concern is not so much for cases like Thailand, where the military simply seizes power and democracy comes to a crashing halt at the barrel of a gun, but, rather, it's for the declining performance of democracies, in which democracies are run less and less according to principles of the rule of law and free and open political competition.

STROMSETH: So, one more kind of broad gauged question about the evolution of the political system in Indonesia is where is the military in Indonesian politics today? Because it has such a prominent role under Suharto. And I think as political observers of the region, other countries around the world look at Indonesia, it seems to be a successful case of somehow winding down the role of the military in politics, which has kind of set the stage in a positive way for opportunities for greater democracy.

Can you kind of tell us how that happened or, frankly, if that's accurate?

PEPINSKY: That's a great question. And I'm reminded that just this morning I saw an article in the Indonesian press talking about whether or not Indonesians should be criticizing the military. So, it's a topic which is on the minds of Indonesians as well.

You're absolutely right that under Suharto the military played a not just prominent but sort of foundational role on how the country was governed and how it was managed. The Indonesian army has a territorial presence and it invokes an ideology of dwifungsi, or dual function, which said that Indonesian military legitimately plays the role not only as a defense force, but also in social and political affairs as well.

With democratization, the ideology or doctrine of dwifungsi was officially sunsetted and the process of civilianizing the military or pressing the military to step out of politics and return to its standard role of serving as a defense force, made some progress. So, for example, the military and the police were institutionally separated as part of democratization. There used to be reserved seats in the Indonesian parliament for the military. Those have been ended.

But there are other areas in which reform has not been so successful. So, bringing the military budget purely under a civilian control has not been a successful process. It's ongoing. I don't see any signs that will come to a successful completion any time soon, but what this means is that the military self-finances for a large part of its budget by running businesses and things like this. And this is a problem for civil military relations because it suggests that the military hasn't left politics.

In the past decade, and certainly under Jokowi, there have been worrying signs of the military reasserting its role in particular segments of society and parts of government. One thing that shows up in particular for foreign researchers such as myself is that the state intelligence agencies play a role in overseeing research visas. So little things like that, which I don't think it's fair to say the Indonesian military ever formally left politics that way, but in the early to mid-2000s, this wasn't as conspicuously

the case.

Just even more recently, however, there have been concerns about insufficient numbers of career advancement opportunities for the large number of sort of mid-range officers in the military. And so, the consequence of this is the government looks like it's going to be putting military mid-career officers in civilian bureaucracies, so they have a place to continue their service advancement.

And among the country's pro-democracy activists and progressive activists, this is a real concern because it suggests a creeping return of that ideology of dwifungsi. And, in fact, just last week an Indonesian sociologist and activist was arrested for singing a song in public which insulted the Indonesian military under Suharto. And so that fact is something that may be a small individualized case, but I suspect it's anything but and in fact reflects an increasing sense that military reform is not going to be proceeding much further and that the military has the ability to set the tone of national politics in order to get its interests met.

STROMSETH: Thanks, Tom. Well, finally, let's take a turn to foreign policy a little bit, and specifically to the relationship between Indonesia and the United States. Relations seem to have improved fairly steadily over the years and the two countries established a strategic partnership in diplomatic terms in 2015. So, they're not allies, but I think Indonesia's increasingly seen kind of like Viet Nam, as an important emerging partner of the U.S. in the region. But how close are the U.S. and Indonesia really today? And what realistic expectation should we have for the future?

PEPINSKY: So, Indonesia suffers from a couple of problems in the eyes of the DC community. One is it's really far away. Another is that it hasn't been particularly

problematic recently, and so it doesn't present grave concerns in terms of an issue such as terrorism or something related to that. On the other hand, it's a large country, it's strategically positioned at one of the most important parts of the world for U.S. power projection in the Asia Pacific, and it's a country that has represented, under the Obama Administration in particular, the prospects for democracy and democracy promotion being successful. And so, relations have improved, and it remains the case that Indonesia has a set of what I would consider to be broad strategic interests with the United States. For example, neither the United States nor Indonesia wishes to see any further expansion of Chinese claims for sovereignty over the South China Sea. Indonesia does not have any claims over any of the islands of the South China Sea, but the Nine-Dash Line does interfere with some of Indonesia's claims about what its exclusive economic zone is. And so, these are areas in which Indonesia can be an important ally for the United States, or at least an important partner for the United States.

Indonesia also has a great interest in trade and commerce, just given its geostrategic position and its history as a trading archipelago from the Dutch, and even previous to that. And this means that the United States has a partner there, in terms of having interest in the orderly and stable flow of goods and investment throughout the region.

I also suspect, though, that the Trump Administration is rather less able to press its interests in Southeast Asia than was Obama for the simple reason that Trump doesn't seem to be as closely aligned with the type of government that Joko Widodo has had as did Obama. On the other hand, Prabowo would probably be a nice partner

for President Trump and those could get along quite nice.

And so, if I'm wrong that Jokowi is going to win, then there may be an opportunity or a different type of person to person relationship of the form that we see between Trump and Duterte, which is probably bad for U.S.-Filipino relations over the long-term, but certainly does represent a better relationship than we saw between Duterte and Obama.

STROMSETH: Well, thanks, Tom. This has really been a grand tour of Indonesia, its upcoming election, implications for democracy, and also for U.S.-Indonesia relations. So thanks a lot for speaking with us today.

PEPINSKY: It's been my pleasure. Thanks for having me.

(MUSIC)

DEWS: The Brookings Cafeteria Podcast is the product of an amazing team of colleagues, including audio engineer and producer Gaston Reboredo, with assistance from Mark Hoelscher. The producers are Chris McKenna and Brennan Hoban. Bill Finan, Director of the Brookings Institution Press, does the book interviews, and Eric Abalahin provides design and web support. Our intern this semester is Quinn Lukas. Finally, my thanks to Camilo Ramirez and Emily Horne for their guidance and support.

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Until next time, I'm Fred Dews.