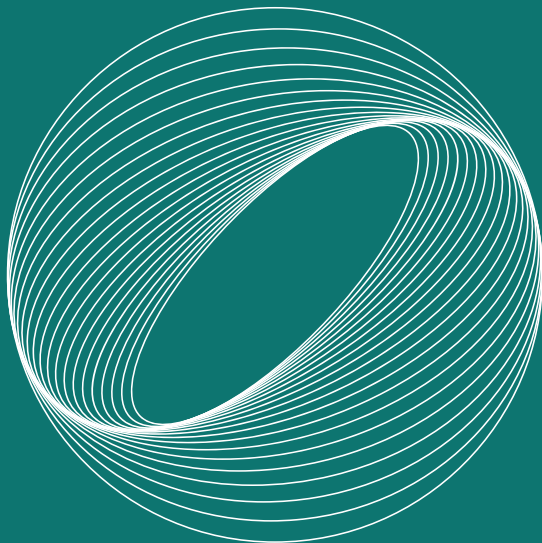




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PRABOWO SUBIANTO'S POLITICAL DEFLECTION AMIDST CIVIL UNREST: ENDLESS FOREIGN INTERFERENCE?

On 25 August 2024, President-elect Prabowo Subianto issued his first address at the annual National Mandate Party (*Partai Amanat Nasional*) congress after recent mass protests nationwide against “undemocratic” election legislation changes announced by the Indonesian parliament (The Jakarta Post, 2024). These changes would've allowed the 29-year-old Kaesang Pangarep, the son of current President Joko Widodo, to run in the Jakarta gubernatorial elections by lowering the minimum age requirement of 30 (Sood, 2024). This context, coupled with Widodo's sudden reshuffling of the ministerial cabinet appointing notorious Prabowo loyalists as well as long-withstanding tensions from the accession of Gibran Rakabuming (also Widodo's son) as Prabowo's running-mate despite similar legal barriers prompted civilians to the streets declaring a state of “National Emergency” in democratic integrity (Reuters, 2024).

In his speech, Subianto suddenly spoke of the 1998 nationwide protests, insinuating that the dissent was planned by “foreign interference” against rapid technological advancement in Indonesia (Achmad and Prabowo, 2024) without addressing the accusations of collusion against him. Subianto has previously said that foreign intelligence in regions was behind separatist sentiments such as Papua, Aceh, and East Timor (Kenzu, 2023). According to Aspinall (2015), Indonesia's political rationale is undergoing a “new nationalist mood” defined by “a sense of suspicion, sometimes bordering on paranoia, about allegedly hostile intents harboured by foreign countries” (p. 73). He notes that such rhetoric intensifies during socio-economic turmoil and may be used by officials to undermine criticism.

Subianto's narrative tendencies are particularly concerning when considering his unanswered human rights violations such as the kidnapping of student activists in 1998 and military violence during Timor Lester's fight for independence (Tan and Husada, 2024). Without stronger pressure for accountability, Subianto's presidency may be riddled with deflections of further state corruption. (Shafa Amani Anargya Pragiwaka, IR UGM 2021)

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THE 2024 STUDENT PROTESTS IN BANGLADESH BRING AN END TO SHEIKH HASINA'S EXTENDED TENURE

After 15 years in power, Bangladesh's Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina, resigned on August 5, 2024, following massive student-led protests. These protests were in response to the 30% government job quota for the children of independence war veterans, which students argued unfairly strengthened the ruling Awami League. This party led Bangladesh's independence movement in 1971. Unlike earlier attempts to challenge Hasina's 'authoritarian' regime (Macdonald, 2024), the 2024 student protests succeeded in toppling the government.

The students managed to bring down Hasina by turning her repressive measures against her. While their protests started in a nonviolent manner, Hasina responded with aggression. Violent actions targeted peaceful demonstrators by her party's student wing, the Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL). Hasina also labeled the protesters as "razakars," a term for those who sided with Pakistan during the 1971 war. The condition is worsening as there are about 300 casualties, including 32 children (Uddin, 2024), but instead, the government imposed a curfew, internet blackouts, arrests, and accusations.

Rather than suppressing the unrest, the government's repressive actions only fueled public outrage, making more people support the civil disobedience campaign (Uddin, 2024). The army even cooperated with the protesters, which led to the military officials' perception that things were out of control (Ethirajan & Hossein, 2024). Military officials eventually intervened, involving Hasina's sister and son to prompt her resignation.

The student-led protest succeeded in removing Hasina by using her repressive actions to gain sympathy for their peaceful protests. By capitalizing on her oppression, military intervention, and family ties, they left her no choice but to step down. The protest's success underscores the students' vital role in her resignation and could significantly impact Bangladesh's and the region's political future. (Triana Nadila, Publication Staff)

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THE 2024 KENYAN PROTEST UNPACKED

In Kenya, widespread protests against William Ruto's presidency have grown more intense—the protest initially began as a resilience against the government's proposal to increase the tax rate. Although Ruto has stated that Kenyan taxes are relatively low compared to other countries, grievances have mounted due to high tax rates on essential food products such as bread and oil (Rukanga, 2024). As the protests evolve, not only do the masses' demands shift, but the demands of opposition party, the Communist Party of Kenya, has also escalated the conflict. Initially opposing Ruto's proposal (Communist Party of Kenya, 2024), the party later adopted a more radical position by rejecting his presidency (Omole, 2024).

The party has employed various strategies to advance the goal of the protesters. One notable strategy is the usage of various social media platforms to deliver political declarations and messages. For example, the party's Vice Chairman, Booker Ngesa Omole, has called upon protesters to occupy Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport on his Twitter. Another case is to spread out his party's ardent opposition against Ruto's presidency (Omole, 2024).

The national political effects of this protest are still generally hard to predict. Despite the demands thus far, Ruto is still committed to being Kenya's leader. The same commitment to the oppositional stance can also be said for the Communist Party of Kenya. With all that said, the outcome depends on how effectively the opposition party executes its strategy and how well the masses handle their demands and protests. (Athallah Arkan Triwahyu, HI UGM 2022)

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