

Book Reviews

MARCUS MIETZNER, *The Coalitions Presidents Make: Presidential Power and Its Limits in Democratic Indonesia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2023. 269 pages, \$36.95. ISBN 978-1-5017-7265-8 (pb)

This book discusses the formation of coalitional presidentialism in Indonesia and how these coalitions enable the maintenance and survival of the government under conditions that threaten democracy, such as the dominance of political power by the ruling coalition. The book argues that the stabilisation of coalitional presidentialism in the country between 2004 and 2021 was achieved when the president utilised the executive toolbox to enhance political parties' support in parliament. Marcus Mietzner suggests that the president needed to accommodate other non-party actors from outside the party coalition to achieve stabilisation of the coalition, by inviting these non-party actors and integrating them into the acting government. These arguments are based on observations of Joko Widodo's government compared to that of previous presidents, such as Abdurrahmad Wahid, Megawati and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Mietzner states that Widodo's government learned well how to practice and to create coalitional presidentialism from previous experiences in order to maintain the government's stability (p. 233). However, the book also emphasises some of the resultant problems for the stabilisation of coalitional presidentialism that may affect democratic institutions in Indonesia.

Marcus Mietzner is a distinguished scholar of political science renowned for his extensive experience and deep expertise in contemporary Indonesian politics. He is a well-established academic with a long history of observing Indonesian political actors, academics, journalists and NGO actors. His new book consists of eleven chapters divided into three main parts: introduction, discussion and conclusion. In the discussion section, the book elaborates on nine key actors or institutions that have influenced the formation of coalitional presidentialism in Indonesia, including the president, political parties, the legislature, the military, the police, the bureaucracy, local governments, oligarchs and Muslim organisations. The book thus offers a comprehensive account of and a thorough reflection on political dynamics at both the national and local levels in today's Indonesia.

Drawing on the study on coalitional presidentialism by Paul Chaisty, Nic Cheeseman and Timothy J. Power (*Coalitional Presidentialism in Comparative Perspective: Minority Presidents in Multiparty Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), Mietzner overviews the function of the executive toolbox,

which allows the president to develop and maintain relationships with legislative members. To expand on this theoretical discussion, Mietzner argues that it is necessary to also consider non-party actors under the control of the executive leader, such as the bureaucracy, local governments, the army and the police, which act as the president's proxies to stabilise power. External actors such as religious organisations and oligarchs can also support the president's policies and strategies for maintaining power dynamics among the political actors. In exchange, these actors receive various compensations from the president, such as involvement in infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects, government legitimations of religious events or even appointments to official public positions such as in ministries or national enterprise commissions.

The Coalitions Presidents Make addresses various aspects that contribute to a better understanding of contemporary Indonesian politics. Primarily, it clearly explains how the fostering of relationships between the executive and legislative branches can stabilise presidential power in a newly democratic country like Indonesia. Previous studies, especially those focusing on Latin America,¹ have highlighted similar cases involving instability and challenges within the presidential systems. In contrast, according to Mietzner, the Indonesian case demonstrates that coalitional presidentialism, with the support of a multi-party parliament, can be smoothly established and maintained without any interruption until the end of the government's term. Moreover, Mietzner's study provides strong evidence of non-party actors' involvement in coalitional government-making, which has helped shield presidents from potential disturbances. For this, the president must create safeguards by expanding the coalition beyond government circles to include groups such as oligarchs and religious organisations, seeking their support throughout the administration's tenure. These non-party actors are able to fulfil this role while receiving political and economic benefits.

As the book discusses Indonesian politics only up to the year 2021, an important development is missing. In the 2024 Election, President Joko Widodo enacted a pivotal moment by enhancing coalitional presidentialism through his endorsement of the elected presidential candidate, Prabowo Subianto. President Widodo's high approval ratings from voters and dominance within the party coalition in parliament facilitated his involvement in the presidential nomination and creation of a party coalition for Prabowo's candidacy. Widodo's endorsement of Prabowo led to the latter's victory as the elected presidential candidate.

Mietzner warns about this issue in his conclusion, stating that the weakness of checks and balances and Widodo's dominant presidential powers have

1 See e.g. Scott Mainwaring (ed.): *Party Systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, Decay and Collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018; and Cesar Zucco / Timothy J. Power: Fragmentation Without Cleavages? Endogenous Fractionalization in the Brazilian Party System. *Comparative Politics* 53(3), 2021, pp. 477–500.

contributed to the regression of Indonesian democracy (p. 243). It will also be important to observe post-2024 election developments to see if the management patterns of coalitional presidentialism will be replicated by the new president, or if there will be an even stronger dominance of presidential power. This raises concerns about the future of Indonesian democracy, as the issue of stabilising presidential power could further weaken the checks and balances essential to a democratic system. This will likely be a significant topic for future studies on presidentialism.

The Coalitions Presidents Make is recommended as an essential reference for diplomats, journalists, academics and consultants seeking a comprehensive understanding of an important phenomenon of presidentialism in many countries, especially the unique case of contemporary Indonesia.

Aditya Perdana

CHARLOTTE SETIJADI, *Memories of Unbelonging: Ethnic Chinese Identity Politics in Post-Suharto Indonesia*. Honolulu: Hawai'i University Press, 2023. 322 pages, \$68.00. ISBN 9780824894054

In Indonesia in May 1998 amidst a severe economic crisis and political turmoil, anti-Chinese riots erupted, mainly in Jakarta, Medan and Surakarta, marked by intense violence, looting and arson targeting the ethnic Chinese communities. Over a thousand people were killed, and countless Chinese-owned businesses and properties were destroyed. Reports of severe human rights abuses further highlighted the brutality of the events. *Memories of Unbelonging* is based on field research conducted primarily in Jakarta from 2007 to 2019 and discusses the politics of ethnic identity construction following the discrimination that peaked during the anti-Chinese riots. Guided by Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory and Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus*, the book provides insight into how collective memory plays a role in shaping identity. The author, Charlotte Setijadi, states that the collective trauma of anti-Chinese discrimination is still firmly entrenched even after the end of Suharto's New Order era (1966–1998), with the analysis focusing on the ways Chinese Indonesians “remember their collective past, negotiate their identities, establish boundaries, and inform their political participation” (p. 6).

Setijadi starts her book with a concise history of Chinese Indonesians from the colonial period to the much-publicised rise and fall of Ahok, the first ethnic Chinese governor of Jakarta, whose tenure lasted from 2014 to 2017. Opening with an interview with an ethnic Chinese woman who maintains distrust of the “non-Chinese” (indigenous Indonesians), this foreshadowing of continuing