

# SBY's big first year agenda

- Hadianto Wirajuda and Vishnu Juwono

London | Sun, December 13 2009 | 01:54 pm

- [□](#)
- [□](#)
- [□](#)

Less than three months since his inauguration, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's second administration has to overcome fundamental governance challenges that include, among others, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) case, judicial graft and the Bank Century bailout - issues that were already bubbling over before the presidential election was held, which spilled over into public only recently.

We are not equipped with sufficient technical knowledge as economists or lawyers. We are only trying to contribute our thoughts in the public discourse from a political and humanity perspective.

In one of his speeches soon after being elected president, US President Barack Obama made an underlined, clear-cut statement that he was not a perfect man and could not be a perfect president, but he promised his fellow Americans to listen to them and work together with them to build their very own democracy.

This statement he made was not baseless. It was the nationwide hope that puts extra weight on his shoulders. He understands that the country he leads faces fundamental governance problems, as shown by America's chronic economic crisis since 2008 and ongoing dysfunctional healthcare system - as argued by Michael Moore, even Cuba has a better system than the United States.

The newly elected Obama has to deal with a powerful vested interest group - especially from corporations - reflected in strong resistance to compensation reform in a major US bank and a refusal by interest groups for public option in America's healthcare system.

The situation Indonesia faces is not much different. We have Dr. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired, intellectual and thinking army general who led the country in its first phase of democratic consolidation. Not significantly affected by the global crisis, under Yudhoyono Indonesia's economic growth marked its substantial achievement of approximately 4 percent growth when other countries suffered from the crisis.

Under his leadership the country was able to lower the poverty rate from 17 percent in 2006 to 15.4 percent in 2008, and to keep national stability at a manageable level. Internationally, under Yudhoyono's order, Indonesia is widely regarded as a country with a million friends and zero enemies.

Still, the pertinent governance problem remains relatively untouched, i.e. inefficient public services and lack of credible law enforcement in corruption cases handled by the Attorney General's Office and police.

The governance issues, however, didn't deter Yudhoyono from running for a second term, and alongside his confidence, public hopes mounted for Yudhoyono's forthcoming performance. Looking at Yudhoyono's style of campaigning, which was similar to Obama's, and given the profile of his competitors in the 2009 election, it came as no surprise that Yudhoyono trounced them almost effortlessly.

This can be seen at least from the presidential debates prior to the election. His campaign emphasized good governance and anticorruption - backed by empirical evidence. Letting his son's father-in-law be investigated in a corruption case was also a big factor in his meticulous winning campaign. In short, Yudhoyono is Indonesia's *cr\*me de la cr\*me*.

At Yudhoyono's nomination in Bandung, May 2009, he clearly stated he was not a superman. As expected, he cannot resolve all the complexities that this nation has on his own, thus partnership with other stakeholders is still needed.

What he wanted to achieved from this statement was clearly first, that people should not expect too much from him; second, that the political coalition was an important ingredient for his second administration; and third, that he would do his best to accelerate the good governance and anticorruption agenda. The election went peacefully, and as predicted by many, he won more than 60 percent of votes.

He resumed his presidency, took up the same office and perhaps the same presidential infrastructure, but with different helping hands, different confidence, and most importantly, different expectations, which indeed have become higher for him to do an essential government reform.

The Cabinet selection was Yudhoyono's first test, and spurred the hopes of the people that their elected President would opt for Indonesia's best to fill the Cabinet.

And when the Cabinet was announced, the voices of disappointment were not small from the people in general, since the selection was seen as political accommodation for coalition partners rather than recruiting professionals to help him execute the bold reform agenda.

In his own respect, Obama also had difficulties when he formed his Cabinet. His Treasury secretary was bogged down with a tax miscalculation, although in the end he survived. Tom Daschle, one of Obama's political mentors, was forced to withdraw as nominee for health secretary due to a tax problem.

Certainly, disparity of views is common in a democracy, and even more so in leadership, where you can not always satisfy all, although you come from the majority. This is exactly what happened to Indonesia, where there is a gap between Yudhoyono's confidence, on the one hand, and the people's hopes on the other.

The 60 percent of votes indeed injected Yudhoyono with greater confidence to orchestrate a harmonious Indonesian society with all of its pitchy tones and pebbles in the shoes.

Unfortunately, his confidence was not sufficient to balance the expectation of the people for a decisive type of leader, which is crucial in bringing much-needed institutional reform. In our opinion, it is understandable what Yudhoyono did in regards to the KPK and Century scandals, considering the cases' big potential to erode his main asset: credibility as a reformer.

In this regard, we are not suggesting that Obama's way of approaching the public through his modest statements as mentioned before should be followed, nor we are trying to make any comparison between two presidents who have an association with Indonesia.

But we believe that the two presidents share key similarities: they have an ambitious agenda and they both want to leave a legacy that lasts beyond their presidency for decades to come. Therefore for both Obama and Yudhoyono, pushing for greater institutional reform has to be actualized no later than their first year of presidency.

We still believe that right now he is our best choice, and the majority of the people have trusted him to lead our country for the next five years. We wish that the events of the past several months will help him refocus and redouble his efforts in bringing the much-needed change, with a spirit of *lanjutkan*, to meet the hopes of the people.

Hadianto Wirajuda is a PhD student in international relations at the London School of Economics. Vishnu Juwono is a research associate at the Center for the Study of Governance, University of Indonesia. Both are founders of the Youth initiative for Indonesia's Democracy and Development (YIDD).

