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## Indonesia's cabinet line-up: not all the president's men



Indonesian president Joko Widodo's cabinet line-up does not reflect a clean break from the old oligarchy. EPA/Adi Weda  
Indonesia's new president Joko Widodo announced his cabinet on Sunday afternoon and they were formally sworn in the next day. Analysts, politicians and business communities gave mixed responses to the much-anticipated line-up. The overall tone of the commentaries published by the local media has been cold.

The cabinet line-up reflects the strong influence of Megawati Soekarnoputri, leader of the Indonesian Democratic Party - Struggle (PDI-P) and Indonesia's fifth president (2001-04) over Jokowi's selections. It also shows Jokowi is prioritising domestic issues over international relations.



PDI-P party chairman and former president Megawati Soekarnoputri has had a strong influence in the selection of Joko Widodo's cabinet ministers. EPA/Mast Irham

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## **Between the public and political elites**

The public expects a lot from Jokowi. They expect him to solve strategic challenges that his predecessor largely ignored. They want him to create a clean and professional government, enforcing principles of equality before the law. They want consistent policy that will revive an economy and budget tattered by deficits. They want better social policies for the poor.

Amid such high expectations, Jokowi in early August pledged to create a streamlined cabinet consisting mostly of professionals.

But the political mandate from the PDI-P and its party coalition for his presidency created an apparent headache for Jokowi when selecting his ministers. The new cabinet is obviously not all the president's men.

## **Power tussle for cabinet membership**

When the General Election Commission confirmed his victory in the presidential election, Jokowi promised to form a professional cabinet to be announced a day after his inauguration. It took him six days before he was ready to announce his cabinet ministers.

The delay undeniably shows how difficult it was to accommodate all vested interests. Although a special transition team has assisted Jokowi to prepare for this since early August, the power struggle for cabinet membership occurred until the last minute before its announcement.

Jokowi appointed 19 professionals from various backgrounds and 15 politicians from all the government-supporting parties – that is, the PDI-P, PKB, Nasdem, Hanura and PPP.

Admittedly, Jokowi has shown that he is serious about the integrity of the cabinet members. To get clean and non-corrupt figures, he consulted the KPK (Corruption Eradication Commission) and the PPATK (Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre) to get accurate background information about each of the candidates. The media covered many candidates being summoned to the presidential palace, speculating that Jokowi interviewed them personally.

But the cabinet line-up still reflects Megawati's strong influence over Jokowi. She had earlier shown her authority by foisting one of her close aides, Rini Soemarno, on the transition team. She has now been appointed as the Minister of BUMN (State-Owned Enterprises).



Puan Maharani, Megawati's daughter, is one of Jokowi's cabinet ministers. EPA/Adi Weda

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Puan Maharani, Megawati's ambitious daughter, received the position of co-ordinating minister for human development and culture amid concerns that she did not have the experience nor capacity for dealing with such strategic issues. Three other ministries have been given to PDI-P cadres: home affairs, law and human rights, and co-operatives and SMEs.

## **Not a clean break from oligarchy**

Jokowi is seen as a fresh face who comes from outside the political oligarchy that has always reigned Indonesia. The cabinet appointments showed that his leadership is not a complete break from the past. His vice-president, former Golkar chairman Jusuf Kalla, also influenced the names in cabinet.

Although Jokowi has been meticulous in selecting the ministerial candidates based on their integrity, his choices do not accommodate the wishes of human rights activists.

Wiranto, the Hanura party chairman and ex-army general known for his bad human rights record, did not make it onto the team. But Jokowi appointed Ryamizard Ryacudu, the army commander during Megawati's presidency who also has a tainted reputation, as defence minister.

## **Overview of the cabinet**

Emphasising that Indonesia is an archipelago, Jokowi established a new co-ordinating ministry for maritime, natural resources and the environment. He appointed Indroyono Soesilo, an expert and senior bureaucrat, to lead this ministry.

The business community is not particularly happy with Jokowi's team. Bambang Brodjonegoro, the finance minister, has a good record on regional economics and fiscal decentralisation. Yet he needs to strengthen his political prowess and macroeconomic competence in the face of a hostile opposition majority in the parliament.

Meanwhile, Adrinof Chaniago, the chairman of Bappenas (National Development Planning Board), does not have experience in economic policy and development planning and has yet to prove that he will be capable in his post.



Foreign minister Retno Marsudi is more experienced in domestic matters rather than high-profile international issues. EPA/Adi Weda

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The government's emphasis on domestic issues is also reflected in the appointment of Retno Marsudi to the foreign affairs portfolio. Although she has an excellent record as the first female Indonesian ambassador and now the first woman in this ministerial position, she has more experience in issues of human rights, such as the Aceh peace negotiations, and debt rescheduling. These matters are related to domestic rather than high-profile international issues.

The cabinet members have a wide range of academic credentials. There are two university rectors, professors and some PhD holders in the cabinet. There is also Susi Pudjiastuti, the marine and fisheries minister, who did not complete high school.

Most politicians in the cabinet only finished their first degrees. This shows again that Jokowi is pragmatic. He is more interested in integrity and capability rather than formal academic records.

Nevertheless, there are questionable appointments of politicians who don't have the specialist expertise required for the responsibilities of their portfolios.

For example, critics say that the much-needed reforms of the bureaucracy might not be properly implemented under Yuddy Chrisnandi, the minister of state apparatus reform. The Hanura party official does not have experience in administrative reform.

Meanwhile, the National Democratic Party's Siti Nurbaya has experience in the ministry of home affairs rather than in her new post as environment and forestry minister. The business community is surprised by the appointment of Saleh Husin, also from Hanura, as the industry minister as he lacks experience on the strategic tasks involved in this portfolio.

Overall, it is fair to say that Jokowi's "Working Cabinet" (Kabinet Kerja) is not up to public expectations in Indonesia.

However, in line with the presidential system in the country, it is important to give the cabinet members a fair chance to perform. Jokowi has to convey a clear message that they can be replaced at any time if their performance does not satisfy the president and the Indonesian people.

Jokowi is the first president to come from outside the traditional circle of Indonesian political elites. The stakes are high for his administration and, with it, the future of Indonesian democracy.