



Letter to US President Obama, on behalf of the Indonesian Consumer.

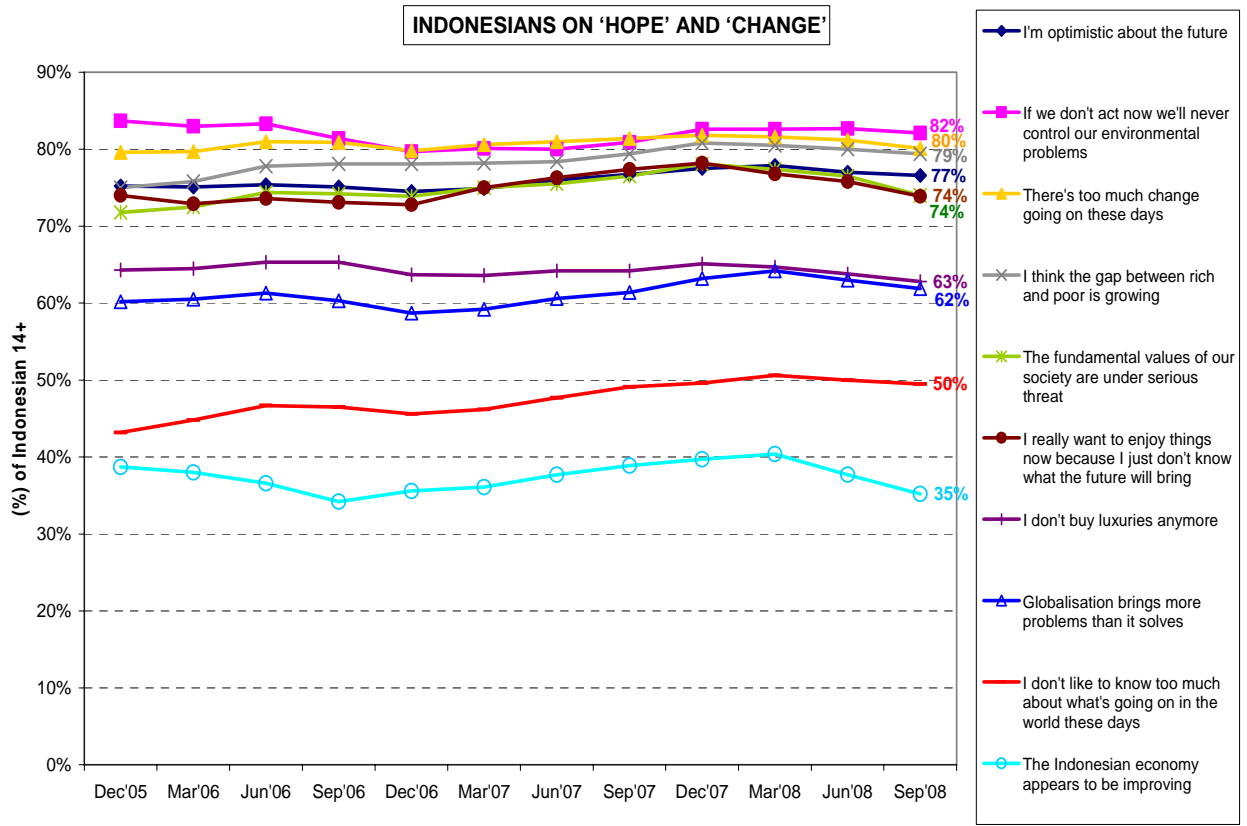
Especially today, people around the world are looking forward to real change. With much hope. But among the peoples of Asia, the early years of your childhood in Jakarta creates a unique bond with Indonesians. It is their view I hope to convey to you. With over 25,000 respondents each year, the statistical reliability of the insights used by this humble writer is not easily challenged. Roy Morgan Single Source measures over 200 attitudes and opinions continuously, alongside consumer behavior. My interpretations are based on the dialogue I continue with members of society, young and old, rich and poor, urban and rural.

Most noteworthy is the spirit of the people, with 77 per cent “optimistic about the future” despite their everyday struggles. They live in hope. Though 80 per cent believe “there’s too much change going on these days”, it should not dampen your enthusiasm for the particular brand of change you herald. Most people in most countries, their leaders included, are so insecure in the world left behind by your predecessor that they are ready and willing to follow your lead. In Indonesia, 79 per cent of the people think that “the gap between rich and poor is growing” even while GDP growth has galloped along. Today’s moral decay is represented not just by the growing signs of social inequality, of equal concern is the cynical attitude to issues like corruption, health, education, the environment to name but a few.

No wonder, 74 per cent of Indonesians agree that “the fundamental values of our society are under serious threat”. 82 per cent believe “if we don’t act now we’ll never control our environmental problems”. Yet, legislators are still taking bribes to sell forest reserves, reports of industrial pollution and manmade disasters continue unabated. While 62 per cent believe that “globalisation brings more problems than it solves”, the existential threat to the environment is more readily accepted by its people than by its leaders.

Now, half the population “don’t want to know what’s going on in the world outside”. Who can blame them? The ceasefire in Gaza is doomed to fail, again. When the score of the current invasion leaves 1204 Palestinians dead against 13 Israelis killed, for as long as lands remain illegally occupied, innocents will bear the pain of festering wounds. This is the epicenter of global insecurity, even more damaging than the global financial crisis. What sense does it make in today’s world for the US to spend more on its military than the next 16 countries combined? What good is another aircraft carrier in the face of an angry Palestinian teenager with no hope? The holistic approach, the “smart power” you envision would be welcomed by the world’s largest Muslim population, a thriving democracy today.

After all, 74 per cent of Indonesians “really want to enjoy things now because I just don’t know what the future will bring”. They are not alone. Only one in three think “the Indonesian economy appears to be improving”. 63 per cent “don’t buy luxuries anymore”, a sentiment many of Asia’s teeming millions would also echo even in the best of times. Most market-watchers this side of the world would agree that both haves and have-nots just want to get on with their daily lives. If you try to do the right thing every time, if you take a fair and even-handed approach to solving problems, you will be greeted with gratitude. For trying. *Selamat Bekerja, Mr.Obama!*



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