

## Youth embracing the new decade with growing optimism.

While Indonesia's corruption scandals and political shenanigans are making headlines around the globe, life goes on. Some things change but many stay the same just like they have for generations. But at the cusp of two decades, the visible differences in Indonesia's youth augur well for the country's future.

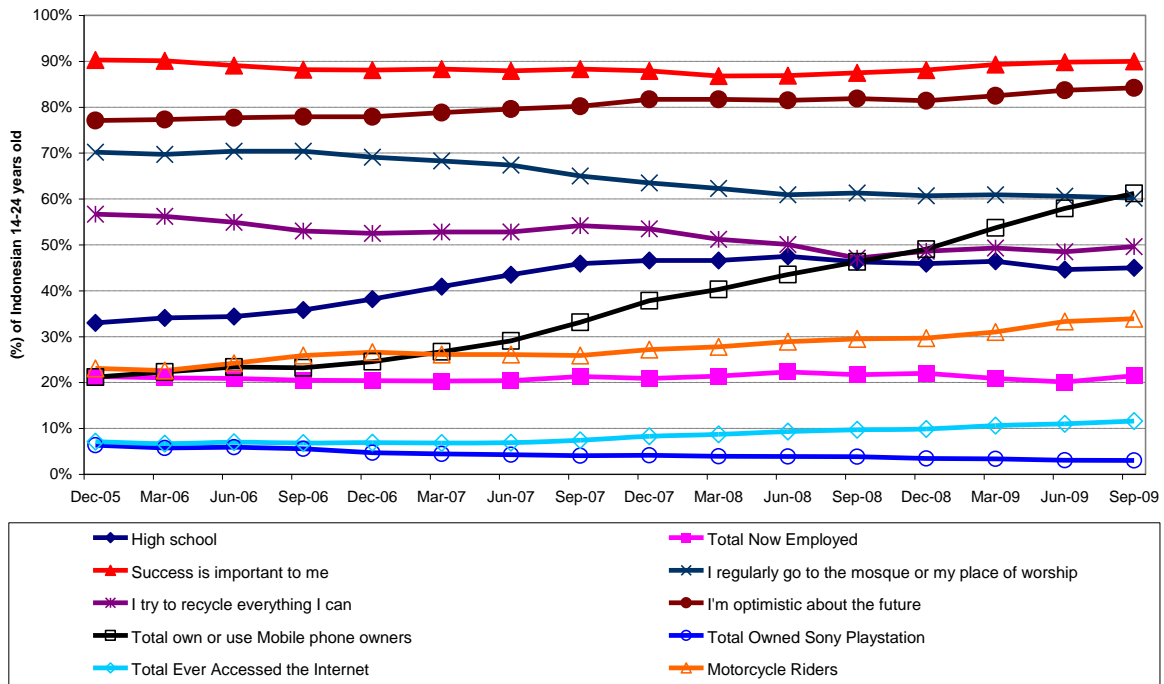
Almost nine out of ten Indonesians believe "corruption is a major problem affecting my country". Among 14-24 year olds, this conviction is even more widely accepted. The old guard would be wise to understand that their failings will neither be accepted, nor forgiven by the young voter. Despite the bad examples set daily by their elders, "I am optimistic about the future" say a growing number of Indonesia's youth. This is up from 77 per cent four years ago to 84 per cent today. Hand in hand, "success is important to me" remains a belief shared by nine out of ten young people.

This is a very young country. More than 20 per cent of the legally employable population, 14 years and older, is from the 14-24 age group. The future is literally in their hands. To the chagrin of clerics asking women to stop straightening their hair, the number of young people who say "I regularly go to the mosque or my formal place of worship" is rapidly declining. From 70 per cent five years ago, that number is now down to 60 per cent today. At that rate of decline, the prospect of a secular Indonesia will become reality in the not-too-distant future. That prospect is being spurred on by the bemusing exhortations of the men of cloth, anachronisms in the main. After all is said and done, there is no denying that the human race's biggest belief, in a god, any god, is based on the least amount of proof, historical, scientific or otherwise. Magnificent edifices are built, constitutions are written and wars are fought, in the name of god. Is it possible that Indonesia's youth are tiring of the worn-out view that somebody's god is better than someone else's, if at all there is one?

A relatively large number of young Indonesians believe that "a magazine like Playboy should not be permitted in this country". 76 per cent, to be precise. But at 39 per cent, a much smaller number agree that "it should be compulsory for women to wear the *jilbab*". The distinction between the two is clear, even though religious teachings influence the reaction to both statements. It isn't difficult to see their ability to draw the line between what could be argued as Western degradation and Eastern suppression, of the very same gender.

Materially, Indonesia's youth like youth everywhere, have never had it better. Five years ago, only 21 per cent of 14-24 year-olds had a mobile phone. That number has rocketed to 61 per cent today, still climbing but at a slower rate than before. The much bigger price tag of a motorcycle has not kept today's youth away either. At 23 per cent in December 2005, the number of young motorcycle riders has grown to 34 per cent and continuing to grow steadily. Ownership of MP3s and the like will always be in the hands of a smaller section of society, but is also growing. While "ever accessed the internet" has grown from 7 per cent of youth to 12 per cent in five years, this is one area of technological competence that is restricting Indonesia's potential in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. High costs and slow speeds are literally holding the country back.

**Indonesia's Youth : One Decade To The Next**



One in five 14-24 year-olds has a job, one economic indicator that has stayed flat over the last five years of the previous decade. If that was because more are studying longer, the lack of growth would remain a positive fact. As illustrated in last week's column, women are finishing high school in much bigger numbers, even if they are not joining the workforce. But it is obvious that this spurt is not equally true for young men, where a decline is beginning to show. If this trend is not arrested, it will negatively impact Indonesia's ability to continue attracting foreign investment.

Another area of concern is the environment. Indonesia's youth, 80 per cent and growing, are of the view that "If we don't act now we'll never control our environmental problems". Despite the widespread and growing worry, the number of young people who actually "try to recycle everything I can" is in fact diminishing. From 57 per cent in December 2005, that number is down to 50 per cent today. The only logical explanation is that much of Indonesia's recycling habit is influenced by economic necessity in the home. As creature comforts continue to increase within the household, the old frugal habit of re-using shopping bags, jars and tins is perhaps not being passed on to the young as forcefully as it used to be.

In the main, liberals would be pleased with the direction Indonesia's youth is heading. Some would say not fast enough. Conservatives on the other hand would find little to celebrate. These conclusions are based on findings from Roy Morgan Single Source, the country's largest syndicated survey with over 25,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect almost 90% of the population over the age of 14. The survey is used by more marketers and advertising agencies than any other survey in the country.

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