

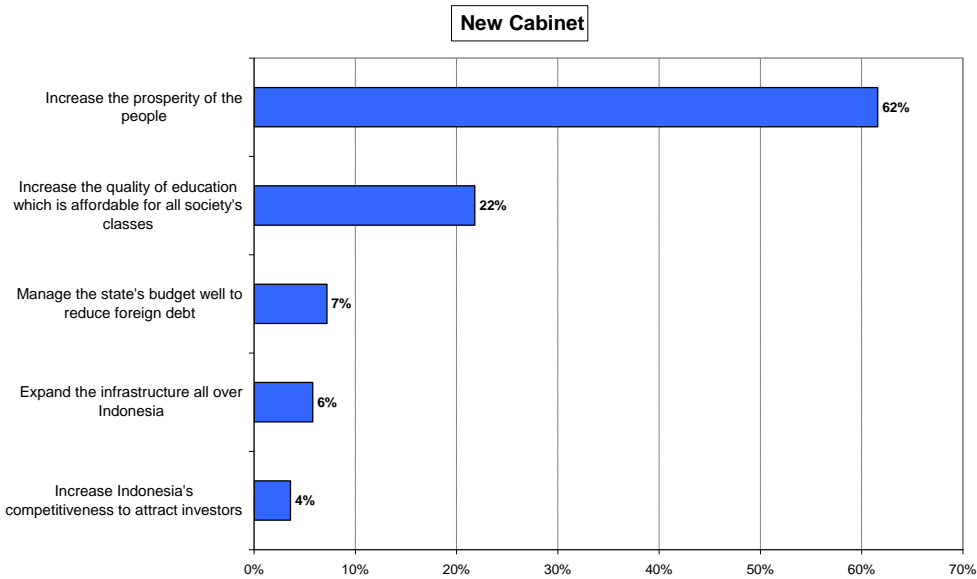
What a waste of time, energy and enthusiasm.

Soon after the new cabinet was announced by President Yudhoyono, Roy Morgan Research designed a special poll to gauge the mood of the people around the country. A total of 1780 respondents were interviewed in November. Then the various scandals started gathering momentum, becoming more and more bizarre as the days raced by. What the voters thought, wanted or hoped for seemed irrelevant.

Revisiting the findings weeks later, one cannot but feel a sense of loss. A government with a clear mandate, an economy almost untouched by the global crisis, a popular president and an optimistic people made Indonesia a country to watch. In a quagmire, the government appears to be in a state of paralysis. Lost opportunities, lost time, lost aspirations. Today, the voices of the people who expressed their opinions then can only serve as an urgent reminder to politicians, legislators and bureaucrats that the people are waiting for them to get back to business. From anybody’s perspective, the inquiry commission needs to conclude its hearings and come to a conclusion soon.

Using a broad spectrum of issues written about in media, respondents were asked what they believed should be the priorities of the new cabinet. More than anything else, the prosperity of the people was the pivotal issue with 62 per cent of respondents in agreement. Clearly, jobs and wages are on top of the list of needs and wants, everything else pales in comparison. With 22 per cent wanting quality at an affordable cost, education was a distant No.2. Then came “manage the state budget well to reduce foreign debt”, with 7 per cent agreeing. The need to “expand infrastructure all over Indonesia” found favour with 6 per cent. With only 4 per cent giving it the tick of approval, increasing “Indonesia’s competitiveness to attract foreign investors” is of little interest for the man on the street. All he or she cares about is a decent job with a decent wage, the ‘how’ isn’t important.

THE PEOPLE’S EXPECTATIONS OF THE NEW CABINET



The deeper probe on other key issues produced some fascinating results. Despite all the talk of an international economic slump, 43 per cent of respondents believed that economic conditions in Indonesia would be better, in the near term. “Much better”, said another 2 per cent. 42 per cent felt things would remain the same, with only 12 per cent thinking that the situation would get worse. What the response to this primary issue would be today is anybody’s guess.

With regard to another everyday concern, security, the response was almost as optimistic. 47 per cent expected conditions to remain the same, not better nor worse. But 46 per cent, just about the same number of people, expected the security environment to get better, or much better. Only 6 per cent expected conditions to worsen. Combined with the optimism about the economy, as well as high levels of consumer confidence, the new cabinet was poised for a flying start.

To add a touch of reality to a nation brimming with enthusiasm was the respondents’ view of the job market. 50 per cent of them believed that “unemployment would increase”, with another 6 per cent of the view that it would “increase a lot” in the near future. One in four concluded that things would remain the same, but 18 per cent expected employment to actually improve. Another 1 per cent felt that the situation would decrease a lot. Though the domestic consumer economy continues to chug along, export-driven industries in particular are still suffering from a slowdown in orders from traditional markets overseas. Overall investments slowed down in 2009, compared to 2008. Everybody may not be reading the newspapers, but they are all watching television. On bread-and-butter issues, the people know what’s going on, every day.

Take the response to yet another issue hurting the hip pocket. Asked whether they expected the price of everyday essentials to go up or down, 56 per cent said they believed the cost of commodities would become more expensive. Another 5 per cent believed they would become “much more expensive”. But 27 per cent expect prices to remain the same, with another 12 per cent believing that they will be cheaper or much cheaper in the near term. With the majority of the population battling to pay the bills every day, the views expressed on the cost of living are not surprising. The government’s ability to keep inflation in check, in line with projections, can radically alter current perceptions.

At the best of times, corruption remains Indonesia’s social concern No.1. Asked if they believed the incidence of corruption would go up or down in the near future, 34 per cent the situation to remain the same. But almost as many at 33 per cent expected incidence levels to go down. 28 per cent expected corruption to rise. While 8 in 10 Indonesians agree that this is a major issue affecting this country”, the jury is still very divided on which way it will head under the new cabinet. The needs and wants aren’t difficult to read. Jobs and wages, then prices remain the pivotal issues. 100 days into a new term, they remain unattended.

Opinions for this special poll were sought from across society, not just in the big cities but in the towns and villages spread across the country.

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