

How would President Soeharto have rated on Good Governance?

Most history books are written years later, and not by the people whose lives are affected by the events of their time. Try as they might to record without bias, opinion colours the facts read and discussed by generations to come. As always, businesses make the best of the situation, in good times and bad.

Former President Soeharto's passing away marked a milestone in Indonesian history. His demise stirred emotions, with media coverage feeding heated debate in boardrooms, bedrooms and on the street. Was his legacy a positive or negative one, in the minds of his fellow citizens? Having waited for heated sentiments to settle down, a special poll was recently conducted to get the people's verdict. 2017 people 14 years and older around the country were asked if the former president had done more good or more bad for Indonesia during his time in office.

The results are loud and clear. 81 per cent believe that he did more good than bad. The responses have no particular skew by gender, nor by the urban-rural divide. But there is enough evidence to show that higher percentages of people outside Java think more favourably about his legacy than do his fellow Javanese. The greatest polarisation of views on any of the major islands is in Kalimantan, with the West giving him as much of a thumbs-up as he gets a thumbs-down in the East. Not surprisingly, he fared better with the age groups above the age of 34 than he did with the younger generations.

Historians should take note. There are not many icons around the world, living or dead, who would score that highly years after falling from favour. But this view should not be construed as an invitation to distort history, erase the many wrongs or overlook the many flaws. An era is over and it is to the credit of the Indonesian people that opinions can be expressed today without fear or retribution.

Business, especially big business, perhaps never had it better than in the 1980s. When he deemed the country stable and secure by his own yardstick, the former president opened up a whole new world for his people. A wide majority of Indonesians even today want "things to stay the same" and believe there is "too much change" going on in their society. Combine these sentiments with their desire for "security in my job" and it becomes easy to understand the overwhelming response to the memory of the strongman. In a word, stability.

Far from being isolated like Myanmar still is, today's Indonesia exists in a borderless global economy. With the highs come the lows. The price of oil in the world market and its continuing impact on the price of food is taking its toll in a way it would not have in the insular days of old. As always, the weaker sections of society suffer the most in global storms. In a country where 'the have-nots' overwhelmingly outnumber 'the haves', the impact of these external winds is felt all the more painfully. The only defence against these downturns is continuing growth in employment, from new investments in businesses big and small. The challenge for a government steering an economy that looks like it will continue to grow at over 6 per cent per annum, is to ensure that the wealth created in large measure from the country's natural resources does not remain solely in the hands of the affluent few.

PT. Roy Morgan Research, Wisma 46, Kota BNI, 17th Floor, Jl. Jend.Sudirman Kav. 1 Jakarta 10220

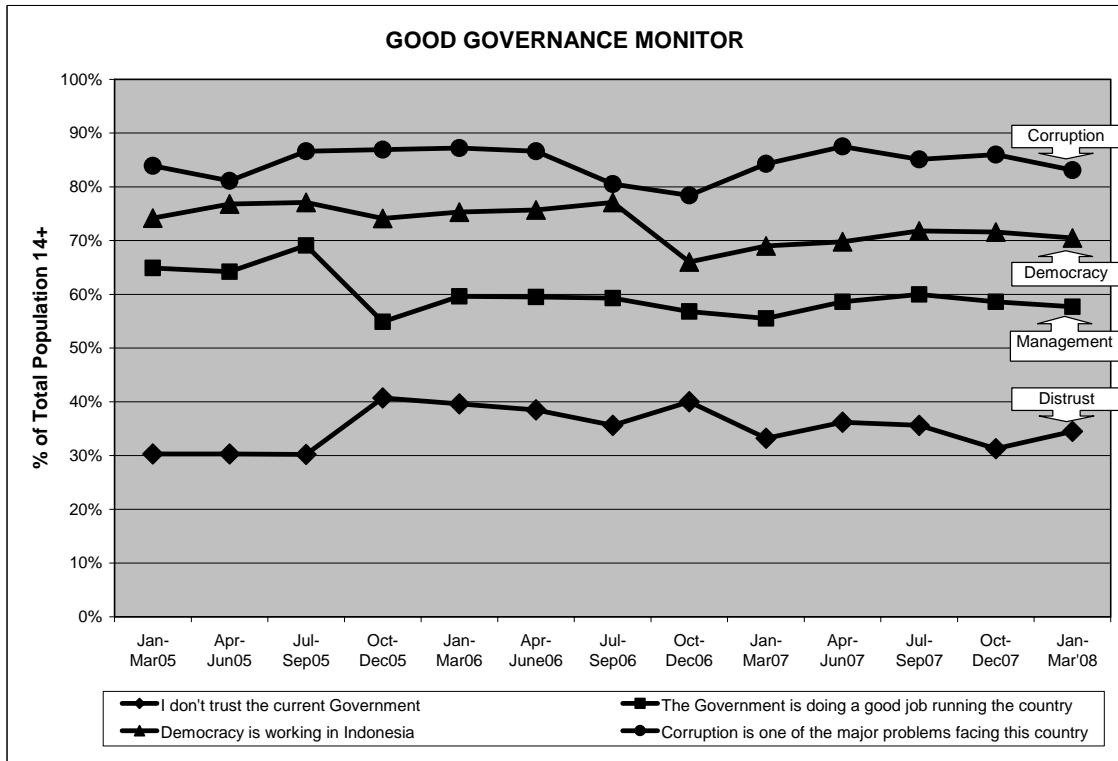
Tel: (021) 572 2021 or 572 7529 Fax: (021) 572 4864

411 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, G.P.O. Box 2282U, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia

Tel: (03) 9629 6888 Fax: (03) 9629 1250 (03) 9224 5387 Email: melbourne@roymorgan.com

Website: www.roymorgan.com

Offices also in: Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, London, Auckland and USA



The political environment within which businesses thrive or dwindle, remains strong despite the fact that the Roy Morgan Consumer Confidence Index dipped by six points to 109 in the January-March quarter from a recent high of 115 in the last quarter of 2008. While the consumer is hurting, with many more tightening their belts, the political repercussions have not been as damaging to the government as might have been expected.

On all the four key measures that constitute the Good Governance Monitor, the SBY administration is still enjoying positive scores in the main. Though corruption remains issue No.1, it actually dipped three points to 83 per cent now saying that it is “one of the major problems facing this country”. Seven in ten people continue to say “democracy is working in Indonesia” but food prices are impacting negatively on “the government is doing a good job running the country”. The recent removal of fuel subsidies will most likely continue the downward trend of this vital measure, with 58 per cent agreeing most recently. In similar vein, “I don’t trust the current government” went up a modest four points to 35 per cent of the population. The April-June quarter will see these scores dip further, the key question of course is by how much, before it makes businesses nervous.

These observations are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, the country’s largest syndicated survey with over 27,000 Indonesian respondents annually, projected to reflect almost 90% of the population over the age of 14. That is a universe of 140 million people. The results are updated every 90 days. The opinions expressed are my own.

The writer can be contacted at Debnath.Guharoy@roymorgan.com

PT. Roy Morgan Research, Wisma 46, Kota BNI, 17th Floor, Jl. Jend.Sudirman Kav. 1 Jakarta 10220
Tel: (021) 572 2021 or 572 7529 Fax: (021) 572 4864
411 Collins Street, Melbourne, Victoria 3000, G.P.O. Box 2282U, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia
Tel: (03) 9629 6888 Fax: (03) 9629 1250 (03) 9224 5387 Email: melbourne@roymorgan.com

Website: www.roymorgan.com

Offices also in: Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth, Canberra, London, Auckland and USA