



Context Indonesia

Indonesian history has experienced long periods of colonial rule by the Portuguese, the British, the Dutch and the Japanese. On August 17, 1945, the Indonesian nationalist movement declared independence from the Dutch



Following a period of conflict and negotiation, the Dutch recognised sovereignty of the Republic of Indonesia, but retained control of Papua – at the time called Dutch New Guinea.

Following independence, Soekarno, the leader of the Indonesian Nationalist Party, became first president of the Republic of Indonesia. The new president called for all previous colonial areas in the archipelago to be handed to Indonesia, including Dutch New Guinea (Papua). An agreement was concluded in New York in 1962, under which the Dutch were to transfer Papuan sovereignty to the United Nations for a period of six years until a referendum in Papua could be conducted to determine the preferences of the Papuans. The referendum, known as the “Act of Free Choice”, was held in Papua in 1969. It was in favour of integration with Indonesia, but has been criticised by some organisations on grounds that only a limited number of Papuans were allowed to vote.

During the same period, in 1965 Indonesia experienced significant internal conflict. In 1967, Soekarno was relieved of his duties by the Provisional People’s Consultative Assembly (MPRS) and General Soeharto was appointed as acting President. In March 1968, the MPRS appointed Soeharto as President.

Under President Soeharto, Indonesia experienced a period of rapid economic expansion. But it was not to last. In the late 1990s severe economic downturn hit the entire Asian region. Soeharto was re-elected in 1997, but the regional economic crisis continued to have a significant effect on Indonesia. The beginning of 1998 saw a series of widespread public demonstrations against the existing government, which ultimately forced Soeharto’s resignation in May 1998.

Soeharto was succeeded by his former Vice-President, B.J. Habibie. However, political tension continued to undermine his administration. In 1999, Habibie announced public elections which were won by the party led by the daughter of the former President Soekarno, Megawati Soekarnoputri. The Peoples Consultative Assembly (MPR), who at the time appointed the President, appointed Abdurrahman Wahid as President, and Megawati Soekarnoputri was appointed vice-president. In 2001 President Wahid was replaced as president by Megawati Soekarnoputri, and remained in office until 2004 when the current President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono assumed power following the Presidential elections.

The year 2004 – a new chapter in Indonesian history

The election of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in 2004 was the first time in Indonesia’s history that the president was elected directly by the people. President Yudhoyono won with over 60% and was inaugurated in October 2004. His election is widely seen as reflecting the people’s demands to improve the effectiveness of government and to root out corruption.