

# [***The world's largest single day election is underway. Young voters will be decisive***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B9Y-NGB1-DY7V-G06K-00000-00&context=1516831)

CNN Wire

February 13, 2024 Tuesday 2:34 AM GMT

Copyright 2024 Cable News Network All Rights Reserved

**Length:** 1417 words

**Byline:** By Kathleen Magramo and Heather Chen, CNN

**Dateline:** (CNN)

**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Polls opened in the vast country of Indonesia on Wednesday with more than 200 million voters casting their ballots to elect a new president, in what is billed as the world's biggest single-day election.

The sprawling Southeast Asian nation, the world's third-largest electoral democracy and largest Muslim-majority country, has made impressive gains since the fall of the late dictator Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998 - morphing into one of Asia's most vibrant democracies and economies.

Hosting a vote in the [*world's largest archipelagic nation*](https://kemlu.go.id/vancouver/en/pages/indonesia_at_a_glance/2016/etc-menu#:~:text=Indonesia%20at%20a%20Glance,-%E2%80%8B&text=INDONESIA%2C%20the%20largest%20archipelago%20in,which%20about%206%2C000%20are%20inhabited.) is a huge effort. The country is wider than the United States and straddles three time zones. It is made up of over 18,000 islands and islets, of which 6,000 are inhabited, and over 150 languages spoken across its breadth.

The campaign has been dominated by big personalities in a decisive election that will also select some 20,000 other national and provincial lawmakers.

[*Younger Indonesians*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/11/asia/indonesia-election-young-voters-dg) are key, with around half of registered voters being under the age of 40, according to the [*General Election Commission.*](https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/11702/dpt-pemilu-2024-nasional-2048-juta-pemilih)

Job opportunities are top of mind for many voters, with presidential hopefuls vowing to propel the country's economic growth fueled by rich natural resources and trade opportunities. But climate change and illegal logging challenge Indonesia's sustainable future.

Here's what to expect.

The presidential candidates

The race is a three-way contest between a former army general and two former governors.

Prabowo Subianto, 72, a former military general and incumbent defense minister, is running for president for a third time, and he's leading the polls.

Prabowo is the former son-in-law of the late dictator Suharto and his controversial background hasn't dented his popularity, as experts warn dynastic ***politics*** is making a comeback.

He is accused of kidnapping and torturing pro-democracy activists in the late 1990s when he served as general - which he repeatedly denied responsibility for. In the years since he has re-made his image as a democracy supporter, but many activists and analysts remain fearful of his authoritarian past.

"That he was favored by former leader Suharto and has now found it politically advantageous to transform himself into an ostensible democrat doesn't change the very real prospect that he would revert to his brutal past should he manage to ascend to the presidency and no longer need to feign respect for human rights to advance his ambitions," Kenneth Roth, former executive director at Human Rights Watch and visiting professor at Princeton University, told CNN.

Another main contender is Ganjar Pranowo, the candidate of the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. He served two terms as governor of Central Java which has won him a large following outside the capital Jakarta in Indonesia's most populous island. His running mate is senior minister Mahfud MD.

Former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan is running as an independent candidate. He has strong links with Islamic political groups, and his vice-presidential pick, Muhaimin Iskandar, is the leader of Indonesia's largest Muslim political party, the National Awakening Party.

Anies was the former governor of Jakarta, a position he won in 2017 after accusing his main contender - an ethnic Chinese Christian, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, [*better known as "Ahok"*](https://www.cnn.com/2017/05/09/asia/ahok-trial-verdict/index.html) - of blasphemy.

Jokowi's influence

Outgoing President Joko Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, has dominated Indonesian ***politics*** since 2014, but is constitutionally barred from seeking a consecutive third term.

He was hailed at the time as a break from Indonesia's dynastic ***politics***. But concerns have been growing over what many view as moves by Jokowi to secure influence after leaving office through his 36-year-old son Gibran Rakabuming Raka, who is running for vice president with Prabowo.

Gibran was made eligible to run despite being below the age limit after a constitutional court ruling - headed by Jokowi's brother in law - granted him an exception.

"The plan is clearly to establish a Jokowi dynasty and Gibran fits the mold," said Adrian Vickers, professor of Southeast Asian studies at the University of Sydney. "He is also clearly the asset for Prabowo in getting the millennial vote."

Will there be a run-off?

It's very likely, experts say, even as Prabowo and running mate Gibran emerge as frontrunners in various polls.

A presidential candidate needs a simple majority of at least 50% of total votes and 20% of votes in more than half of the country's 38 provinces to win. If no one succeeds, a run-off will take place on June 26.

"A lot of people are worried about Prabowo becoming president and are pulling out all the stops to head him off," said Vickers from the University of Sydney. "Anies could get a strong enough vote to force a run-off," he added.

What change do voters want to see?

Indonesia is a youthful nation. At least a third of voters are millennials, and 22% are Gen Z. But nearly one in five Indonesians aged between 15 and 24 are unable to find work, based on [*government data*](https://webapi.bps.go.id/download.php?f=o3cQpj/eD3e/rk5yv37JZFwgE++1ZZrfOxFsoX7AC5xdn2pOuRk5w12/ybMPI8kFsZ25m/weXxW8PyBOtYPu0C4waR8XuRNhehYuGYoQH1Hpt1ajox2DgeHO3AS64y5KfaOWvtLvDQjZ566GeGDUn0erxigXvWfZnI0S5aV8uYBsAKXSCbDbu5eMB4IUBQe89RpJsyq/tBL/U8qfogoWnb1YSBa52qjfFMTU2rtC+ROmSryBMwmDj9ywuNYUxp6YdM7FXmRlhuoCpzLgR9Fh0RtL/FSfkbieitOCs+9j6Bw=)[*.*](https://www.bps.go.id/id/pressrelease/2023/07/17/2016/profil-kemiskinan-di-indonesia-maret-2023.html)

The young electorate has emphasized job opportunities, eradicating poverty and corruption as their top three priorities in the vote, according to a survey conducted in November 2023 by Lembaga Survei Indonesia and the ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute.

Creating high-quality jobs with fair pay hinges on Indonesia's governance system - where corruption is not uncommon to lure foreign investments - according to Maria Monica Wihardja, an economist and visiting fellow at the institute.

"When you don't have good institutions, that will affect the investment climate. And when it affects investment climate that will affect job creation," Wihardja told CNN.

Transparency International ranks Indonesia at [*110 out of 180 nations*](https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/idn) in its annual Corruption Perceptions Index and says the country has backslid somewhat during Jokowi's time in office.

Casting his ballot at a polling station Wednesday in Bekasi, West Java, 34-year-old Karim Saputra said he hopes the new president can propel Indonesia to advance and prosper.

"I hope the elected president can eradicate corruption and stabilize the price of goods and help the underprivileged with healthcare and [social security]," he told CNN, saying the new leader should also work on improving the education system.

The use and abuse of AI

With more than 210 million Internet users, Indonesia boasts one of the world's largest digital populations. The internet plays a huge role in the country's ***politics***.

Sixty percent of voters under 40 said social media was their primary source for information, [*according to a 2022 survey*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/asia/indonesia-election-young-voters-dg/index.html), followed by television at 40%.

Online hoaxes, misinformation and smear campaigns were rampant during the 2019 election and with the rise and advancement of AI technology, experts say the situation has grown more concerning.

One deepfake in particular, of the late dictator Suharto, [*went viral*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/asia/suharto-deepfake-ai-scam-indonesia-election-hnk-intl/index.html), spreading across social media platforms and through chat apps - fueling public debate about the ethics of AI in the election.

What about the environment?

Indonesia's rainforests are the third largest in the world but industrial-led deforestation has accelerated land degradation in recent years.

Lucrative businesses thrive as there's few punitive measures for polluters and illegal land grabs in industries such as palm oil and raw materials mining, according to Sayyidatiihayaa Afra, a researcher at Indonesian conservation group Satya Bumi.

Detrimental environmental damage has come alongside Jokowi's mandated plans to develop a homegrown [*nickel processing industry*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/08/asia/indonesia-sulawesi-nickel-ev-as-equals-intl-hnk/index.html) to fuel the electric vehicle boom - which some presidential hopefuls are also aiming to fulfil.

"So many commodities come from Indonesia - from illegal logging and illegal plantation, and from the mining sector that violates human rights, and local communities which are being put on the table in this election," Sayyidatiihayaa said.

Jokowi made it his hallmark policy to relocate the capital from Jakarta to Nusantara on Borneo, in a $30 billion plan to distribute economic activity throughout the country as the capital struggles with flooding and congestion.

Presidential contenders Ganjar and Prabowo said they would back building the new capital but Anies openly rejects the plan saying it would fuel "new inequality" across different regions.

Journalist Agustinus Beo da Costa contributed reporting from West Java, Indonesia.

TM & © 2024 Cable News Network, Inc., a Time Warner Company. All rights reserved.

**Load-Date:** February 13, 2024

**End of Document**