

# Palestine's Future: Perspectives from Indonesian Presidential Candidates

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Support for Palestine has swiftly emerged as a crucial component amidst the genocide in Gaza, as well as marked a significant focus on three Indonesian President Candidates. Indonesia, as the hosts of the globe's biggest Muslim populace, made religious matters as a wield significant influence in shaping the voting decisions of Muslims (Maulia, 2023). Moreover, the Palestinian issue goes beyond religious matters; it also pertains to humanity matters all over the world.

The discourse surrounding the Palestine issue within the context of the Indonesian Presidential election of 2024 epitomized a strategic deliberation, distinguishing it from its predecessors in 2014 and 2019, where Palestinian affairs were not prominently featured. The Gaza attack of October 7, 2023, served as a catalyst for exacerbating geopolitical tensions. Initially surprising the Israeli military, the Gaza assault led some military analysts to link it to Israel's subsequent loss of intelligence and military dominance.

In the subsequent month, Israel's severe actions garnered widespread condemnation for resulting in civilian casualties, particularly the bombing of Al Shifa hospital in Gaza (Al Jazeera, 2023). Media reports characterized these events as suggestive of an Israeli genocide. Consequently, South Africa advocated for Israel's prosecution at the International Criminal Court, receiving support from certain nations (Ochab,

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2023). However, most European countries backed Israel, leading to fresh divisions in global politics. The cessation of international humanitarian aid to Palestine underscored profound uncertainties about the region's future. Meanwhile, Indonesian communities meticulously scrutinized the presidential candidates' positions on the Palestinian issue amidst these complex geopolitical circumstances and the ongoing election campaign.

Viewing the Palestinian issue historically reminds us of Indonesia's fight for independence in 1945. The exclamation of "combatting colonialism" in the UUD 1945 constitution sparked deep thoughts in Soekarno's mind about neo-colonialism, seeing Israel as a modern form of colonialism. Soekarno's strong support for Palestine peaked at the Bandung Conference of 1955, greatly boosting Indonesia's global reputation. By 1967, Soekarno firmly stated, " We must take pride in being a nation that consistently upholds the spirit of independence, not merely an anti-imperialist sentiment. Hence, we refrain from recognizing Israel." (Mukthi, 2014).

It's crucial to connect historical understanding with present-day issues. Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi's recent speech at the United Nations referenced the Bandung Conference, emphasizing alignment with the principles of the UUD 1945 constitution. Consequently, each presidential candidate sought to portray themselves as guardians of constitutional values by advocating strongly for Palestine. Multiple media sources confirmed the unanimity among the candidates, as also reported by foreignpolicy.com. This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of their views on Palestine's future.

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Source: Antara Photo/Andri Saputra, Jakarta Globe News.

### Mapping Opinions of Presidential Candidates on Palestine During the Debate

**D**uring the third debate, held by the General Elections Commission (KPU) on January 7, with the topic of National Defense, Security, International Relations, and Geopolitics, the discourse on Palestine emerged prominently. All candidates unanimously expressing their support for Palestine (Prima, 2024). This debate played a pivotal role in shaping the prospective policies of the next Indonesian President, extending beyond purely domestic concerns to encompass foreign policy considerations.

Anies Baswedan, a politician with an academic background, garnered considerable public support during his tenure as Governor of Jakarta from 2017 to 2022, a position previously occupied by Jokowi. He asserted the vision of "Indonesian Justice and Prosperity for All" and champions the mission of the "Eighth Movement Path," all while articulating his position on the Palestinian issue. Anies underscored the

imperative of instigating peace initiatives to aid oppressed nations, emphasizing that this duty extends beyond the purview of the President to encompass all strata of society.

Prabowo Subianto, the former special forces commander who is making his third bid for the presidency after previously losing to Mr. Widodo in 2014 and 2019, is now re-entering the election fray by advocating for the vision of "Together with Advanced Indonesia, Towards a Golden Indonesia 2045," and the mission of "Eight Asta Cita's Mission." He also emphasized the importance of the Palestinian cause. Prabowo firmly expressed his support for Palestinian independence and stressed the need to strengthen military power and the Indonesian Embassy in Palestine for this purpose.

Ganjar Pranowo, whom the ruling Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle has placed its aspirations upon after governing Central Java twice, one of the nation's most densely populated regions (The National, 2023), presented the vision of "Towards a Superior Indonesia: Fast Action to Realize a Just and Sustainable Maritime Country," and the mission of "Eight Quick Actions," emphasizing the need to actively support Palestinian civilians through a Freedom-Active foreign policy. He highlighted a strong commitment to this cause, indicating steadfast dedication to its ongoing pursuit.

## In-dept Analysis of Each Candidates's View on Palestine

### Anis Baswedan

**D**uring the debate, Anis discussed his support for Palestine, emphasizing Indonesia's need to increase its influence in global politics to protect national interests and promote global peace. He also highlighted Indonesia's role in promoting peace in oppressed regions. Anis's international recognition stems from his active participation in prestigious academic forums worldwide and his education background, such as appointed to serve on the ASEAN Studies Advisory Board at Oxford University (Permana, 2023), which demonstrates his comprehensive understanding of international politics compared to other candidates. Based on this background, Anis proposed his vision to strengthen the country's defense system and strategy to adapt to the dynamics of the new global era, which is filled with uncertainty, challenges, as well as conventional and non-conventional threats (Santoso, 2023).

In discussing Indonesia's international role in supporting oppressed nations, parallels can be drawn with Soekarno's actions during Indonesia's struggle for independence. Although Soekarno's involvement in the Palestinian cause may not have been extensive, his nationalist ideology viewed the Palestine issue as a form of prolonged colonialism, as expressed during the Bandung Conference of 1955 (Hasnan, 2021). Like Soekarno, Anis integrates his support for Palestine into Indonesia's constitutional framework, positioning it as a global initiative against colonialism. He emphasizes this support within the context of Indonesia's Freedom Active Foreign Policy and its resistance to Dutch colonialism in West Papua. By drawing on historical frameworks, Anis's stance on Palestine appears both viable and strategically significant, particularly in light of recent events in Gaza.



In 2011, Anis delivered a speech at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), wherein he shared his encounter with Canada's Ambassador, who had conducted research on the Spirit of the Bandung Conference. Anis has consistently raised this topic in various forums, including discussions with the aforementioned Ambassador. This consistent focus is not arbitrary; rather, Anis drew from his firsthand experiences during his service in Africa, where he encountered numerous individuals expressing enthusiasm for Bandung City. This resonated with Anis, instilling a sense of pride in Indonesia's proactive involvement and substantive contributions to global affairs, as opposed to merely engaging in transactional exchanges. He articulated his sentiment, stating, "I felt proud when Indonesia showed up, when Indonesia acted, and not transactionally, we were present to think about the world, so the world remembers and establishes us as a reference" (Basyari, 2023).

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In alignment with Anies's perspective, Indonesian Foreign Affairs Minister Retno Marsudi, during the United Nations General Assembly in September 2023, also highlighted Indonesia's foreign policy orientation toward the Bandung Conference of 1955 (Tanamal and Suhendra, 2023). However, it is worth noting that Jokowi did not attend the assembly nor make a personal appearance. This contrasts with Soekarno's approach at the United Nations, where he personally conveyed Indonesia's stance, often in collaboration with a professional Foreign Minister.

Outside the debate, Anies actively advocates for justice and collective action in support of Palestine, rallying global solidarity in Jakarta on November 5. He calls for addressing the profound suffering of Palestinians and advocates for measures such as a blockade of Israel and a ceasefire. Anies attributes the escalation in Gaza to settler colonialism, highlighting his consistent critique of Israel's actions, including the relocation of its capital to Jerusalem (Aco, 2023).

### Prabowo Subianto

Prabowo, as reported by the Westerns media and some of Indonesia media, called as The Rising of Jokowi's Dynasty by appointing Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka as Vice President Candidate of Prabowo (Meakem, 2024). He himself also claimed that he will continue Jokowi's regime, including supporting Palestine. Prabowo expressed his support for Palestine during the debate by advocating for Palestinian independence and emphasizing the importance of the Indonesian Embassy in Palestine. He stressed the need for strong diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Palestine to bolster support for the Palestinian cause.

Furthermore, Prabowo connected the Palestinian struggle to the significance of military strength, citing historical examples where nations lacking strong militaries faced oppression, drawing parallels to the situation in Gaza. He suggested increasing defense budgets and modernizing weaponry systems, viewing military weakness in Palestine as a barrier to Palestinian aspirations. Consequently, he advocated for supporting Palestine through military means as crucial.

Additionally, Prabowo addressed the issue of terrorism, particularly regarding the designation of Hamas as a terrorist organization by Israel. While acknowledging differing viewpoints within the United Nations on this matter, he called for a reevaluation of discussions on terrorism post-2024, considering the associated risks and ambiguities.

Outside the debate, Prabowo's dedication to supporting Palestine was evident through his actions as acting Minister of Defense. He facilitated the deployment of military resources for humanitarian aid delivery to Palestine, including dispatching a hospital ship following an attack on an Indonesian hospital in Gaza (Aco, 2023). This demonstrated his understanding of Palestine's ongoing struggle against colonization and his commitment to providing tangible support to the Palestinian people.



As publicly asserted by Prabowo, perceived as a potential successor to Jokowi's administration, it is pertinent to examine Jokowi's actions concerning the Palestinian issue. In November 2023, Jokowi, accompanied by the Foreign Minister, participated in the Islamic Cooperation Organization (OKI) assembly in Riyadh. During this event, they issued 32 resolute resolutions, addressing not only support for Palestine but also admonishing international organizations for their perceived double standards (Mawardi, 2023). Comparing to the current issue, South Africa was engaging in international efforts to bring the issue of the Israel Genocide before the International Court of Justice (Ochab, 2023). This action prompted many countries to rally behind South Africa in seeking punitive measures against Israel through international organizations. Indeed, upon examining history, South Africa's actions mirrored those of Soekarno when he brought the West Irian issue before the United Nations personally (Mangkusubroto, 2023). Conversely, discussing support for Palestine through resolutions may not have as significant an impact on the international order as their direct actions.

The strategy articulated by Prabowo was not surprising, given his understanding (also referenced in Jokowi's statement) that the future of Indonesia is precarious. The protracted conflicts between Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Palestine have the potential to increase the prices of staple foods. Additionally, the rivalry

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between China and the United States over Taiwan threatens food supplies, energy security, and trade. In response to these challenges, Prabowo emphasized the necessity for Indonesia to actively engage in safeguarding national interests on the global stage by strengthening national defense and fostering constructive international relations. He asserted that Indonesia cannot effectively support Palestinian independence without ensuring the safety and stability of its own national state (Santoso, 2023). In contrast, Soekarno's struggle focused on both international interests, aimed at combating colonialism globally, and national interests, seeking independence from Dutch re-colonization attempts. Prabowo's approach appears to prioritize national interests in a more unilateral manner, whereas Soekarno played a pivotal role in facilitating the independence of numerous Asian and African countries.

### Ganjar Pranowo

Ganjar Pranowo highlighted the enduring importance of the Freedom Active Foreign Policy, established in 1948, and its relevance in modern international relations. This perspective was shared by all candidates with their distinct approaches (Boran, 2023). Ganjar, however, emphasized a significant link between this policy and the Palestinian situation, arguing that supporting Palestine was crucial for Indonesia to assert its position without aligning with major global powers like the United States or the Russian Federation.

Moreover, Ganjar stressed the need to strengthen diplomatic efforts and embassy presence to protect the interests of migrant workers. This proposal aligns with Prabowo's suggestion to support other countries by improving domestic affairs and connections with the diaspora. Ganjar also highlighted that Indonesia's support for Palestine would be incomplete without ensuring the safety of Indonesian citizens living in Palestine. Similar to Prabowo, he emphasized the importance of enhancing military defense capabilities. This policy made by Ganjar in this regard was based on his portrayal during the debate, that is emphasizing the prioritization of 100% national interest all over anything (Santoso, 2023).

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Outside the debate, Ganjar showed unwavering support for Palestine by advocating for the exclusion of Israel from the FIFA U-20 tournament scheduled to be held in Indonesia in 2023 (Aco, 2023). He justified this decision as a response to Israel's escalating hostilities against Palestine. Additionally, he argued that excluding Israel from the tournament was consistent with the core principles of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and the mandate outlined in the UUD 1945 constitution to confront global colonialism actively. He further emphasized his commitment to following the principles set by Indonesia's first President, Soekarno, in the pursuit of Palestinian self-determination.

Indeed, Ganjar's actions are deeply rooted in the Indonesian constitution, particularly in the foreign policy of Freedom Active, which was initiated in 1948. This policy was crafted to uphold the principles laid out in the constitution of UUD 1945, specifically in the context of combating colonialism. Soekarno, influenced by his leftist ideology, employed this policy framework in addressing the Palestinian issue. However, it is essential to note that the Freedom Active foreign policy was not merely a pragmatic approach but rather a principled decision to actively contribute to global affairs without aligning with any particular superpower. Drawing from Soekarno's ideas from the 1920s, it was believed that aligning with either the United States or Russia would not effectively address the issue of colonialism. Soekarno's adherence to this stance earned him international recognition, particularly for his successful navigation of the West Papua issue through the Freedom-Active policy (Yulianti, Nia, 2021). In contrast, Ganjar's approach, which rejected Israel's participation on FIFA U-20, falls short of demonstrating his adeptness in handling the complexities of the Freedom-Active foreign policy. This policy framework is deeply entrenched in profound academic concepts of politics as Soekarno had.

## Conclusion

In summary, when analyzing the views of Indonesian citizens regarding the Palestine issue in the context of the presidential candidates, we can outline the perspectives of the three contenders—Anies's focus on garnering international support for Palestine, Prabowo's emphasis on strengthening the military and domestic diplomacy, and Ganjar's dedication to the Freedom and Active Foreign Policy.

In my view, the validity of these arguments depends on the challenges Indonesia faces in the post-2024 era and the strategic direction we choose. Ganjar's advocacy for the freedom and active foreign policy aligns with the goal of upholding the constitution. However, the implementation of this policy requires further examination and courage, akin to the actions taken by Soekarno during the West Irian Recolonization period. Furthermore, Ganjar's vision still lacks experience.

Prabowo's approach of enhancing military capabilities is relevant and contributes to supporting Palestine. However, military assistance should be accompanied by a thorough understanding of the Palestinian situation. The assertion that Gaza's vulnerability is solely due to military factors is historically inaccurate and differs from Soekarno's perspective on the continuation of colonialism. In addition, Prabowo's interest on Palestine's issue was not as wide as what Soekarno had to fight for Palestine's independence.

Anies's stance resonates with Soekarno's principles of international engagement. His advocacy for active participation in international organizations and vocal support for Palestine reflects Soekarno's initiatives during the preparation for Indonesian independence and the Revolution Period. The post-2024 period presents fluid dynamics regarding Palestine on the global stage, influenced by initiatives such as those from South Africa. Given the cessation of International Humanitarian Aid for Palestine, careful consideration of strategies to support Palestine is crucial. Moreover, any approach to supporting Palestine should anticipate future challenges.



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