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Harnessing the potential of the Indonesian diaspora

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Trends in
Southeast Asia

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF
THE INDONESIAN DIASPORA

CHARLOTTE SETIJADI

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

Trends in Southeast Asia

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FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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Harnessing the Potential of the Indonesian Diaspora

By Charlotte Setijadi

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- In recent years, the Indonesian government has increased efforts to harness the economic, political, and social potential of its diaspora.
- A recent high-profile event was the 4th annual Congress of Indonesian Diasporas that took place in Jakarta on 1 July 2017. Opened by former U.S. President Barack Obama, the event was intended to draw the Indonesian public's attention towards the contributions of Indonesian diaspora communities abroad.
- Current estimates put the number of overseas Indonesians at about 8 million people worldwide. Members of the Indonesian diaspora are lobbying for legislative amendments, including dual citizenship, parliamentary representation, property ownership rights, and constitutional recognition.
- There are plans to set up a separate governmental office for diaspora affairs. Presidential Regulation Number 76/2017 also put into law the "Diaspora Card" that will provide Indonesians abroad with special entitlements such as long-term visas and property ownership rights.
- The Indonesian government needs to take the potential of its diaspora seriously in order to capitalize on their enormous capital and skills contribution.

Harnessing the Potential of the Indonesian Diaspora

By Charlotte Setijadi¹

INTRODUCTION

According to data from the United Nations, Indonesia now has the fifteenth largest diaspora population in the world.² With various estimates placing the number of overseas Indonesians at up to 8 million people worldwide, the Indonesian diaspora has enormous economic, social, and political potentials for Indonesia that have largely remained untapped. However, in recent times, the Indonesian government has displayed greater recognition towards the contribution and specific needs of the country's diaspora.

Indeed, members of Indonesia's overseas communities have more actively organized themselves in the last few years through lobby groups such as the Indonesian Diaspora Network (IDN) spearheaded by Dr Dino Patti Djalal, former Indonesian Ambassador to the United States and Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Overseas community groups like IDN have demanded greater recognition of their national belonging from the government, regardless of whether they are still Indonesian citizens or not. As well as recognition, these expatriates are also lobbying for legislative changes that would allow them to maintain both material and emotional attachments in

¹ Charlotte Setijadi is Visiting Fellow in the Indonesia Studies Programme, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

² “International Migrant Stock 2015” <<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimatesgraphs.shtml?4g4>> (accessed 4 August 2017).

Indonesia, such as land ownership, business interests, and the ability to vote in elections.

In response, the government has promised to review the dual citizenship law, and has in the meantime proposed other diaspora-specific initiatives designed to strengthen ties between overseas Indonesians and the “homeland”. Indeed, the Indonesian government seems to have begun to realize the importance of mobilizing its overseas diaspora to advance its national interests. Here, Indonesia has much to learn from countries such as China and India that have successfully utilized their diaspora networks as economic, cultural, and political mediators in advancing their respective state agendas.

In this article, I examine recent issues and developments in Indonesian diaspora activism, including the progress of long-standing requests such as changes to the dual citizenship law. I then discuss some of the ways in which the Indonesian government may harness the potential of its diaspora in the future, especially since overseas Indonesians are now wealthier, more mobile, and better connected than ever before. I argue that the case study of the Indonesian state’s growing relationship with its diaspora can enrich our understanding of how Southeast Asian countries are cultivating better and more beneficial relationships with their diaspora communities.

OBAMA AT THE 4TH ANNUAL CONGRESS OF INDONESIA DIASPORAS

In his first visit to Asia after leaving the U.S. presidential office, former President Barack Obama was in Indonesia to open the 4th annual Congress of Indonesian Diasporas (CID4) that took place in Jakarta on 1 July 2017. Organized by IDN, the congress was attended by up to 6,000 overseas Indonesians who had come to Jakarta for the occasion. The event was also attended by a host of ministers, government officials, military officers, foreign dignitaries, and prominent political figures such as former President Megawati Soekarnoputri, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, Finance Minister Sri Mulyani, House Speaker Setya Novanto, Jakarta Governor-elect Anies Baswedan, and Police Chief General Tito Karnavian.

Local and international media attention surrounding Obama's Indonesia visit — which included a short family holiday in Bali and Yogyakarta, and a casual lunch with President Jokowi — successfully provided an enormous publicity boost for the diaspora congress. Indeed, securing Obama as a guest of honour was an impressive feat on the part of the congress organizers, especially considering the fact that the Indonesian “diaspora” is a relatively new concept in Indonesian political discourse, and there have so far only been four congresses of Indonesian diaspora.

While organized by the IDN as a private organization and with privately sourced corporate sponsors such as local media conglomerate Emtek Group and smartphone company Blackberry, this year's congress had full government support through relevant ministries such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The scale and prestige of this year's diaspora convention shows increased effort by the Indonesian government to harness the economic, social, and political potentials of the 8 million Indonesians living abroad.

THE APPEAL TO RETURN “HOME”

In his keynote speech, Obama spoke more broadly about pluralism, economic inequality, gender equality, and the global need to combat radicalism and terrorism. His message about pluralism and tolerance was popular with the local media, particularly in the wake of the recent Jakarta gubernatorial election that saw a spike in religious and ethnic tensions in the capital and roused fears that Indonesia will become an ever more conservative society in the future.³

However, in keeping with the congress' theme of “Creating Synergy to Build Our Nation,”⁴ Obama also emphasized the importance of

³ “Indonesia can inspire other Muslim countries in promoting tolerance: Obama” <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/07/01/indonesia-can-inspire-other-muslim-countries-in-promoting-tolerance-obama.html>> (accessed 18 July 2017).

⁴ The IDN Congress was held in English and not in Indonesian. Most of the publication and marketing materials associated with the conference were also printed in English. According to the organizers, this was to make the congress

maintaining one's roots, and of cultivating human capital in the nation-building process. In his speech, a nostalgic Obama spoke of fond memories of living in Indonesia for four years during his childhood when his mother Ann Dunham was married to his Indonesian stepfather Lolo Soetoro. The adoring crowd cheered each time Obama mentioned the Indonesian names of foods he claimed to miss, such as *sate* (satay) and *bakso* (meatball soup). Nevertheless, amidst the food nostalgia and humour, having Obama there as a speaker served a more symbolic example for the overseas Indonesians present at the congress: here was a widely popular former U.S. President who never forgot his Indonesian links, and who has now "returned" to Indonesia.

Indeed, throughout the congress, the notion of "returning" (*pulang*) home to Indonesia was a prominent message, not just from Obama, but also from other high-profile speakers, such as Finance Minister Sri Mulyani and Vice Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Arcandra Tahar, both of whom are "returned" overseas Indonesians. This message was perhaps made most explicitly by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, who in her opening speech, read a poem she had personally written, entitled *Anakku* (My Child). The poem tells of a mother's advice for her adult child to never lose a sense of duty (*bakti*) towards Indonesia, no matter how successful they have become or how far they have travelled.

The congress' direct appeal for Indonesians abroad to either return home or contribute to Indonesia's national development through financial or other means is in line with the message that the government has been projecting in recent times.

For instance, during his speech to a large gathering of Indonesians living in the Australian city of Sydney on 26 February 2017, President

materials more universal and easier to understand for many diaspora attendees who speak many different languages (some of whom no longer speak Indonesian well). However, the organizers' decision to use English in promotional materials can also be seen as an appeal to the cosmopolitan sensibilities of Indonesian diasporic subjects, as well as to publicly display the transnational upward mobility and social capital possessed by the diaspora, as exemplified by the use of English (along with Indonesian) within the community.

Jokowi encouraged those present to help with the development of Indonesia's material and social infrastructures. In his speech, Jokowi implores: "Those who are studying here [in Australia], return to the motherland [Indonesia] immediately [after your studies]. Those who are already working here, please open businesses in the motherland. The country needs human capital with intelligence, skills, high integrity, and high productivity, because that is how our country will be able to compete with other countries."⁵

That was not the first time that Jokowi had asked overseas Indonesians to return home. He made a similar speech during a meet-and-greet session with Indonesians living in Washington, D.C. during his U.S. visit in October 2015, then even promising that his government would look into pushing through a law that would allow for dual citizenship.⁶ On another occasion, Jokowi said that he had personally asked twenty-four Indonesian professors currently working in U.S. universities to come home and improve Indonesian universities, particularly in under-developed regions such as Papua.⁷ In the past, former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and various government ministers and ambassadors also made similar appeals, but Jokowi's government has amplified the rhetoric.⁸

⁵ "Jokowi Minta WNI di Australia Pulang Untuk Bangun Tanah Air" [Jokowi Asks Indonesian Citizens in Australia to Come Home to Help With Nation Building] <<https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3432255/jokowi-minta-wni-di-australia-pulang-untuk-bangun-tanah-air>> (accessed 19 July 2017). Translated from Indonesian by the author.

⁶ "Jokowi Janji Dorong RUU Dwikewarganegaraan" [Jokowi Promises to Push Review of Citizenship Law] <<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/10/26/15413891/Jokowi.Janji.Dorong.RUU.Dwikenegaraan>> (accessed 19 July 2017).

⁷ "Jokowi Ajak 24 Profesor Indonesia di AS Untuk Bangun Papua" [Jokowi Asks 24 Indonesian Professors in the US to Build Papua] <<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2016/08/18/14014311/jokowi.ajak.24.profesor.indonesia.di.as.untuk.bangun.papua>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

⁸ "SBY Invites Diaspora Investment" <<http://m.thejakartaglobe.com/news/sby-invites-diaspora-investment/>> (accessed 19 July 2017).

Now as Jokowi's government strives to bring more foreign investments into Indonesia, the country may need the contribution of its overseas population more than ever. The government would also like to increase the Indonesian diaspora's remittance potential. While remittances are already an important source of income for many poor rural areas, it currently only contributes 1 per cent to the country's GDP, which is small compared for instance to the Philippines where remittances make up over 10 per cent of the annual GDP.⁹ This is not to mention the diaspora's political potential, especially considering that there are currently over 2 million registered overseas Indonesian voters.

WHAT IS THE INDONESIAN DIASPORA?

In the past, the image of Indonesians living abroad was commonly associated with the many (mostly female) low-skilled domestic and migrant workers working in countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Saudi Arabia. There is, of course, a long history of Indonesians going abroad for study or high-skilled work, but these types of overseas experiences were mainly confined to the rich who could afford to seek transnational education and opportunities, or a small pool of talented young people who went abroad to pursue higher education in more developed countries, often on bonded government scholarships. Because this image of Indonesians abroad is quite marginal to Indonesian society as a whole, their existence and national contributions have been largely unknown/unacknowledged, and the public does not hear much about them apart from the occasional cases about Indonesian domestic workers (*Tenaga Kerja Indonesia* or TKI) being abused by their employers.

However, in the last few decades, Indonesia has witnessed considerable changes in terms of the demographic characteristics and socio-political outlooks of its citizens. The rise of Indonesia's affluent middle class since the 1980s means that, today, this segment of the country's population — estimated at 74 million in 2014 and expected to double to roughly

⁹ "World Bank Data on Personal Remittance" <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS>> (accessed 21 July 2017).

141 million by 2020¹⁰ — is more educated, possesses more optimistic outlooks about their economic futures, and thus has more ambitious aspirations for upward mobility. Increasing global interconnectivity also means that contemporary Indonesians are much more transnationally connected, and more and more Indonesians go abroad for study, work, marriage, and other opportunities.

Today, the top receiving countries for overseas Indonesians include Malaysia, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. More affluent Indonesians also migrate as professional or investor migrants to wealthy Western countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia.

There are various estimates on the number of Indonesian citizens, former citizens, and those of Indonesian descent living overseas. However, the first problem of identification from a statistical point of view lies in defining who should be considered members of “diaspora”, to begin with.

Traditionally, “diaspora” was used to refer more specifically to Jews who had to flee or were taken away from their homes in ancient Judea.¹¹ Because of this, the term previously implied an involuntary dispersal whereby refugees maintain emotional ties and a nostalgic longing for an eventual return to the homeland. Today however, the term diaspora is used not to only refer to Jews, but also to the overseas populations of other nations. So broad is the application of the term nowadays that sociologist Rogers Brubaker notes that diaspora now refers “to an ever-broadening set of cases: essentially to any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space.”¹²

¹⁰ “Indonesia’s Rising Middle-Class and Affluent Consumers: Asia’s Next Big Opportunity” <https://www.bcgperspectives.com/content/articles/center_consumer_customer_insight_consumer_products_indonesias_rising_middle_class_affluent_consumers/> (accessed 23 July 2016).

¹¹ M. Rozen, *Homelands and Diasporas: Greeks, Jews and Their Migrations* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008).

¹² R. Brubaker, “The ‘Diaspora’ Diaspora”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28, no. 1 (2005), p. 3.

However, while scholars like Brubaker agree that contemporary definitions and uses of the term “diaspora” have become much broader, there are still some characteristics that define the many diverse diaspora communities worldwide. For instance, William Safran famously proposed six characteristics of the modern diaspora, namely: (i) a sense of having dispersed from an original “centre” to two or more “peripheries” or foreign regions; (ii) the retention of a collective memory, vision, or myth about the original homeland; (iii) a feeling of alienation that stems from the belief that they cannot (at least fully) be accepted by their new homelands; (iv) a longing for the ancestral homeland as the “true” home; (v) a sense of commitment to maintain the safety and prosperity of the ancestral homeland; and (vi) feelings of ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity with other diaspora members who also continue to personally or vicariously relate to the homeland.¹³ Although not all of these characteristics apply to all diaspora communities or members within them, generally, diaspora subjects are understood to possess a sense of multiple simultaneous belongings to the “homeland,” the host countries, and to a globally dispersed community of fellow expatriates.

While the term “diaspora” is new in Indonesia, the concepts of sojourning and of migratory mobility are not. Different tribes (*suku*) and ethnic groups in the Indonesian archipelago have had long histories of sojourning across lands and oceans that stretch back well before the period of Dutch colonization. For instance, seafarers and explorers from the Srivijaya and Majapahit empires were recorded to have sojourned all over the Indian Ocean, mainland Southeast Asia, and even beyond. The Minangkabau people of west Sumatra place such an emphasis on the act of sojourning (*merantau*), that of leaving one’s home — either temporarily or permanently — in order to gain experience and to seek one’s fortune is considered an important rite of passage for young males. The spread of Bugis communities throughout maritime Southeast Asia is

¹³ W. Safran, “Diaspora in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return”, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83-84.

also so extensive and influential that much of the scholarly literature on the Bugis has focused on their many “diaspora” communities.¹⁴

Another conceptual complexity with the use of the term “diaspora” in the Indonesian context is that the term is traditionally used to refer to the dispersion of people from the same ethnic/ethno-linguistic group who are bound together by a sense of common ancestry, culture, and traditional homeland, as in the case of the Jewish diaspora. Indonesia, on the other hand, is a modern nation-state comprised of many ethnic and linguistic groups from different local homelands. So, the Indonesian diaspora can therefore be understood as a global community bound together not by common ancestry or ethnicity, but by a broader sense of common *national* homeland and modern nationhood. This new definition of diaspora has become more commonplace in recent times, particularly as postcolonial national identities mature and new generations of nation-state subjects migrate abroad and form diaspora communities based on their common national identity.¹⁵ For instance it is now common to refer to a Singaporean, Malaysian, or Australian diaspora.

Organizations such as the IDN have been influential in popularizing the term “Indonesian diaspora” in public discourse. According to former Indonesian Ambassador to the United States and founder of the IDN, Dr Dino Patti Djalal, the foreign term “diaspora” was chosen instead of local terms such as the Malay “*rantau*” because the term is more internationally recognized, and also because it signifies a dispersed

¹⁴ L. Andaya, “The Bugis-Makassar Diasporas”, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 68, no. 1 (1995): 119–38.

¹⁵ See, for instance, new studies of modern national diaspora communities, such as J.B. Park, *Identity, Policy, and Prosperity: Border Nationality of the Korean Diaspora and Regional Development in Northeast China* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2017). See also F. Adamson and M. Demetriou, “Remapping the Boundaries of ‘State’ and ‘National Identity’: Incorporating Diasporas into IR Theorizing”, *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 4 (2007): 489–526.

population with strong transnational connections.¹⁶ Dr Djalal added that the Indonesian diaspora includes not only those who are still Indonesian citizens, but also naturalized citizens of other countries, and the children/descendants of Indonesians who are now living abroad. Because of this very open definition, anyone with Indonesian ancestry — regardless of whether or not they have lived in Indonesia — can technically be regarded as members of the Indonesian diaspora. This very inclusive definition makes it difficult to determine how many members of the Indonesian diaspora there are, globally.

The United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) places the global number of Indonesians living abroad at 3.8 million in 2015. As seen in Figure 1, according to this organization, the number of Indonesians abroad in 2015 has increased by more than 230 per cent since 1990. UN DESA bases their calculations on data obtained from the national surveys of countries from around the world, and these surveys rely on respondents to self-identity their ethnic/national affiliations.

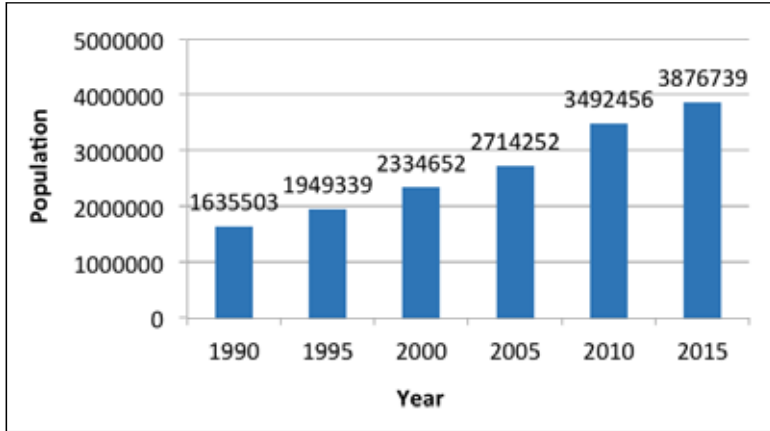
Most other estimates range from 2 to 8 million overseas Indonesians, and the large discrepancy can be attributed to differences in methodology. For instance, Dr Djalal claimed that data of registered Indonesians from 167 Indonesian consular offices around the world stand at 4.7 million in 2013.¹⁷ This estimate was later further raised to reach the 8 million figure often quoted by the IDN and Indonesian government officials.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Global Migrant Origin Database, developed by the Research Centre on Migration, Globalization and Poverty at the

¹⁶ Interview conducted in Jakarta on 4 July 2017.

¹⁷ "Diaspora Indonesia: Konektivitas Menjadi Jiwa Nasionalisme" [Indonesian Diaspora: From Connectivity to Nationalist Spirit] <<http://idn.kbrikualalumpur.org/index.php/80-template-details/general/111-idn>> (accessed 27 July 2017).

¹⁸ "Dino Patti Djalal: 8 Juta Diaspora Aset Besar Untuk RI" [Dino Patti Djalal: 8 Million Diaspora a Big Asset for the Republic of Indonesia] <<http://global.liputan6.com/read/3007853/dino-patti-djalal-8-juta-diaspora-aset-besar-untuk-ri>> (accessed 31 July 2017).

Figure 1: Indonesians living abroad, 1990–2015



Source: United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Department.

University of Sussex made a more modest estimate of just over 1.8 million overseas Indonesians in 2007.¹⁹ As Salut Muhidin and Ariane Utomo²⁰ point out, more conservative estimates of the Indonesian diaspora are mainly drawn from international migrant stock datasets that, like the UN DESA data, are mostly based on statistics of foreign-born populations obtained from national population censuses. They tend to exclude second and later generations, as well as other overseas Indonesians who were not born in Indonesia. Despite the different methodologies however, one thing common to all these datasets is that the number of Indonesians abroad is increasing every year.

¹⁹ “Global Migrant Origin Database: Indonesia” <http://www.migrationdrc.org/research/typesofmigration/global_migrant_origin_database.html> (accessed 28 July 2017).

²⁰ S. Muhidin and A. Utomo, “How many overseas Indonesians are there?”, *Discussion Paper Series*, no. 1 (Sydney: Indonesia Diaspora Network, 2013).

Indonesian diaspora communities are also extremely diverse in terms of demographic profiles. While it is true that there are now more upwardly mobile middle and upper class Indonesians living abroad who possess large financial capital, it needs to be remembered that the majority of Indonesia's overseas workforce are still migrant workers who mostly work as domestic helpers or low-skilled labourers. Estimates from the Indonesian Ministry of Manpower places the total number of Indonesian migrant workers abroad at up to 6 million worldwide.²¹ These types of workers possess limited financial and social capital,²² have restricted mobility because of their visa statuses, and in the past have been afforded very little protection from workplace abuses, either from the Indonesian government or the host countries.²³

HARNESSING THE POTENTIAL OF INDONESIANS ABROAD

Despite differences in definitions, statistical data, and demographic profiles, the millions of Indonesians abroad are a valuable asset for Indonesia's national development that have so far remained largely untapped.

²¹ "Jumlah Pekerja Asing di RI Masih Sedikit Ketimbang TKI" [Number of Foreign Expatriates in Indonesia Still Smaller than Indonesian Migrant Workers Abroad] <<http://bisnis.liputan6.com/read/2692942/jumlah-pekerja-asing-di-ri-masih-sedikit-ketimbang-tki>> (accessed 31 July 2017).

²² While migrant workers have limited social capital in their "host" countries, many come "home" with much increased social capital having accumulated relatively greater wealth and cosmopolitan prestige abroad. Returned Bugis migrants from Malaysia, for example, will reappear in their villages, and use significant accumulated funds to build new, grander, houses, and will — in the eyes of their non-migrant counterparts — have achieved a kind of cultural capital having worked overseas. Maids who return from Saudi Arabia to places like Java also return with significant cultural, religious, not to mention linguistic capital — having become fluent in Arabic and performed the haj during their stay there.

²³ See W. Palmer, *Indonesia's Overseas Labour Migration Programme, 1969–2010* (Leiden: Brill, 2016). See also M.M. Rahman and Lian K.F., "Gender and the remittance process: Indonesian domestic workers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia", *Asian Population Studies* 5, no. 2 (2009): 103–25.

Economy

Economically, Indonesia has much to gain from its diaspora. In terms of remittances alone, according to the World Bank Group's Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development Initiative, in 2015, Indonesia was the fourteenth largest recipient of migrant remittances in the world, with an estimated US\$10.5 billion sent into the country by overseas Indonesians annually.²⁴ Yet as mentioned before, this financial inflow currently only amounts to around 1 per cent of Indonesia's annual GDP, and there is much room for improvement, particularly among overseas Indonesians who are not currently remittance senders. The Indonesian government is also keen for its diaspora to play a more active role as brokers in trade dealings between Indonesia and other countries. To this end, Jokowi has been asking the Indonesian diaspora to act as economic go-betweens in trade deals between Indonesia and whatever "host" country they now live in.²⁵

Dr Djalal explains that philanthropy is another area in which the Indonesian diaspora can contribute in more concrete financial terms. The combined wealth of Indonesians abroad is currently unknown, but contributions for charitable causes such as the building of schools, hospitals, orphanages, religious facilities, and other projects in rural areas would help with the country's national development. According to Dr Djalal, Indonesian communities across the world can also utilize their personal and group networks to promote and distribute Indonesian products abroad.²⁶

Unlike other countries with large diaspora communities, Indonesia has never properly utilized its overseas community for people-to-people

²⁴ "Indonesia Ranks 14th Among Remittance Recipients: World Bank" <<http://jakartaglobe.id/economy/indonesia-ranks-14th-among-remittance-recipients-world-bank/>> (accessed 20 July 2017).

²⁵ "Jokowi Wants Indonesian Diaspora to Help with Exports" <<https://en.tempo.co/read/news/2017/07/03/056888442/Jokowi-Wants-Indonesian-Diaspora-to-Help-with-Exports>> (accessed 21 July 2017).

²⁶ Interview conducted in Jakarta on 4 July 2017.

(P2P) or business-to-business (B2B) diplomacy. Unlike China and India, there is currently no special government branch to liaise with the millions of diaspora subjects living abroad, and there are presently only two dedicated officers for diaspora matters within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Dr Djalal argues that current efforts are not nearly enough, and, particularly now that Jokowi's administration wants to promote foreign investment and tourism, the government should make a more concerted effort to unify Indonesians abroad in order to create a sense of belonging and duty to the homeland.²⁷

Even with the relatively low level of government support given now, members of the Indonesian diaspora have been actively organizing themselves and getting involved in activities that strengthen their sense of "Indonesianness". There are many Indonesian associations abroad catering to students, families, and religious communities, and there are even Indonesian language/cultural centres and schools in large population areas like Singapore and Malaysia. While some of these organizations were the initiatives of Indonesian embassies and consulates, many were started by the communities themselves and funded through community donations and membership fees.

Politics and Parliamentary Representation

Politically, the Indonesian diaspora has been quite active, particularly during presidential elections. The Indonesian Electoral Commission registered over 2 million overseas voters for the 2014 legislative and presidential elections.²⁸ While overseas voters only amount to around 1 per cent of Indonesia's over 186 million registered voters, these 2 million votes are still important, particularly in tight elections. Currently, Indonesian overseas voters are lumped together as part of the

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Jumlah Pemilih Luar Negeri Bertambah 14.000" [Number of Overseas Voters Increased by 14,000] <<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/01/13/1824358/Jumlah.Pemilih.Luar.Negeri.Bertambah.14.000>> (accessed 1 August 2017).

DKI (Jakarta Special Administrative Region) second electoral district that covers the affluent Central and South Jakarta regions.

In the 2014 legislative election, PDI-P won the most number of seats in the electoral district. In the presidential election later the same year, Jokowi and running mate Jusuf Kalla (JK) won 53.74 per cent of the votes in overseas polling booths following enthusiastic social media campaigning and record voter turnout among diaspora communities.²⁹

Interestingly, there was a clear divide among overseas Indonesians who voted for Jokowi-JK, and those who voted for Prabowo-Hatta in the 2014 presidential election. Jokowi-JK who were seen as the more secular and liberal pair won in the vast majority of overseas polls apart from those located in Islamic countries, and they especially suffered losses in places where many Indonesian students were enrolled in conservative/radical Islamic educational institutions. Prabowo-Hatta won in countries such as Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Libya, United Arab Emirates (Abu Dhabi, not Dubai where the majority of expatriates are white collar professionals), Pakistan, and Egypt.³⁰ The difference in the voting behaviour of Indonesians in these countries reflect the different demographic profiles of Indonesians abroad, and — while complexities and exceptions exist — there has been a clear tendency for more affluent middle- and upper-class voters in Western countries to vote for more secular, progressive candidates like Jokowi.

The political activism of these more progressive overseas voters has also captured the Indonesian public's attention in recent times, most noticeably during former Jakarta Governor Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama's failed second term bid earlier this year. Diaspora communities

²⁹ "Antusiasme Pemilih Luar Negeri Menambah Semangat Jokowi-JK" [The Enthusiasm of Overseas Voters Fuels Jokowi-JK's Energy] <<http://www.beritasatu.com/nasional/195121-antusiasme-pemilih-luar-negeri-menambah-semangat-jokowijk.html>> (accessed 1 August 2017).

³⁰ "Ini Hasil Rekapitulasi Pilpres di TPS Luar Negeri" [Presidential Election Result from Overseas Polling Stations] <<https://m.tempo.co/read/news/2014/07/20/269594424/ini-hasil-rekapitulasi-pilpres-di-tps-luar-negeri>> (accessed 1 August 2017).

across the world organized campaign events and social media flash-mobs to support Ahok-Djarot despite the fact that the vast majority were ineligible to vote in the Jakarta gubernatorial elections. Many of those eligible to vote in Jakarta made a point of flying home just to vote for Ahok in both rounds of the election. Indonesian communities in Australia, Europe and the United States were very active in social media campaigns and in voicing their support for Ahok, with many participating in candlelight vigils in cities across the world when he was subsequently sent to jail for blasphemy.³¹

Clearly, these more secular, liberal overseas voters are important for Jokowi's secular coalition in the lead up to the 2019 elections, particularly amidst the growing influence of hard-line Islamist factions among conservative Muslim voters.

Considering the active overseas Indonesian political scene, it should come as no surprise that one of the items that the IDN is lobbying for is for the Indonesian diaspora to have its own member of parliament (MP) representing a separate overseas electoral district in the national parliament (DPR). During a meeting with the Special Taskforce on Electoral Legislation Reform (Pansus RUU Pemilu) in June 2017, IDN members complained that they did not feel that members of parliament representing overseas voters in the DKI second electoral district have properly looked after the concerns of Indonesians abroad. They argued that issues faced by overseas voters are very different from those faced by local Jakarta voters, and — at 2 million people — the population of overseas voters is larger than some Indonesian electoral districts.

In response, Chairman of the Pansus Lukman Edy said that the government would continue to consider the request, especially as the government has agreed to fifteen extra parliamentary seats in the upcoming 2019 legislative election. However, Mr Edy said that, since the priority is for additional parliamentary seats in domestic constituencies, the more likely solution is not for overseas voters to have their own

³¹ “Indonesian Diaspora Rallies Around Jailed Jakarta Governor Ahok” <<https://asiancorrespondent.com/2017/05/indonesian-diaspora-rallies-around-jailed-jakarta-governor-ahok/#abEolxrHC32BXEiA.97>> (accessed 20 July 2017).

separate electoral district, but to have an additional MP representing the DKI second district that is more dedicated to overseas voters' issues.³² He adds that there is even the possibility that members of the Indonesian diaspora can run as MP for the DKI second district in the future.

THE DUAL CITIZENSHIP PROBLEM

Another more urgent and long-standing issue for the Indonesian diaspora is dual citizenship. Indonesia does not currently allow for dual citizenship, and one must be an Indonesian citizen in order to (among other things) vote, have businesses in the country, own property in Indonesia, and receive one's family inheritance. Because of this, many Indonesians abroad have refrained from obtaining citizenship in their countries of residence (thus limiting their rights as citizens there), and those who have become naturalized citizens of other countries harbour hopes that they could one day reapply to become Indonesian citizens as soon as the country recognizes dual citizenship. As Dr Djalal explains,

Indonesians abroad are patriotic, and most want to remain as Indonesian citizens... But at the moment the citizenship law requires them to choose [which citizenship they want], and for many this is a very emotional decision because they have [a sense of] belonging and attachments both in Indonesia and in their new countries"³³

Jokowi himself has in the past promised to fast-track the review of the dual citizenship issue, particularly for children of Indonesians with foreign spouses. At present, Law Number 12/2016 that governs citizenship allows for the children of Indonesian nationals married to foreign nationals to remain as a dual citizen until the age of 18, upon

³² "Menimbang Urgensi Pembentukan Dapil Luar Negeri" [Weighing Up the Urgency of Forming a Separate Overseas Electoral District] <<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/06/03/04350041/menimbang.urgensi.pembentukan.dapil.luar.negeri.?page=all>> (accessed 31 July 2017).

³³ Interview conducted in Jakarta on 4 July 2017.

which they have to choose whether to remain an Indonesian citizen or to relinquish that privilege. These dual-national children also need to be registered with the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the record of their former dual-national status remains throughout their lives, even if they choose Indonesian citizenship. This in turn makes them vulnerable to potential discrimination since dual citizenship is still a contentious issue in Indonesia.

A case in point was the discrimination faced by Gloria Natapradja Hamel, a then 16 year-old high school student who — after a long audition process — was selected to be one of the flag raisers for the 17 August Independence Day ceremony at the National Palace in 2016. Miss Hamel’s name was removed from the prestigious team only days before she was due to perform when it became known that she was still a dual Indonesian-France citizen, by virtue of her father being French.³⁴ Her case sparked renewed debate about dual citizenship, and Hamel was only allowed back in the flag-raising team after direct intervention from president Jokowi.

An even bigger national controversy regarding dual-citizenship involved current Vice Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources Arcandra Tahar. Before his eventual appointment as Vice Minister, Jokowi had personally appointed Dr Tahar to become Minister for Energy and Mineral Resources in the cabinet reshuffle of July 2016. Dr Tahar returned home to Indonesia to take up the post after having lived and worked in the United States as an offshore engineering specialist since the mid-1990s. However, Jokowi was forced to honourably dismiss Dr Tahar from his post as minister only a month later in August 2016 when it was discovered that he still held dual Indonesian-U.S. citizenships.³⁵ Amidst

³⁴ “Polemik Dwi Kewarganegaraan dan Janji Presiden” [The Problem of Dual Citizenship and the President’s Promise] <<https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/polemik-dwi-kewarganegaraan-dan-janji-jokowi/3555756.html>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

³⁵ “Tersandung Status Dwi Kewarganegaraan, Presiden Copot Menteri ESDM” [Tripped by Dual National Status, President Dismissed Energy Minister] <<https://www.voaindonesia.com/a/tersandung-status-dwi-kewarganegaraan-presiden-copot-menteri-esdm/3465198.html>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

controversy, Dr Tahar relinquished his U.S. citizenship and was fast-tracked to receive sole Indonesian citizenship after being briefly stateless when his Indonesian citizenship was cancelled as a consequence of his dual-nationality status, as dictated by the Citizenship Law. Jokowi was only able to install him as Vice Minister in October 2016 after he became an Indonesian citizen again.

These recent dual citizenship controversies highlight the fact that there are still many negative connotations associated with Indonesians who choose to have other nationalities. One perception is that Indonesians who become citizens of other countries are unpatriotic and disloyal. Taking a more pragmatic stance on the issue, Jokowi himself seemed annoyed at what he called “noises” (“*gaduh*”) over dual citizenship, stating that, rather than problematizing citizenship matters, Indonesia should be rewarding and encouraging its talented, high-achieving citizens so that they stay in the country and not go abroad.³⁶

However, negative perceptions of disloyalty are prevalent among senior politicians, even those from Jokowi’s own party PDI-P. For instance, speaking about the Arcandra Tahar case, PDI-P MP Effendi Simbolon said:

there is no need for us to accommodate [dual citizenship]. His [Tahar’s] oath of allegiance to the US involved him relinquishing allegiance to his country of origin, which means that he has betrayed Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. How could we then accommodate him just because he’s talented?³⁷

³⁶ “Jokowi: Kita Harusnya Hargai Orang Berprestasi, Bukan Gaduh Terus” [Jokowi: We Should Be Appreciating High Achievers, Not Be Perpetually “Noisy”] <<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2016/08/18/13292581/jokowi.kita.harusnya.hargai.orang.berprestasi.bukan.gaduh.terus>> (accessed 2 August 2017).

³⁷ “Problematika di Balik Kewarganegaraan Ganda” [The Problems of Dual Nationality] <http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/berita_indonesia/2016/08/160817_indonesia_kewarganegaraan_ganda> (accessed 2 August 2017). Quote translated from Indonesian.

There are also legal, economic, and security concerns regarding dual citizenship. For one, there are worries that people will take advantage of dual citizenship to avoid paying taxes in Indonesia. There are also concerns that foreign nationals will assume Indonesian citizenship for the sole purpose of opening businesses or buying property in Indonesia, thus driving up prices for ordinary Indonesians. From a national security perspective, there are lingering suspicions that dual nationals will act in the political interest of other countries. Indeed, this widespread belief is reflected in some of the rumours and hoax news circulated on social media which accuse Jokowi of being pro-dual citizenship because he wants to allow millions of mainland Chinese to settle in Indonesia.³⁸

To be sure, Indonesia is not alone in its suspicious attitude towards those with dual nationality. There are many countries in the world that are strictly against dual citizenship, including all Southeast Asian countries apart from the Philippines. However, controversies surrounding the dual citizenship issue reflect underlying local beliefs about national belonging, loyalty, and duty in Indonesia. As a country with a long history of deep distrust towards foreign influences, the idea of dual national allegiances still does not sit well with many Indonesians. Indeed, despite Jokowi's promises to review the Citizenship Law, the DPR is certainly not in any rush to make any changes to accommodate dual citizenship.

At a special information session on dual citizenship during the 4th IDN Congress, Golkar MP Meutya Hafid, who is also Deputy Chairperson of the House Committee on Defence, Intelligence, Foreign Affairs and Communications admitted that a revision of the Citizenship Law is not a priority for the DPR, and that, realistically, the issue is not likely to be discussed before the 2024 legislative election.³⁹ Ms Hafid said that,

³⁸ "Staf Kepresidenan Sebut 3 Isu Hoax yang Sering Menyerang Jokowi" [Presidential Staff Mentions 3 Hoax Issues Often Used to Attack Jokowi] <<https://nasional.tempo.co/read/901522/staf-kepresidenan-sebut-3-isu-hoax-yang-sering-menyenang-jokowi>> (accessed 28 October 2017).

³⁹ Recorded during information session on "Dual Citizenship", 4th IDN Congress, Jakarta, 1 July 2017.

while the issue of dual citizenship is an important one for members of the diaspora, there are many domestic and infrastructural issues that must be resolved first before the government could even begin to consider dual nationality. For instance, the government currently struggles to establish even a basic centralized national database of citizen records, let alone complicating matters with issues such as dual citizenship. Ms Hafid added that there is also currently no consensus within Jokowi's government about dual citizenship, and the DPR cannot proceed with reform discussions until the government has made up its mind about the matter.

ACCOMMODATING THE INDONESIAN DIASPORA

For the time being, the Indonesian diaspora must be content with other concessions that the government is willing to make. During the 4th IDN Congress, Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said that Indonesia must learn from countries like China and India in embracing and partnering with its diaspora.⁴⁰ Minister Marsudi admitted that the dual citizenship law will be a long deliberation process, and so in the meantime, her ministry plans to provide verified members of the diaspora with a special identification card that will give them special privileges in entering Indonesia and conducting business in the country.

Kartu Masyarakat Indonesian di Luar Negeri (Card for Overseas Indonesian Communities, popularly known as *Kartu Diaspora* or Diaspora Card) is one of these initiatives. Officially launched and made into law on 4 August 2017 under Presidential Regulation Number 76/2017 on "Facilities for Indonesian Communities Abroad", the Diaspora Card will be given out to overseas Indonesians who voluntarily register themselves with the foreign ministry either in Jakarta or through their local embassies. These cards will be made available for both Indonesians

⁴⁰ Recorded during keynote speech by Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, 4th IDN Congress, Jakarta, 1 July 2017.

who are still citizens, and those who have become naturalized citizens of other countries. Descendants of Indonesians born abroad will also be eligible.

The Diaspora Card will enable Indonesians abroad to apply for long-term, multiple-visit visas (up to five years per application), as well as fast-tracked immigration processing during entry and exit from Indonesia at airports and ports.⁴¹ Government Regulation Number 26/2016 already enables former Indonesian nationals living abroad to apply for multiple-entry five-year visas, so the Diaspora Card is meant to help ease applications for these visas. In the long run, there are plans that the Diaspora Card will function in similar fashion to India's Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) card given to members of the Indian diaspora, allowing them to apply for a multiple-entry lifetime visa into India.

Furthermore, Presidential Regulation Number 76/2017 dictates that the Diaspora Card provide diaspora members who are still Indonesian citizens with the ability to open Indonesian bank accounts, own property, and take part in business ventures.⁴² At this time, details are still unclear about what special privileges will be bestowed on diaspora members who are now citizens of foreign countries. Considering the proviso within the Presidential Regulation stating that benefits to diaspora Indonesians are to be administered by the relevant ministries and government institutions, the full implementation of the Diaspora Card may face greater bureaucratic and legislative obstacles. However, the ultimate goal is for non-citizen members of the Indonesian diaspora to one day also be able to have access to property ownership rights and ease of business, particularly in making investments in Indonesia.

From an administrative point of view, the Diaspora Card will allow the Indonesian government to keep more accurate data of its diaspora

⁴¹ At the time of writing, a special immigration-processing lane for "Diaspora" already existed at Jakarta's main Soekarno-Hatta International Airport, although the author observed that the lane was unmanned and closed.

⁴² "Peraturan Presiden Republik Indonesia Nomor 76/2017" [Presidential Regulation Number 76/2017] <<http://sipuu.setkab.go.id/PUUdoc/175291/Perpres%20Nomor%2076%20Tahun%202017.pdf>> (accessed 24 August 2017).

abroad, which would be beneficial for business and networking in the future. Minister Marsudi explained that, ultimately, the data will be used to better improve government services for the diaspora, which currently only consists of two full-time staff within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.⁴³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Expert Staff for diaspora affairs Niniek Kun Nasyatie adds that the Diaspora Card will also be a useful form of identification and marker of diplomatic protection for Indonesia's many domestic and foreign workers whose passports are often held by their foreign employers.⁴⁴

There are obvious legal hurdles to be overcome here, and considering the recent increase in nationalist rhetoric surrounding land and business ownership in Indonesia, we can expect political pushback on the idea of land/business ownership by non-citizen members of the diaspora. Historically, Indonesia as a nation has also displayed deep distrust towards foreigners and fellow citizens who are perceived to have been disloyal in pledging allegiance to other nations. The image of foreigners (even those of Indonesian ancestry) as potential spies is still prevalent. The idea of now-foreign nationals or non-resident Indonesians receiving special privileges through the Diaspora Card does not sit well with more conservative Indonesian politicians and public. Furthermore, in the eyes of Jokowi's political opponents, the Diaspora Card can be used as yet another example of the president's lax — even welcoming — attitude towards foreign interests.

The Diaspora Card has also been devised with seemingly little consultation with governments of other countries, particularly Singapore, Australia, the Netherlands and the US where many Indonesians have become citizens over the years. It is unclear how these foreign

⁴³ “Penjelasan Menlu Retno Soal Kartu Diaspora Indonesia: Untuk Pendataan” [Foreign Minister Retno's Explanation About Indonesian Diaspora Card: To Obtain Data] <<http://news.detik.com/berita/3288192/penjelasan-menlu-retno-soal-kartu-diaspora-indonesia-untuk-pendataan>> (accessed 3 August 2017).

⁴⁴ “Apakah Obama Boleh Menerima Kartu Diaspora Indonesia?” [Can Obama Receive the Indonesian Diaspora Card?] <<http://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-41016886>> (accessed 24 August 2017).

governments feel about its citizens receiving special identification cards that allow them to maintain interests and loyalties in Indonesia. To put it in a different perspective, many politicians and members of the public in Indonesia would almost certainly be outraged if countries such as China or India were to give special cards to Indonesians of Chinese or Indian descent that would allow them to maintain loyalties to their ancestral “homelands”.

More ambitiously, the IDN is currently lobbying for the term “diaspora” to be acknowledged and defined in Indonesia’s Constitution. Dr Djalal explained that such constitutional recognition is needed to lend legitimacy to the diaspora’s requests for rights.⁴⁵ At present, the Constitution defines “Indonesian citizens” as those who are either born in Indonesia or born of an Indonesian citizen parent. The IDN would like the Constitution to also acknowledge those who are “ethnically” (*etnis*) Indonesian but who are not citizens or who do not live in Indonesia. Dr Djalal argued that such recognition would create a greater sense of patriotism and belonging among Indonesians abroad.

However, such constitutional recognition would be both difficult and problematic. From a definitional point of view, “Indonesian” is not technically an ethnicity, since — like all other national identities — it was a modern national construct designed to unify the many ethnicities and local modes of belonging that have existed in the archipelago since before the country’s independence in 1945. Furthermore, since the scope of who may be regarded as a member of the Indonesian diaspora itself is currently very broad, it would be highly contentious to give constitutional recognition to those who only have very distant ties to Indonesia.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Indonesian government under President Jokowi has clearly been increasing its efforts to take advantage of the economic, political, and social potentials of the 8 million overseas Indonesians. Some initiatives

⁴⁵ Interview conducted in Jakarta on 4 July 2017.

such as the Diaspora Card have been introduced to enable greater physical, financial, and emotional connections between Indonesians abroad and Indonesia as the “homeland”. However, there are some important legislative, administrative, and jurisdiction hurdles to overcome before the full planned benefits of the Diaspora Card enjoyed, particularly for non-citizen members of the diaspora. Other items of current debates, such as changing the dual citizenship law, diaspora parliamentary representation, and constitutional recognition, are even more difficult to negotiate, and the dual citizenship issue is unlikely to be debated in parliament until after the 2024 legislative election.

There are now plans to provide better services for members of the diaspora through the establishment of a separate diaspora affairs office that would have a similar function to China’s Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China (OCAO, also known as *qiaoban*). It is not yet clear exactly what services would be provided by this new diaspora affairs office. For instance, considering that a large proportion of Indonesians abroad are domestic and migrant workers, it is not clear whether or not an office for diaspora affairs would also look after their affairs, or whether domestic and migrant workers would continue to be under the administration of the National Body for the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers (BNP2TKI).

Furthermore, a critical lens needs to be applied to whether current diaspora initiatives also benefit more vulnerable members of the diaspora such as domestic workers who are often abused by employers and systemically disadvantaged by their lack of legal and diplomatic protection. Initiatives such as the Diaspora Card designed to enable members of the diaspora to invest in Indonesia are clearly geared towards middle-upper class overseas Indonesians who can afford to consider a transnational investment portfolio. Currently, middle-upper class members also vastly dominate diaspora lobby groups such as the IDN while there seems to be very little involvement by domestic workers. Indeed, at IDN congresses, speakers from migrant worker communities are usually represented at only one or two sessions.

If Jokowi’s administration wants to harness the diaspora’s potential, then it must also demonstrate that it is willing to put in the effort to

improve consular and other services, particularly for its most vulnerable members. At the moment, the Diaspora Card is little more than a feel-good exercise designed to appease overseas Indonesians who had been lobbying for special privileges for a long time. However, for the card to be useful and meaningful, the government needs to coordinate between its various ministries and institutions in order to clarify exactly how proposed privileges for overseas Indonesians (both for those who are citizens and non-citizens) are to be implemented. Likewise, regarding the issue of dual citizenship, the government should at least draw up and communicate a realistic timeline of when and how the dual citizenship discussion is to progress. These concrete steps would demonstrate the government's seriousness in reaching out to the Indonesian diaspora.

Ultimately, debates surrounding the diaspora are related to the changing definition of who can be regarded as "Indonesian" in this age of transnational connectivity. As discussed in this article, current public discourses on national identity and belonging still largely discriminate against those perceived to have a low sense of national loyalty through having sought a better life abroad. However, trends suggest that more and more Indonesians will go abroad to study, work, and live, either temporarily or permanently. New conceptualizations of national identity need to also take into consideration Indonesians abroad, many of whom still feel a deep attachment to the country. Moreover, as national boundaries become more porous and dual nationality comes to be adopted by more and more countries around the world, the Indonesian government needs to seriously consider persistent requests for the citizenship law to be reviewed.

If the Indonesian government succeeds in maintaining a strong sense of national belonging among the country's transnationally mobile population, then Indonesians abroad would theoretically be more likely to act in the country's interest. This is true not just for Indonesia, but also for other Southeast Asian countries with increasingly large diaspora populations. Thailand, for instance, currently has around 850,000 Thais abroad (1.24 per cent of the country's population), Vietnam has 2.5 million overseas Vietnamese (2.67 per cent of the country's population), there are 1.8 million overseas Malaysians (5.7 per cent of the country's population), and overseas Singaporeans are estimated to be at

around 212,000 people (3.7 per cent of the population).⁴⁶ Most Southeast Asian countries have put mechanisms in place to encourage emotional and commercial connections between diaspora communities and their homelands, although at present, only the Philippines allows its citizens to hold dual citizenships. However, especially now that Southeast Asian governments are keen to receive more foreign investments, there needs to be a more serious drive to tap into the wealth and networking potential of Southeast Asian communities abroad.

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