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Assessing Prabowo-Gibran's Victory: An Exit-Poll Aftermath Analysis of the 2024 Presidential Election

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Indonesia's president-elect Prabowo Subianto (Left) speaks to the media with vice president-elect Gibran Rakabuming Raka (Right) as they arrive at the plenary session of the General Elections Commission (KPU) after his main rivals' challenges to his election victory were rejected at the KPU office in Jakarta, on 24 April 2024. (Photo by Yasuyoshi CHIBA/AFP).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Prabowo-Gibran's landslide victory in the 2024 presidential election can be explained by two major factors: Jokowi's high approval rating, and support from young voters (Gen Z and millennials).
- Ganjar Pranowo's failure to develop a political brand and a narrative outside the influence of Jokowi, together with his chosen strategy of attacking Jokowi, led to election defeat. This left him with little appeal outside his own PDIP base.
- In turn, Anies Baswedan's strategy of offering change appealed to anti-Jokowi voters. But given Jokowi's high approval rating, this did not boost support for him to any significant extent.
- The social assistance (Bansos) programme indirectly boosted support for Prabowo-Gibran by way of maintaining Jokowi's high approval due to the fact that the recipients of Bansos were generally spread across the camps of all the three candidates.

INTRODUCTION

After a long and widely criticized vote recapitulation process, the General Election Commission (KPU) finally announced the results of the 2024 presidential and legislative elections on March 20, 2024. Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka were declared the winner with a landslide margin of 58.6%, beating rivals Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar at 24.9% and Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD at 16.5%.¹

The KPU's final vote tally surpassed the predictions of several leading Indonesian pollsters which had estimated Prabowo-Gibran's victory in the range of 52-54%. How could someone with a track record of human rights violations, who had repeatedly lost elections, suddenly manage to defeat two strong rivals by such a large victory margin? Using exit poll data, this article investigates the factors that contributed to the overwhelming triumph of Prabowo-Gibran.

Survey trends ahead of the election had indicated a landslide victory for Prabowo.² Once Prabowo had picked Gibran as his vice-presidential candidate, his electability had continued to rise. Jokowi's high approval rating throughout the election cycle favoured the candidates who promised to continue Jokowi's programmes. Picking Gibran as running mate was a clear political cue from Prabowo to voters that he was the only candidate running in "Jokowi's lane," which he previously had had to share with Ganjar. From then on, support for Prabowo was accompanied by a sharp decline in Ganjar's poll numbers. This trend continued until election day, February 14, 2024. Ganjar voters had migrated to Prabowo.

At the same time, Anies' electability trend tended to stagnate. Even though he overtook Ganjar in mid-December 2023, Anies failed to increase support in Prabowo's traditional electoral base, except in Aceh and West Sumatra. He also failed to attract Jokowi voters in Central Java, East Java and in the non-Muslim bases.

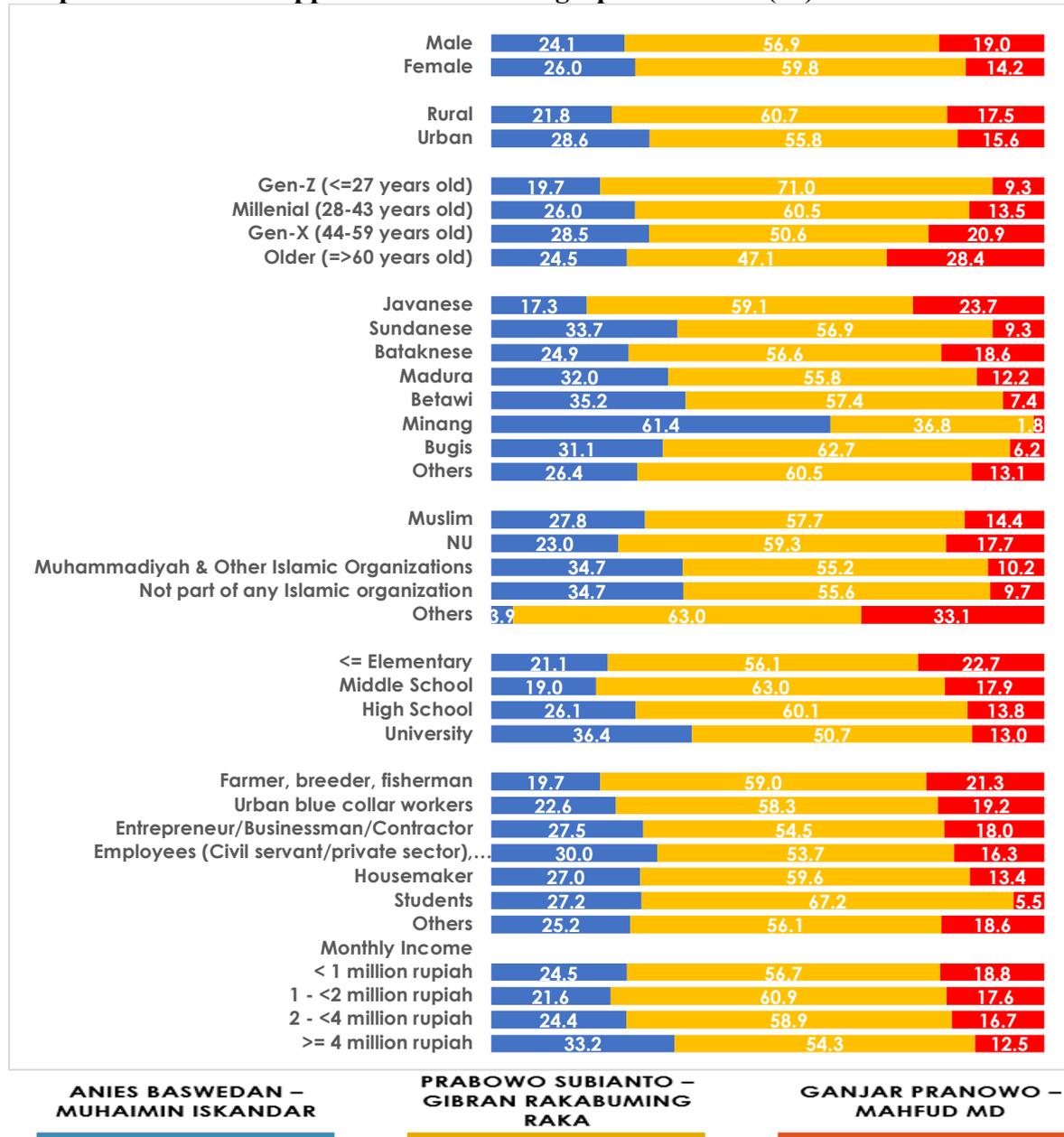
Prabowo also benefited from the presence of so-called 'shy voters'. Almost all 'shy voters' who did not reveal their choice at the time of the survey gave their votes to Prabowo. One reason could be as predicted in the spiral of silence theory,³ which asserts that when individuals notice that their opinion is shared by their like-minded community, for example, in social media like Twitter, they will in time become more confident and outward with their opinion. However, if the individual notices that his opinion is unpopular in the group, he will be more reserved (shy to reveal their opinion). People who backed Prabowo, especially middle-class people who knew Prabowo's background and who were active on social media, especially Twitter, tended to hide their preferences before the election.

EXIT POLL ANALYSIS OF THE CANDIDATES

An exit poll conducted by Indikator Politik, a leading pollster, covering 2,975 respondents after they cast their votes across the country⁴ helps us understand the demographic base of supporters of the three presidential candidates. In terms of gender, there is no significant difference between male and female voters who supported the three candidates. In terms of age, the younger voter group displayed greater support for Prabowo. On the other hand, the older voter group showed higher support for Ganjar. In contrast to previous trends where the

participation of young voters tended to be lower than the national average, the findings of the Indikator exit poll showed that Generation Z and millennial voters' participation rates were very high. This explains Prabowo's convincing majority in the 2024 presidential election. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded the proportion of Indonesian Zillennial (Gen-Z and millennial) voters at 53% whereas the exit poll recorded the turnout rate of the Zillennial voters at 58.7%.

Graph 1: Candidate support based on demographic variable (%)



In contrast to the widely held assumption that Gen Z voters tend to be progressive, recent studies show a tendency for them to be more conservative than expected in their political preference.⁵ In this regard, Indonesian young voters seem to follow the global trend.

Indonesia's young generation, raised in an environment where democratic elections and the safeguarding of civil liberties are considered 'normal', may be taking for granted their democratic rights and are exhibiting reduced sensitivity towards the potential risks associated with anti-democratic and illiberal state policies.⁶ Moreover, Prabowo's smart campaign strategy, recasting him as a cute, cuddly—*gemoy* in Indonesian—grandpa and his signature *gemoy* dance, also connected well with the young.

Based on ethnic background, support for Prabowo was dominant in almost all ethnic groups, except for Minang voters, who tended to vote for Anies. Interestingly, Prabowo received huge support from both Muslims and non-Muslims. Meanwhile, Ganjar relied too much on non-Muslim voters, and was weak among Muslim voters. In contrast, Anies depended too much on Muslim voters and was very weak among non-Muslims.

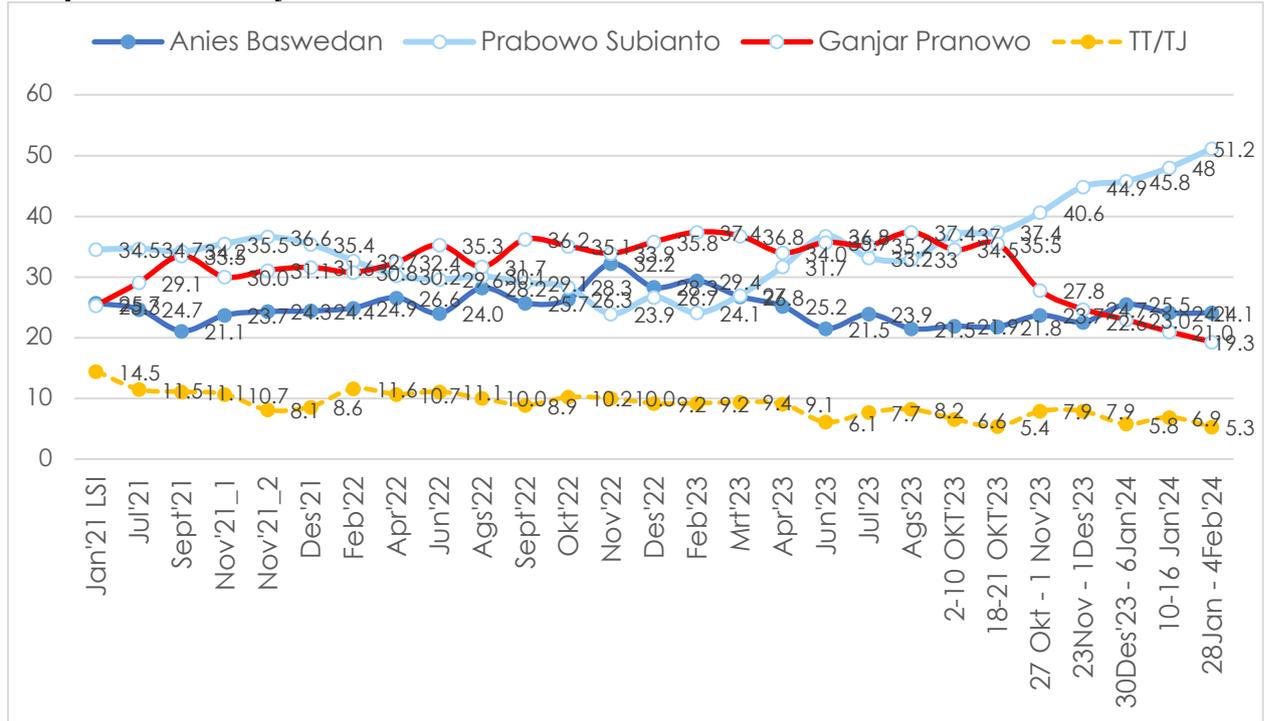
Interestingly, the magnitude of support among NU members for Prabowo was much higher than among members of Muhammadiyah or other mass organizations. Prabowo's prominence within NU circles is interesting because neither Prabowo nor Gibran has NU background. This was different from the cases of Muhaimin Iskandar and Mahfud MD who are closely associated with NU. Studies show that the mobilization of support by NU leaders, or Pengurus Besar Nadhlatul Ulama (PBNU)⁷ and popular NU-affiliated figures such as the Governor of East Java Khofifah Indar Parawansa, boosted NU support for Prabowo. Again, the Jokowi factor was at play here. Jokowi's popularity and traditional support base at NU's grassroots level and his patronage relationship with current NU Chairman, Gus Yahya, strongly influenced NU members to support Prabowo.

Regarding social class categories, Prabowo dominated all lower-, middle-, or upper-class segments based on education level or monthly income level. The assumption that Prabowo was only supported by lower educated groups, while Anies was supported by educated circles, proved to be incorrect. Overall, Prabowo supporters from educated circles were much more than those favouring Anies. This finding confirms that many from the educated middle class were not worried about Prabowo's human rights record or the ethical controversies surrounding Gibran's nomination process in the Constitutional Court. They were not especially concerned about dynastic politics either. The issue of political dynasty and democratic regression were voiced by intellectuals and civil society activists. Yet, these only resonated in a limited circle, even among the educated.

THE JOKOWI EFFECT AND THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The 2024 Presidential campaign narrative was overshadowed by the electoral referendum on Jokowi's approval rating. The dominant campaign theme revolved around two messages, namely, continuity of and change in Jokowi's programmes. In mid-2022, almost two years before election day, Ganjar was the frontrunner in the presidential race, ahead of Prabowo and Anies. He was widely seen as Jokowi's natural successor, given the President's endorsement in public at the time. Along the way, voters eventually split between those satisfied with Jokowi's rule and wanted continuity of his programmes, represented by Ganjar and Prabowo, and those dissatisfied with Jokowi's rule, who gravitated toward a new oppositional camp symbolized by Anies. The opposition camp always faced a daunting challenge in enlarging

Graph 3: Three-way Candidate Poll Trend



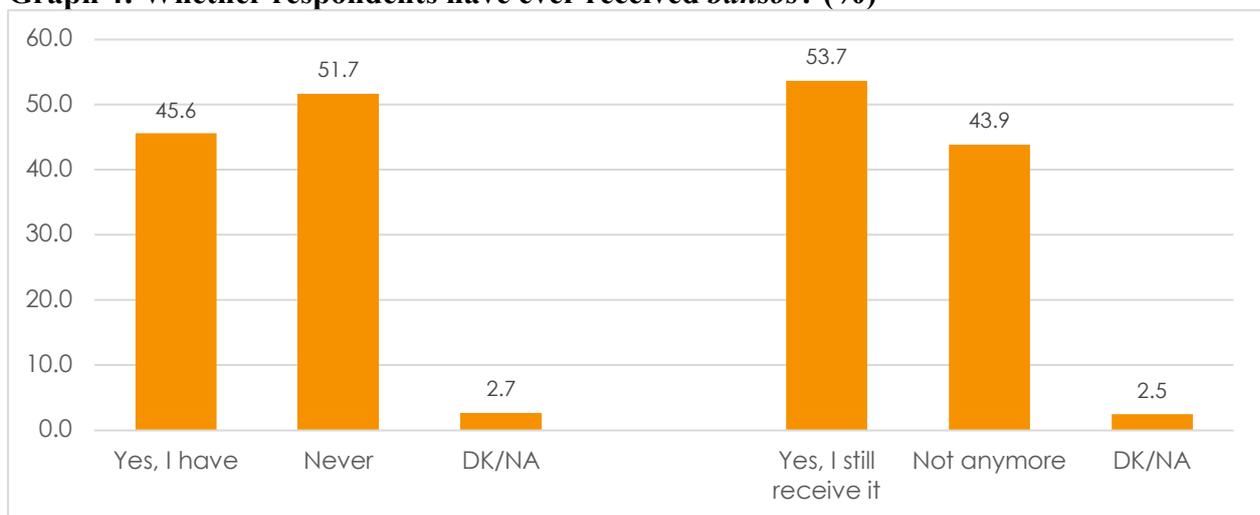
The strong reaction from Ganjar and PDIP against Jokowi also highlighted their failure to develop a political persona and narrative unique and apart from Jokowi. Without Jokowi’s brand, Ganjar’s poll number crumbled as he was left without a clear campaign message or identity. In contrast, Jokowi and Prabowo had their own political identity and electoral support base. The latter had developed over the past two elections to transcend each their own political party, PDIP and Gerindra respectively. Ganjar failed to develop an independent political persona which could appeal to voters outside his own party base. Even Anies had managed to develop a clear political persona as a smart and religious figure, not to mention his reputation as the icon of opposition to Jokowi’s regime.

With more than 200 million voters spread across the archipelago, reaching those voters directly presented a daunting challenge for any candidate in any election. Each presidential candidate therefore had to have a public identity that stood out without the need for him to visit all constituencies physically. Prabowo positioned himself as Jokowi’s successor at a time when eight out of ten voters approved of Jokowi. Prabowo and Gibran were less active compared to Anies and Ganjar when campaigning. Instead, they spent more time as Minister of Defense and Mayor of Solo than campaign. This lack of footwork was more than compensated for by a solid coalition strategy and an effective social media campaign. Using TikTok, Prabowo’s campaign team managed to reach and win over many young voters. One of the turning points in Prabowo’s social media campaign came after one of the presidential debates, which showed Anies and Ganjar jointly attacking Prabowo’s track record. Prabowo’s poor performance during the debate was then effectively reframed by his social media campaign team to create a perception of nasty bullying by his opponents. This then garnered widespread sympathy among voters who watched the debate clip on social media.⁸ An outpouring of support could be seen in the millions of new followers which Prabowo gained on his personal social media accounts,

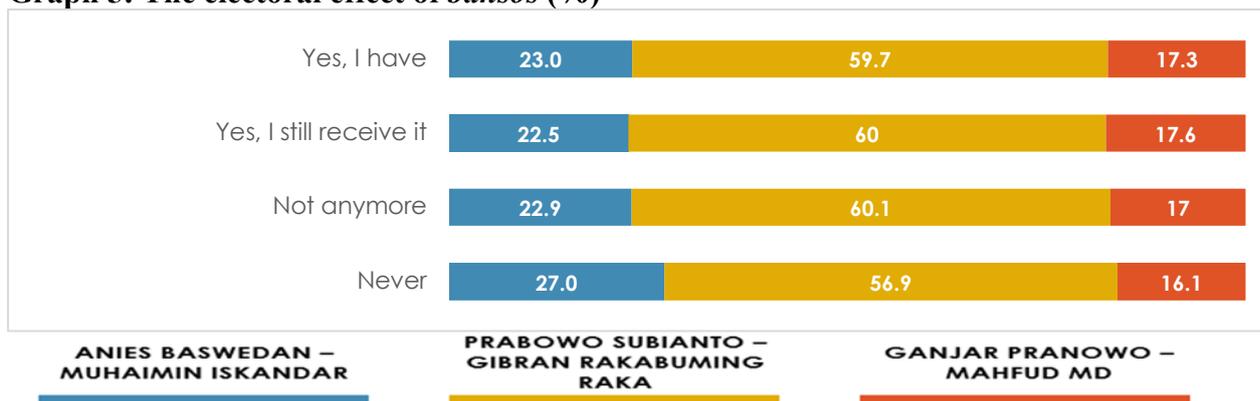
such as Instagram and TikTok. This shows that political campaign are not always about appealing to rational voters; affective means are often very effective.

During the campaign period, Anies’ and Ganjar’s camps criticized Jokowi for initiating massive government social assistance or *bansos* programmes such as direct cash assistance (BLT) to influence the electorates.⁹ To verify this, we asked respondents and their families if they had ever received government assistance (basic food assistance, cash social assistance (BST), direct business assistance (BLU), family hope programmes (PKH), and so on). Graph 3 shows that 45.6% of respondents reported that they had received social assistance, while 51.7% said ‘no’. For those who said ‘yes’, we asked if they continued getting help on a regular basis. On this question, 53.7% said ‘yes’, while 43.9% said ‘no’. Nonetheless, the exit poll results showed that the effect of social assistance was not directly visible since the recipients were spread quite evenly among the three candidate’s supporters (Graph 4).

Graph 4: Whether respondents have ever received *bansos*? (%)



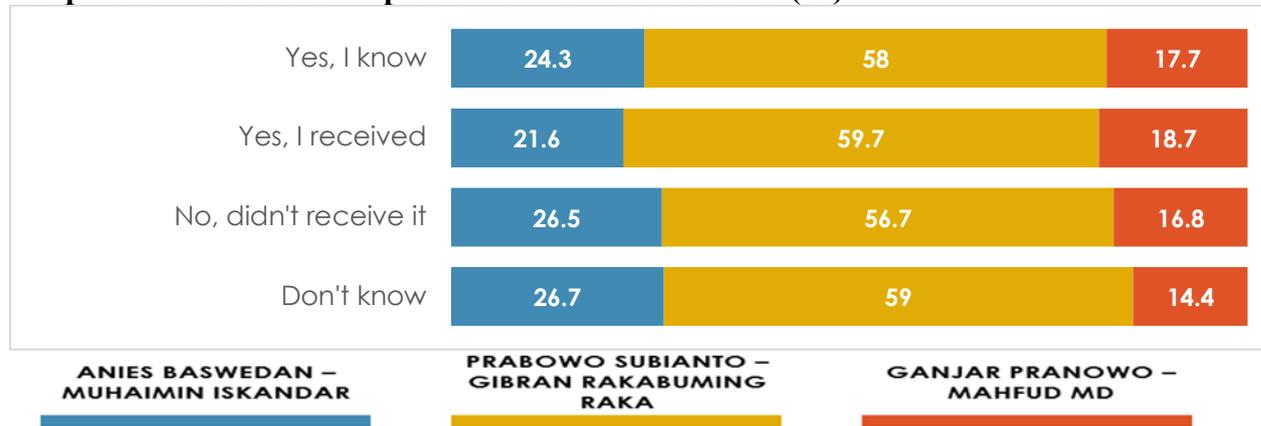
Graph 5: The electoral effect of *bansos* (%)



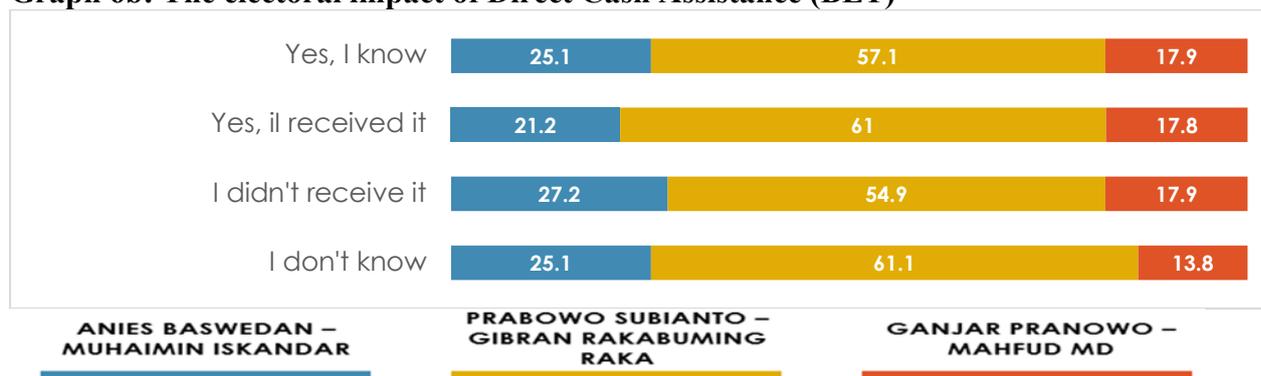
This was also true for the ten kilogrammes of rice assistance programme.¹⁰ 66% of respondents said that they were aware of the programme. Of those who knew, 45% admitted to receiving it. However, there was no significant difference between those who received and those who did not receive the assistance in terms of their choice of candidate (Graph 5). Kompas exit poll

results also revealed similar findings, in which social assistance programmes did not significantly increase Prabowo’s electability.¹¹ Meanwhile, Prabowo’s electability was higher among those who did receive direct cash assistance (BLT)¹² compared to those who did not receive it (Graphs 6a and 6b). Overall, the majority of voters who did not receive BLT assistance still voted for Prabowo.

Graph 6a: The electoral impact of 10-KG rice assistance (%)

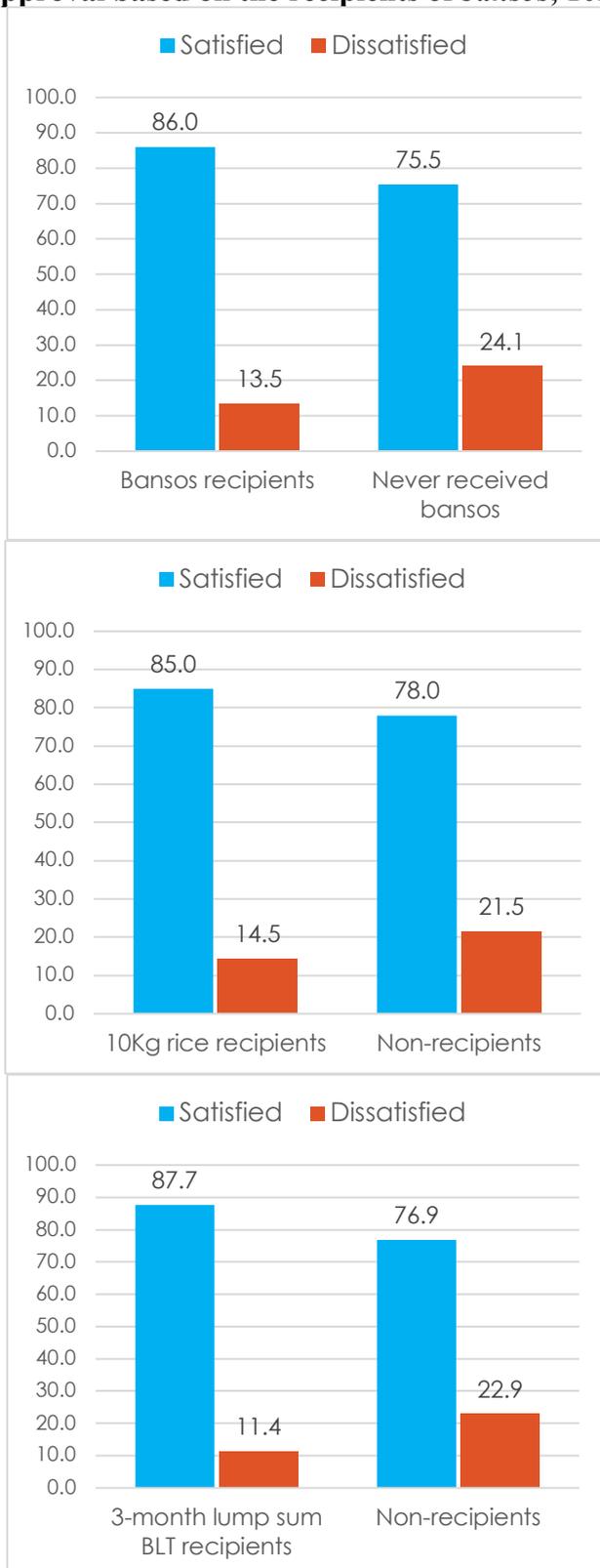


Graph 6b: The electoral impact of Direct Cash Assistance (BLT)



This does not mean that social assistance had no electoral impact at all. Graph 7 shows that the social assistance programs had direct effect in maintaining and even increasing Jokowi’s popularity as well as his approval rating. We found a significant positive correlation between *bansos*, 10Kg rice assistance and 3-month lump sum cash transfer (or BLT) and Jokowi’s approval rating. Similar significant positive correlations were also found between Jokowi’s approval rating and people’s support for Prabowo. Apparently, the effect of *bansos* for Prabowo’s electability poll happened indirectly, by way of Jokowi’s high approval rating. But it did happen.

Graph 7: President approval based on the recipients of *bansos*, 10KG rice, and BLT



CONCLUSION

From the beginning of the election cycle, the 2024 presidential election zeitgeist and narrative were set by Jokowi, who was seen as the most influential political actor on the Indonesian electoral scene. His constantly high approval rating, above 75%, throughout the election cycle benefited Prabowo-Gibran as the candidate-pair who claimed a continuity of Jokowi's programmes and legacy. Another major factor contributing to Prabowo's landslide victory over his two opponents also rested on his own effective electoral strategy in recasting his old strongman image in the last two elections into a more friendly image of a "cuddly grandpa"; this attracted many Gen-Z and millennial voters through social media platforms like TikTok. The exit-poll analysis clearly shows an overwhelming support from young voters, which made up more than half the electorate, towards Prabowo-Gibran. The 2024 election also saw a high young voters turnout, unlike in previous elections. This young voters turnout and their support for Prabowo-Gibran was evident in the exit-poll.

Despite some incidents of electoral irregularities, various exit-poll analyses show that Prabowo's commanding lead and one-round victory were simply too convincing for any electoral fraud allegation. Controversies surrounding the mobilization of the state apparatus and the utilization of *bansos* to overturn the landslide election result are difficult to prove due to weak evidence. The most dominant factor in explaining Prabowo's victory lies in Jokowi's high approval rating. In this sense, we could argue that the 2024 presidential election was a "referendum" on whether Jokowi's legacy should be continued or not.

ENDNOTES

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⁵ Armin Schäfer, "Cultural Backlash? How (Not) to Explain the Rise of Authoritarian Populism," *British Journal of Political Science*, Volume 52, Issue 4, October 2022, pp. 1977 – 1993.

⁶ Burhanuddin Muhtadi, Eve Warburton and Liam Gammon, "The Reformasi generation: examining age cohort effects on support for democracy in Indonesia," unpublished paper.

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⁸ FTNews, "Praktisi Komunikasi Politik Mengupas Besarnya Dukungan ke Prabowo Gibran," 19 January 2024, at <https://ftnews.co.id/mediapemilu2024/praktisi-komunikasi-politik-mengupas-besarnya-dukungan-ke-prabowo-gibran/>

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¹⁰ Each recipient of Cash Social Assistance or BST, as well as the Family Hope Program (PKH), receives an additional 10 kilograms of rice, see <https://indonesiabaik.id/videografis/penerima-bansos-dapat-ekstra-beras-10-kg>

¹¹ Litbang Kompas, “Bansos, Pendongkrak Suara Prabowo-Gibran?” 25 February 2024, at <https://www.kompas.id/baca/riset/2024/02/24/bansos-pendongkrak-suara-prabowo-gibran>

¹² This is additional social assistance in the form of cash to mitigate risks caused by El Nino and to strengthen people's purchasing power, see <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20240202102206-4-511093/jokowi-blak-blakan-alasan-rapel-blt-pangan-rp600-ribu-di-februari-2024>

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