

PERSPECTIVE

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Golkar's Leadership and the Indonesian President

*Leo Suryadinata**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Golkar's (Party of Functional Groups) leadership is in crisis after its general chairman, Setya Novanto, was involved in a major corruption scandal. In December 2017, an extraordinary national congress was held, and a new leader, Airlangga Hartarto, Industry Minister in the Jokowi Cabinet, emerged.
- The leadership crisis started in 2014 when former Golkar chairman Aburizal Bakrie, deviating from the Golkar "tradition" in the past of always being part of the government, allied with Prabowo Subianto to oppose the Jokowi government.
- Golkar rejoined the government coalition after Setya Novanto replaced Aburizal as Golkar chairman in May 2016.
- The Jokowi government has significant influence over Golkar's leadership. Jokowi was invited to address the party's extraordinary national congress (ENC) twice. In both ENCs his preferred candidates were elected.
- The support of Golkar is needed for Jokowi to pass bills and vital to his chances in the 2019 Presidential Election.

* *Leo Suryadinata is Visiting Senior Fellow at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.*

INTRODUCTION

Golkar's leadership is in crisis again. Its general chairman, Setya Novanto (May 2016-December 2017), was implicated in a corruption case, accused of receiving kickbacks of at least US\$7.3 million (Rp 99 billion) involving a 2009-2013 government project of biometric identity cards (e-KTP).¹ On 17 July 2017 the Indonesian anti-Corruption Commission (KPK) named Setya as a suspect but after the pre-trial hearing on 29 September, he was released. On 15 November, KPK reissued a warrant to detain him again, but he disappeared. The following day, Setya was involved in a car accident. He was sent to a private hospital where his spokesman argued that he should not be detained due to his injuries. However, on 18 November he was transferred to the Government Hospital and was declared to be healthy enough to be remanded and stand trial.²

The high profile e-KTP case, which involved millions of dollars, affected Golkar's reputation. A survey showed that Golkar's electability was as low as 7.1%,³ and there was a danger of Golkar being relegated to being the third biggest political party in parliament. Many factions within Golkar were eager to replace Setya. The first to raise his voice on the matter in the press was Akbar Tanjung, former general chairman of the party, who stated that Golkar was a doomed party and a new general chairman was needed to save it.⁴ This view was subsequently expressed by Jusuf Kalla, also its ex-general chairman, and by many other influential Golkar figures.⁵

At this juncture, there are at least five factions within Golkar, led by prominent leaders such as Jusuf Kalla, Aburizal Bakrie, Luhut Pandjaitan, Akbar Tanjung and Agung Laksono.⁶ In addition to these five camps, the former wife of Prabowo, Titiek Soeharto, was also interested in the position.⁷ Setya Novanto who was in detention suggested that Aziz Syamsuddin replace him both as the Speaker of the House and as the general chairman of Golkar. His suggestion was rejected.

¹ For a detailed report on the Setya Novanto case, see "Enough Fainting Already...", *Tempo*, 24 December 2017, pp. 15-23.

² For the sequence of events which led to the trial, see <http://firsttime.today/berita-tentang/Jalan-Panjang-KPK-Membawa-Setya-Novanto-ke-Kursi-Pesakitan/> (Accessed 2 January 2018).

³ See Yorreys Raweyai, s speech on Partai Golkar at ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute on 7 December 2017; also

<https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20171120063151-32-256746/setya-novanto-ditahan-kpk-beban-kini-bertumpu-di-golkar> (Accessed 6 January 2018)

⁴ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1033765/cemas-golkar-kiamat-akbar-tanjung-desak-setya-novanto-diganti> (Accessed 6 January 2018).

⁵ <http://korantransparansi.com/politik/item/5782-setelah-wapres-jk-kini-giliran-golkar-di-diy-minta-setya-novanto-mundur> (Accessed 6 January 2018).

⁶ Jokowi also revealed the existence of various groups in Golkar in his speech delivered at the opening address of Munaslub Golkar on 18 December 2017. These groups have financial resources to influence the election process in the Golkar party.

⁷ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1041763/kata-jk-sulit-bagi-titiek-soeharto-kalahkan-airlangga-di-golkar> (Accessed 16/12/2017).

The secretary-general of Golkar, Idrus Marham, also expressed his intention to contest for the general chairmanship and claimed that he was supported by Jokowi.⁸ Airlangga Hartarto, Minister of Industry in the Jokowi cabinet, was also interested in the position; he had been able to gain support from the 31 local Golkar Councils. In addition, he was also supported by Jusuf Kalla.⁹ Interestingly, around the same time it was reported that Jokowi was also behind Airlangga.¹⁰ This is the first time that both Jokowi and Kalla agreed on the same candidate for the general chairman of Golkar.

GOLKAR'S EXTRAORDINARY NATIONAL CONGRESSES IN 2016 AND 2017

Before dealing with the 2016 Extraordinary National Congress (ENC, also known as Munaslub), let us examine the origins of the current Golkar crisis. The serious conflict within Golkar started when Aburizal Bakrie gave support to Prabowo Subianto as presidential candidate in 2014. Aburizal stayed with the Prabowo camp even after Jokowi became president. Being in opposition was something new for Golkar, and its leaders did not now enjoy any benefits from the government. This resulted in the split within the party. The Aburizal group held a national congress in Bali between 30 November and 4 December 2014 and Aburizal succeeded in remaining general chairman. To achieve this, Aburizal had prohibited his opponents, including the Agung Laksono faction, from attending the Bali National Congress. On 6-8 December 2014 the Agung Laksono faction held its own national congress at Ancol, Jakarta, during which Agung was elected the general chairman.¹¹ Both sides claimed legitimacy, and this diarchy lasted for more than a year. The pro-government faction in Golkar was growing, however, and by February 2016 Aburizal was forced to declare that Golkar would “support the government”.¹² In April 2016 the Law and Human Rights Minister issued a Decision Letter declaring a new composition of the Golkar Central Board for 2014-2019. This combined board members derived from both the Bali congress and the Jakarta congress; and Aburizal was stayed as general chairman, with Agung as his deputy.¹³

This was not an ideal solution. Agung then proposed to hold an ENC in Bali and Aburizal did not object. Both Aburizal and Agung Laksono agreed not to contest for the top leadership, paving the way for new faces. Eight persons, many deputy chairmen from the Aburizal faction, were declared as candidates. Aburizal supported Aziz Syamsuddin, Jusuf

⁸ <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/sudah-minta-restu-jokowi-idrus-marham-siap-jadi-calon-ketum-golkar.html> (Accessed 6 January 2018).

⁹ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3591730/jokowi-disebut-sreg-dengan-airlangga-hartarto-untuk-pimpin-golkar> (Accessed 16/12/2017).

¹⁰ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-3591730/jokowi-disebut-sreg-dengan-airlangga-hartarto-untuk-pimpin-golkar> (Accessed 16/12/2017). It was reported that Jokowi feels that among Golkar leaders, Hartarto was most neutral and Hartarto also served in his cabinet.

¹¹ For a discussion on this period, see Leo Suryadinata, “Golkar Splits: But wo will emerge the Winner?”, ISEAS Perspective, #34 (3 July 2015).

¹² Detik News on Golkar dukung Pemerintah (Accessed 11/2/2016).

¹³ <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/menkum-ham-keluarkan-sk-kepengurusan-golkar-aburizal-ketua-umum.html> (Accessed 7 January 2018); <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20160426214744-32-126754/agung-laksono-minta-munaslub-golkar-segera-digelar> (Accessed 7 January 2018).

Kalla supported Ade Komaruddin, but Luhut was reportedly supported Setya Novanto, a businessman turned politician.¹⁴

The first round of the elections had Setya Novanto obtaining the most votes (277), followed by Ade Komaruddin (173) and Aziz Syamsuddin (48). No second round of voting was required after Ade Komaruddin decided to discontinue, saying that he was younger than Setya and could wait his time.¹⁵ Setya was therefore officially elected as the new boss of Golkar.

Airlangga Hartarto obtained only 14 votes. The apparent weak support he had changed during the 2017 Golkar ENC. This was perhaps due to the position of Hartarto in the government and also his relationship with both Jusuf Kalla and Jokowi.

Golkar held the ENC in Jakarta on 19 December 2017. Hartarto received support from 31 local councils and was the only candidate for the highest position in the party. He was officially elected as general chairman for 2017-2019, with the Rapimnas (national leadership council) having the right to extend his position to 2022 without having to hold another national congress. He is also given the power to reorganize the Golkar central board.¹⁶

Before and after the election, Hartarto announced that Golkar would continue to support Jokowi in the 2019 presidential election.

GOLKAR'S LEADERSHIP AND THE GOVERNMENT

Golkar was established by generals during the Suharto era. It was developed into an electoral machine by the Suharto government and started the “tradition” of being the government party. Even after the fall of Suharto, although Golkar was being “transformed” into a businessmen-controlled party,¹⁷ its relationship with the government continued to be cordial, or at least it did not oppose the government of the day. Moreover, it was now no longer an ethnic Javanese-controlled party, its top leadership having been taken over by non-Javanese.

However, the situation changed under the Aburizal Bakrie (2009-2014) chairmanship.

¹⁴ A Golkar leader at a closed-door discussion (7 December 2017) confirmed this situation. See also : <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/770952/dua-poros-di-munaslub-golkar-jk-sebut> (Accessed 7 January 2018). As Luhut is close to Jokowi, many argued that Jokowi also accepted Luhut's “candidate” Setya.

¹⁵ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/771535/akom-mundur-setya-novanto-terpilih-jadi-ketua-umum-golkar> (Accessed 27 December 2017).

¹⁶ <http://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2017/12/20/airlangga-hartarto-diputuskan-menjabat-hanya-sampai-tahun-2019> (Accessed 27/12/2017)

¹⁷ General chairmen of Golkar since Akbar were all big businessmen: Jusuf Kalla (Forbes Indonesia 2017, no.30), Aburizal Bakrie (Forbes Indonesia 2008, no.1); Setya Novanto (businessman, but he did not enter the Forbes Indonesian list); and Airlangga Hartarto (Forbes Indonesia 2017, no.100).

But before proceeding further, let us look briefly at the development of Golkar and its relationship with the government since the Reformasi began in 1998. Akbar Tanjung, a former Muslim student activist and a bureaucrat became the first Golkar general chairman who was not from the Suharto group and who did not have a military background. Akbar, a Batak, was able to exercise considerable power but appeared to be a transitional figure. He failed to compete with another Muslim businessman, the Buginese Jusuf Kalla. Apparently, Jusuf Kalla, then the Vice-President of Indonesia, enjoyed the full support of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). Golkar saw the advantages in having a Vice-President as its general chairman. Nevertheless, when SBY sought a second presidential term, he did not select Jusuf Kalla as his partner. Jusuf Kalla thus decided to contest the presidential election in 2009 against SBY but was defeated.

Not only did Jusuf Kalla lose the presidential election to SBY, he also lost the general chairmanship of Golkar to the wealthy Sumatran businessman Aburizal Bakrie. Aburizal had remained an SBY supported and when the latter was re-elected as president, Aburizal was also rewarded with the position of Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs.

During the 2014 general election, Aburizal sought to become president, but was forced to withdraw due to poor support; he then supported Prabowo who promised him a high position if he was elected.¹⁸ After Jokowi won the presidency, Aburizal remained with the Prabowo camp which resulted in growing challenges to his leadership within the party.

GOLKAR AND JOKOWI

Jokowi stayed friendly to Golkar for a number of reasons. He was nominated by the PDI-P for the Presidential Election of 2014, but was not considered as a PDI-P cadre. Many PDI-P leaders were not happy with him but as he had high electability, Megawati, the party chairperson, had no choice but to pick him. The strategy proved effective and Jokowi was elected president. Although Jokowi was now president, Megawati considered him a party functionary (*petugas partai*) who should therefore submit to party rule. In the beginning of the Jokowi presidency, therefore, many observers saw Jokowi as a Megawati puppet. His weak position in the party and since he was heading only a minority coalition in parliament, many political observers and opposition party leaders thought that he would not be able to survive for long.

Jokowi played the game astutely, however. On the one hand he paid his respects to Megawati by not openly challenging her and by offering the position of coordinating minister for welfare affairs to Puan, Megawati's daughter. Even when Jokowi reshuffled his cabinet, Puan retained that position despite her young age and lack of experience. Jokowi was also able to align with Ahok, his deputy as governor of Jakarta. Ahok was able to manage Jakarta well and received tremendous support from Jakarta residents and beyond, until he got into trouble when contesting for the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election.

¹⁸ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/578862/aburizal-terima-tawaran-menteri-utama-dari-prabowo> (Accessed 6 January 2018) Aburizal was promised the so-called Menteri Utama (Chief Minister) position, which had never existed before.

For Jokowi, to rely on the PDI-P support alone was not enough. Golkar was now willing to support him, and had expressed publicly that it would like Jokowi to be the president for the second term, while the PDI-P had not said anything about its 2019 presidential candidate. It is therefore not surprising that Jokowi not only attended the Golkar ENC in May 2016 in Bali but also the ENC in December 2017 in Jakarta.

During the 2017 ENC, Jokowi stated in his opening speech that there were at least five big groups within Golkar, but he wished for the party to stay united. He noted that Golkar was a large party that had supported his government in defending Pancasila and developing the country.¹⁹

To be endorsed by more parties, especially a large party like Golkar, is crucial to Jokowi's re-election next year. Support from the PDI-P has been weak, while at the same time, Golkar is without strong and charismatic leaders and is in need of government support.

CONCLUSION

Golkar, the governing party during the Suharto period, has been greatly reduced since 1999 and is now only the second largest party. Continuous internal conflicts have also weakened it.

It is now controlled by businessmen instead of military /bureaucrats, and gains advantages for itself through being a pro-government party. Aburizal brought the party over to the opposition, however, when he realized that he would not gain benefits from Jokowi. He was eventually replaced as general chairman by Setya Novanto. Setya served for about 19 months and was removed after being involved in a major corruption scandal. Airlangga Hartarto, a candidate who was acceptable to the government, became the new general chairman. Under Hartarto, it is possible that Golkar can stay united at least until the 2019 general and presidential elections. With Hartarto at the helm, Golkar as a Pancasila party is likely to strengthen Indonesia's non-Islamist forces.

Airlangga is the first ethnic Javanese elected as the general chairman of Golkar after Reformasi. However, this does not mean that Golkar has become an ethnic Javanese party again as the leadership has become ethnically very mixed and the Javanese need non-Javanese support to get elected. The level of support for Golkar in non-Javanese areas, especially the outer islands, in the 2019 election will reveal if Golkar remains a non-Javanese party.

¹⁹ "Presiden Jokowi Buka "Rahasia Besar" Partai Golkar –Munaslub Partai Golkar 2017", see <https://www.google.com.sg/search?ei=8b5UWragNcvGvgTh1pHICw&q=Jokowi+berpidato+di+munaslub+Golkar+2017+&oq> (Accessed 8 January 2018)

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