

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

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## Political Parties' Manoeuvring after the Jokowi-Prabowo Rapprochement

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In this picture, Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) (R) shakes hands with Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto (L) during the inauguration ceremony at the State palace in Jakarta on October 23, 2019. The rapprochement of Jokowi and Prabowo has resulted in the unusual absence of a polarising rivalry among the main political parties. Photo: Adek Berry, AFP.

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- The rapprochement of Jokowi and Prabowo has resulted in the unusual absence of a polarising rivalry among the main political parties. There are also no fundamental differences among parties over major policy questions.
- The fractured nature of the Indonesian socio-political elite is instead reflected in the proliferation of small parties. This results in the necessity of multi-party coalitions, thus giving Indonesia's largest party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), a tactical advantage.
- The PDIP has floated the possibility of changing the laws to allow President Joko Widodo to stand again in 2024. Perhaps to sustain its leverage in a post-Widodo government, the PDIP is also advocating the revival of the formal Broad Outlines of State Strategy, which featured during the Soeharto era as overarching policy guidelines for each term of government.
- The manoeuvres of most political parties have been concerned with positioning themselves in relation to the choice of presidential candidates in 2024, including the profiling of potential candidates from within or outside the political parties.
- There are ongoing initiatives to establish parties connected to civil society activism, but these are largely tentative, with considerable uncertainty about their viability.

**INTRODUCTION**

Indonesia's political system is a hybrid presidential-parliamentary system, but where the greatest initiative lies with the president as head of government. On the one hand, nobody can stand as a presidential candidate without at least a quarter of the parliament supporting his nomination; without serious party support, contenders are left high and dry. On the other hand, it is the government, headed by the president, which has the resources to bring legislation easily to the parliament. As a figure wielding executive power, and with a cabinet of his own appointees, the president dominates, despite the accountability to parliament.

Political parties are therefore formed as or crafted into vehicles for personalities with presidential ambitions.<sup>1</sup> The PDIP was initially a vehicle for Megawati Sukarnoputri and then later the host for Joko Widodo. The Democrat Party (PD) was formed specifically to be a vehicle for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's campaign for the presidency, and is now clearly a vehicle for his son, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. Even a recent splinter from the Democrat is being projected as a vehicle for another ambitious political figure, ex-General Moeldoko, currently Presidential Chief of Staff—for the moment.<sup>2</sup> The Gerindra Party was formed as the vehicle for the presidential ambitions of Prabowo Subianto.

Mainstream politics after 1998 were first contoured around the rivalry between Megawati and Yudhoyono as well as Megawati and Prabowo versus Yudhoyono. Later, the contours changed to a rivalry between Joko Widodo, backed by Megawati, and her former ally, Prabowo Subianto. This later rivalry became complicated when Prabowo flirted with ultra-conservative Islamic political groups, giving rise to the illusion that mainstream politics was polarising along religious lines. This illusion was dispelled when Prabowo joined the Widodo government as Minister of Defense.

Throughout the last 20 years, tensions in Indonesian politics have not been generated by disagreement over basic policy or strategic directions, but result instead from rivalries between figures, and from the tactics they have pursued. The nine political parties presently represented in parliament share a similar outlook on basic political, economic and social strategies. The one partial exception to this is the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) that stands for a more Islamic colouring of current strategies.

During campaigns for the presidency, all the parties divide into two camps as they assess the "elektabilitas"<sup>3</sup> of the rival candidates. In 2020, with Widodo's *elektabilitas* for his second term being very high, all but three parties gravitated, either fully or partially, to him.<sup>4</sup> Once he was elected, this support was supplemented by Gerindra, also joining the government.

What happens then when the rivalry disappears? What we do see now is a softly shifting pattern of early manoeuvres by several of the parties. Except for certain parties that operate only in the Special Autonomous Province of Aceh, all Indonesian parties are represented in the political life of most provinces. However, dating back as far as the 1950s, the support bases of each party are normally concentrated in separate regions. This reflects the character of the Indonesian capitalist class, made up as it is of a big numerical majority of locally-based business and bureaucratic elites, with only a few big capitalists operating nationally. Historically too, of course, Indonesia is the coming together of different regions based on different ethnic and language groups, each with different cultural and religious histories. In

this sense, the parties represent different regional-cultural factions of the one national elite. The largest party, the PDIP, scored 19% of the vote in the 2019 elections. The next two largest parties – Gerindra and Golkar – scored 12% each. All the other 13 parties scored less than 10%, with seven scoring under the threshold of 5%.

These factions position themselves for maximum benefit within the system of representation in which they operate. During periods of rivalry between high *elektabilitas* figures, this positioning is vis-à-vis these figures. With Joko Widodo formally unable to stand again for the presidency (at least under current laws) and with Prabowo unable to engage in open political campaigning while he is an important part of the Widodo government, that rivalry is no longer a determining factor. In this context, parties are manoeuvring to test out whether they can elevate a figure as a feasible presidential candidate. They also manoeuvre to better position themselves within the governing coalition.

## **PARTIES AND THEIR MANOEUVRES**

The PDIP has a significant tactical advantage over all other parties. In the 2019 elections, it won 22% of seats in the parliament. This means that it needs only the support of a party/ies with 3 seats to be able to nominate a presidential candidate. It can nominate a presidential candidate with the support of just one other even very small party. The next largest parties Gerindra and Golkar with just over 12% each need the support of at least 2 parties to become the central party of a coalition.

One idea which the PDIP has tested out has been about changing the law to allow a President to stand for a third term.<sup>5</sup> Puan Maharani, Megawati's daughter and now Speaker of the House of Representatives first raised this idea in November 2019. She proposed it for study by a parliamentary committee, without committing herself to a definitive support. The idea had been raised earlier by other commentators including also the Nasdem party.<sup>6</sup> Of course, President Widodo denied this, remarking that "he does not want to violate the Constitution".<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile the other alternative is for the PDIP to build up the profile of other possible candidates. In this respect, it should be noted that Megawati's daughter, Puan Maharani, has been made Speaker of the House of Representatives. Puan was previously Coordinating Minister for Social Affairs. It could be argued that the position of DPR Speaker is a better platform for her to start projecting herself as a potential presidential candidate than as a minister, who is formally merely an appointed assistant to the president. It gives her the opportunity, if needed in the future, to distance herself from Widodo. It also puts her in permanent and everyday communication with all the parliamentary parties. Puan's poll ratings are extremely low now, so she would not be an ideal candidate. Holding this position, however, makes her a potential key player. It also makes her suitable as a potential vice-presidential candidate should the PDIP decide on partnership with its old ally-rival, Prabowo Subianto, who scores at the top of most polls, with around 22%. No doubt the PDIP would prefer its own presidential candidate but the conscious consideration of *elektabilitas* has become central to Indonesia's system of coalitions of small parties, which flows from the need for a 25% nomination threshold and for a majority in parliament to pass budgets and legislations. It is possible that the PDIP will not have a candidate whose *elektabilitas* is seriously better than Prabowo's.

There are two figures, besides Puan (and a third-term Jokowi), who are sometimes mentioned as potential PDIP candidates. One is Ganjar Prabowo, current Governor of

Central Java, Indonesia's most populous province and the main voter support base of the PDIP. He is sometimes publicly spoken about as a candidate by commentators, and is usually included in polls.<sup>8</sup> While Prabowo scores around 22%, Ganjar can score around 15% in current polling.<sup>9</sup> The PDIP is not visibly escalating any profiling of Ganjar. Another PDIP figure with considerable and positive profile is Tri Rismaharini, the former Mayor of Surabaya. Her profile was very recently boosted by her appointment as Minister of Social Affairs. If she is perceived as being a successful Social Affairs Minister, that will certainly strengthen her national authority, and that of the PDIP itself. She is already scoring in the top ten in polling for 2024.<sup>10</sup>

The PDIP has also been supporting the reinstatement of the Garis Besar Haluan Negara (GBHN) – Broad Outlines of State Strategy.<sup>11</sup> The GBHN was a feature of Suharto's New Order. It was a document adopted by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) during that era. The nature of the MPR today is changed, with a clear majority of members being elected either through the DPR or directly to the DPD. A formalized GBHN may be seen by the PDIP as an extra mechanism for asserting control, or at least maintaining some element of control, over a President who was not from the PDIP, even if supported by the PDIP, as it would allow the MPR to set a constraining policy framework.<sup>12</sup> Other parties may see it in the same light, as a mechanism to increase the weight of parliament vis-à-vis any future president.

The two largest parties after the PDIP, Gerindra and Golkar, face very different situations regarding the 2024 elections, thus affecting their current manoeuvres. There is no issue as to who Gerindra may wish to nominate as a presidential candidate in 2024 – clearly, it should be Prabowo Subianto. In 2019, Golkar gave unconditional and all-out support for Joko Widodo. Even as early as 2017, Golkar adopted a position of full support for Widodo.<sup>13</sup> Golkar has started to promote its own chairperson, Airlangga Hartarto, the current Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, as a potential presidential candidate.<sup>14</sup> One poll even scored Hartarto above Prabowo, at 17.6% to Prabowo's 15.6%.<sup>15</sup>

A key player within the coalition has been the Partai Nasional Demokrat (Nasdem), whose chairperson is conglomerate businessman, Surya Paloh. Paloh, who among other interests owns Metro TV, a 24-hour news TV station. Paloh also owns a daily newspaper, Media Indonesia. Nasdem was one of the first parties to do a positioning manoeuvre after the 2019 elections when Surya Paloh met the newly-elected Governor of Jakarta, Anies Baswedan, and pronounced that Baswedan would be an excellent presidential candidate in 2024.<sup>16</sup> This was not a definitive pronouncement of support for Baswedan but rather a signal that in any post-Widodo scenario, Nasdem was not wedded to an ongoing alliance with the PDIP. Baswedan had been nominated by the PKS, and backed by Gerindra – and these two parties were, before 2019, the key components of an "opposition" to Widodo and PDIP. PKS remains in an 'oppositional' position, but now Gerindra is part of the government. In any case, by 2021, Nasdem had widened its discussion of possible candidates to include West Java Governor, Ridwan Kamil, and the current Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy and former vice-presidential running mate of Prabowo, Sandi Uno.<sup>17</sup>

Of the smaller parties in parliament, the other party whose manoeuvres have been interesting is the Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN). PAN positioned itself outside the governing coalition between 2014 and 2019. One of its most prominent figures, Amien Rais, a former chairperson of both Muhammadiyah and PAN itself, was an outspoken critic of the Widodo

government. In a party Congress in 2020, however, Rais and his supporters suffered a major defeat, with their proposed candidates for leadership positions losing out.<sup>18</sup> Rais and his supporters quickly left PAN and are setting up a new party, to be called the Partai Ummat.<sup>19</sup> Since 2020, PAN has been supporting the Widodo government but no PAN member has been appointed a minister. In response to reports of a Cabinet reshuffle, PAN has expressed the hope that it will be allocated ministries.<sup>20</sup> But this does not appear to have happened.<sup>21</sup> PAN, like the United Development Party (PPP), is seen as representing the 'modernist' Islamic regional-cultural faction. Its rival traditionalist Islamic faction, represented by Nahdlatul Ulama, and the National Awakening Party (PKB) had obtained the Minister of Religion position in the last reshuffle.<sup>22</sup>

There have been no signs of party manoeuvres or conflicts over major policy issues. All manoeuvres have been related to positioning presidential candidates within the current and potential new coalitions. As of April, 2021, everything remains softly fluid, with no definitive scenarios emerging, whether involving changing laws to allow a third candidacy for Widodo or in relation to candidates. One question that remains unanswered is to what extent, if at all, the splits in the various parties have been generated by manoeuvres directed by those at the core of government.

## **PARTIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY OPPOSITION**

Opposition to the government on policy questions has remained limited to civil society organisations and movements, who have no representation in parliament through any party. This opposition has been a social rather than a political one.<sup>23</sup> Over the last 20 years, attempts to establish civil society or labour-based parties saw none winning seats in parliament, and often they did not get past the stage of verification for registration as electoral participants. After the 2014 elections, there was, for example, some steps taken by one of the largest unions, the Indonesian Confederation of Trade Unions (KSPI), in alliance with other smaller unions and groups, to move towards a labour party.<sup>24</sup> This effort has since collapsed, with a former KSPI leader being elected to parliament as a Gerindra member.<sup>25</sup> During March and April, there has been media reportage of the initial legalisation, although not yet registration for electoral participation, of a new party, the Partai Adil Makmur (Just and Prosperous Party - PRIMA).<sup>26</sup> PRIMA appears to have been initiated by the People's Democratic Party (PRD), a small party lead by elements from the original PRD of the 1990s – although most of the original PRD leadership are now outside the contemporary PRD.<sup>27</sup> PRIMA appears to be appealing for participation from activist civil society as it moves into the phase of verification for electoral participation. It has declared itself as a party opposed to the power of the big business 'oligarki'.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from PRIMA, which has received some publicity recently, there are other party initiatives stemming from civil society, including the formation of a Green Party<sup>29</sup> and ongoing discussions between some NGOs about coalescing to form a party. Given the reality of an unrepresented but restive civil society sector, and the consequent dynamic push towards achieving representation, these kinds of initiatives should not be ignored. At the same time, it must be emphasised that the administrative obstacles that new parties face under current legislation are enormous. Additionally, the success of such initiatives will depend on the depth of their relationship with activist civil society.

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- <sup>1</sup> The most important exception to this is the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which has a more ideological basis, related to Islamism.
- <sup>2</sup> <https://fulcrum.sg/the-democrat-party-split-dynastic-versus-all-party-politics/>
- <sup>3</sup> See Max Lane, *Indonesia's 2014 Legislative Elections: The Dilemmas of "Elektabilitas" Politics*, at [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2014\\_25.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/ISEAS_Perspective_2014_25.pdf)
- <sup>4</sup> In the case of the Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN) there was some ambiguity with some elements wanting to align with the government and others, such as party elder Amien Rais, who is an outspoken opponent of President Widodo.
- <sup>5</sup> <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4798084/puan-minta-wacana-jabatan-presiden-3-periode-dikaji>
- <sup>6</sup> <https://fokus.tempo.co/read/1275979/wacana-masa-jabatan-presiden-3-periode-merebak-siapa-pengusulnya>
- <sup>7</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/03/20/11473681/soal-masa-jabatan-presiden-3-periode-jokowi-disebut-tak-berniat-langgar?>
- <sup>8</sup> <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2021/03/26/202741278/namanya-sering-diisukan-jadi-capres-ini-tanggapan-ganjar-pranowo?>; <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1436838/kata-pengamat-bila-pdip-tak-usung-ganjar-pranowo-di-pilpres-2024>
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.cnbcindonesia.com/news/20210404160918-4-235137/jreng-hasil-3-survei-capres-2024-terbaru-siapa-juaranya>
- <sup>10</sup> <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1380493/masuk-10-besar-survei-pilpres-2024-tri-rismaharini-saya-tidak-pernah-bermimpi>
- <sup>11</sup> <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1234562/konsep-gbhn-versi-pdip-kombinasi-era-soekarno-dan-soeharto>
- <sup>12</sup> <https://mediaindonesia.com/politik-dan-hukum/263452/pdip-sebut-gbhn-untuk-kesinambungan-pembangunan>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/golkar-partai-terdepan-yang-ingin-jokowi-kembali-jadi-presiden.html>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1439644/menilik-jejak-sigi-airlangga-hartanto-sebagai-capres-2024>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/04/12/17580791/survei-airlangga-tokoh-parpol-dengan-elektabilitas-tertinggi-capres-2024>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.jpnn.com/news/surya-paloh-tampaknya-total-dukung-anies-baswedan-jadi-capres-2024>
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210304162402-32-613796/konvensi-capres-nasdem-bidik-anies-rk-dan-sandiaga-uno>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/10/02/13594521/rekam-jejak-amien-rais-2-kali-bikin-partai-hingga-kalah-pilpres-2004?>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/04/26/13491231/deklarasi-partai-ummat-29-april-2021-menantu-amien-rais-jadi-kandidat-ketua?> There has also been a split in the PKS, with breakaway figures establishing the Partai Gelora. See <https://www.minews.id/cuitan-mi/buku-putih-fahri-hamzah-pemikiran-kegelisahan-dan-lahirnya-partai-gelora>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://tirto.id/ketika-pan-lagi-lagi-berharap-jatah-menteri-dari-jokowi-gddh>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2021/04/28/ini-profil-lengkap-2-menteri-dan-2-kepala-lembara-yang-akan-dilantik-jokowi-sore-ini> There does not appear to have been an actual reshuffle, but rather a restructuring of ministries.
- <sup>22</sup> <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20201222/15/1334281/reshuffle-kabinet-kursi-menteri-agama-kembali-ke-kaum-nahdliyin>
- <sup>23</sup> Max Lane, *Protests Against the Omnibus Law and the Evolution of Indonesia's Social Opposition*, at [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2020\\_128.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_128.pdf)

<sup>24</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/03/31/19315561/serikat-buruh-persiapkan-partai-sendiri-untuk-2024> See also Max, Lane, *An Introduction to the Politics of the Indonesian Union Movement*, ISEAS Singapore, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> This is Obon Tabroni, see <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/melenggang-ke-senayan-aktivis-buruh-ini-janji-jadi-corong-rakyat-ke-dpr.html>

<sup>26</sup> <https://politik.rmol.id/read/2021/03/22/479967/parpol-baru-prima-rawan-terjegal-aturan-administratif>

<sup>27</sup> <https://news.koropak.co.id/14758/prima-hadir-sebagai-partai-baru-anti-oligarki>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.berdikarionline.com/mengenal-prima-partai-baru-kaum-99-persen/>

<sup>29</sup> <https://rumahpemilu.org/partai-hijau/>

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