

PERSPECTIVE

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Uncertainties Surrounding the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election

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Puan Maharani

Politisi dari PDIP, Ketua DPR RI atau Speaker of the House of Representatives of Indonesia

Puan Maharani, speaker of the parliament and daughter of the Chairperson of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Megawati Sukarnoputri, is the most influential person in the PDIP faction in parliament. Photo: Picture of Puan Maharani from her FaceBook account: <https://www.facebook.com/puanmaharaniri>.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Even though the next presidential and parliamentary elections are three years away, open discussion and manoeuvring have already begun, including calls for a date to be set immediately.
- This is partly motivated by the uncertainty arising from the requirement for presidential candidates to be nominated by political parties or coalitions having 20% of parliamentary seats or 25% of the votes. As only the PDIP has 20% of the seats in the parliament (and with none having 25% of votes), aspiring contenders will face growing pressure to seek out feasible coalition partners.
- The uncertainty is aggravated by the absence of any candidate from any party with a clearly high electability (popularity) level, and compounded by the many possible permutations for coalition-building, because there are no ‘natural’ ideological or policy differences among the parties.
- Being the only party with 20% of parliamentary seats, the PDIP’s choice of candidate is therefore an important question. So far, Puan Maharani is favoured by Megawati and the party machinery, but she polls significantly behind Ganjar Pranowo. Given this potential impasse, Joko Widodo has even surfaced as a possibility, but this would require constitutional amendment to allow Widodo’s eligibility for a third term.
- Prabowo Subianto and Anies Baswedan are the two most discussed non-PDIP candidates, with each facing their own specific uncertainties.

INTRODUCTION

On 24 September, the *Jakarta Post* Editorial Board published a special statement demanding that the Indonesian government set a date for the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections.¹ It was a very strong editorial statement ending with the words: “Now set the dates!” What is behind one of Indonesia’s major dailies making such a strong demand more than two years away from the election year? The *Jakarta Post* editorial is just one manifestation of what appears to be an early start to election manoeuvring by everybody involved.² There are several factors to consider in explaining this. One issue that the *Jakarta Post* raised has a real basis, namely that the KPU needs as much time as possible to prepare for the elections in such a huge country which will be carrying out simultaneous elections for the national parliament and the President and Vice-President and in the same year as a round of regional elections. This is a huge task. Tens of millions of people will be voting.

There are, however, deeper reasons for the early start to politicking; these flow from the interaction between the formal requirements of the election process and the situation and character of Indonesia’s political parties.

THE PRESIDENCY AND THE PARTIES

Prior to 2004, the President and Vice-President were elected by the People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR), which comprised members of the House of Representatives alongside other, initially appointed and later elected, individuals. During the New Order period, this facilitated the easy management of the continued re-election of President Suharto as a sole candidate whose state apparatus effectively controlled the three political parties that were allowed to operate, of which GOLKAR, Suharto’s own party, always had a large majority in the DPR. After Suharto’s fall, the state apparatus lost its capacity to effectively intervene, and considerable power was transferred to the political parties with seats in the parliament. From 1998 until 2004, Presidents were chosen and replaced through changing deal-making within the MPR/DPR among the various parties. In 2002, there was a change in the Constitution so that in 2004, the President and Vice-President were directly elected.

Initially, it was only necessary for a political party that wanted to nominate a presidential candidate to have achieved a ‘presidential threshold’ of 3% of seats in the parliament at a general election. This was changed by parliament to 20% in 2009.³ The establishment of this presidential threshold (PT) reinforced the role of negotiations between political parties in the process of nominating candidates, with an important advantage going to any political party that could win 20% of the seats in parliament or get close to that figure.⁴ Only such parties or coalitions, already represented in parliament, can nominate a President and Vice-President.

It is crucial to note today that only the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) has the PT by itself.⁵ Puan Maharani, speaker of the parliament and daughter of the Chairperson of the PDIP, Megawati Sukarnoputri, is the most influential person in the PDIP faction in parliament. The current President, Joko Widodo, was nominated by and is a member of the PDIP – although he was not a lifelong member of the party, joining only when he decided

to make his run for the Presidency, standing first as Mayor of Solo. Every other party will need coalition partners to nominate a President and Vice-President.

In the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, two coalitions emerged behind two sets of candidates for President and Vice-President. In 2021, three years before the next scheduled elections, discussion has already begun as to whether having only two sets of candidates is ideal or not.⁶ Theoretically it is possible to have up to 5 candidates. Under the Indonesian system, there would be a run-off between the two top scoring candidates if nobody scored over 50% in the first round, as occurred in 2004 when there were 5 sets of candidates. In 2009, there were three sets. The debate about this issue reflects the tension created by the constraints necessitated by this rule and manifested in the need for coalitions.

The Democrat Party, has called for the abolition of the PT altogether. Meanwhile, the PDIP has raised the idea of raising the PT even higher and also called for there to be only two sets of candidates nominated by two coalitions, as has been the case since 2014. In the 2019 elections, the PDIP was part of a 10-party coalition that supported Joko Widodo and Maruf Amin. Other parties are open to a first round of 3 or 4 sets of candidates. The political reality underpinning these different positions on the PT and on the number of candidates is ‘simply’ that there is no party even getting close to winning 50% of the vote. The PDIP with 22.26% of the DPR seats is the largest, which it won with just 19% of the vote! All the other parties have less than 15%, some even at just 10% or lower. The Indonesian political reality does not provide the basis for a two-party system. In fact, even this spread of percentages of seats in the DPR has been moderated by the imposition of a national threshold of votes (4%) for parties to be awarded seats in the parliament.⁷ Seven other parties, with a total of around 17% of the national vote, were denied seats in the parliament. All the current parties in the DPR have a greater proportion of seats than of votes because of the elimination of these seven parties from the DPR.

Apart from needing to be nominated by a party or parties with at least 20% of the seats in parliament, a presidential candidate needs to win more than 50% of the vote in a face-off contest with a rival candidate. Given that the votes for the 14 main parties have remained stable for more than ten years, a successful coalition is likely to comprise parties that combined have won at least 50% in the previous elections.

All these factors underpin a system where *any President needs to be supported by a substantial coalition of the existing parties* to have a chance of winning. As President, he or she then needs a majority in parliament to pass budgets and legislation.

Party Representation in the House of Representatives (DPR).		
1	National Awakening Party - PKB	10.09%
2	Greater Indonesia Movement - Gerindra	13.57%
3	Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle - PDI-P	22.26%
4	Golkar	14.78%
5	Nation Democrats - NasDem	10.26%
8	Justice Welfare Party -PKS	8.70%
10	United Development Party - PPP	3.30%
12	National Mandate Party - PAN	7.65%
14	Democrat Party - Demokrat	9.39%

UNCERTAINTIES FOR 2024

There are no substantial ideological or programmatic differences among these parties. At the moment there are only two parties represented in parliament – Democrat and PKS – that are outside the government. Many of the parties in the current government were members of the government when the Democrat President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, was in power. At the provincial and *kabupaten*⁸ level, every possible combination of parties can be found in coalitions. There are no policy issues that seriously divide the political elite and their parties. The fact that there are almost no “natural” divisions among the parties means that almost any combination of parties is possible. At this stage, the only combination that can perhaps be ruled out is one that contains the PDIP alongside the Democrat Party, but this reflects the personal animosities between Megawati and Yudhoyono⁹ rather than any deeper differences.

In 2014 and 2019, the largest coalition was drawn together because of the highly palpable *elektabilitas*¹⁰ of Joko Widodo after his perceived successes as Mayor of Solo. In 2021, the situation is being defined by two facts: first, almost any combination of parties is possible and, second, there is no candidate with the same *elektabilitas* popularity that Joko Widodo enjoyed in 2013 to draw together such an opportunistic coalition. At the moment, both possible candidates and likely coalitions remain uncertain. It is this uncertainty that is driving the flurry of early manoeuvres and discussions of both new policies and of competing scenarios.

This uncertainty, however, is one experienced primarily among the ‘political class’ itself. It is not accompanied by additional uncertainty around future policy directions which might destabilise society in general. There are also no signs, at the moment, that this situation is creating the rhetorical polarisation that mobilised sectarian identity politics in 2014 and 2019. In 2014 and 2019, Prabowo Subianto, who did appear to have substantial electability, allied with sectarian Islamic politics, such as that represented by the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and others. In 2021, having achieved a reproachment with Joko Widodo, he is no longer engaging in that flirtation. Rather, he has moved closer to the PDIP and its

chairperson, awarding her an honorary doctorate from the Defence University, which as Defence Minister he maintains oversight, and appearing with her at other significant events.¹¹ Therefore, this uncertainty is not having significant destabilising impact among the broader society or at the grassroots. This, of course, can change, but there are no such signs now.

PROSPECTIVE CANDIDATES AS OF 2021

The situation described above underlines the centrality of the different party's assessment of the *elektabilitas* of candidates, and not policy outlooks, as the dynamic factor shaping prospective coalitions. In this process, the PDIP does not formally require a coalition to nominate a candidate, although it would be strengthened politically if it does so. If it can put forward a popular figure as a candidate, as it did with Joko Widodo, it becomes the leading player in the game. The prospects of the PDIP in this respect need to be reviewed first.

PDIP's candidates

At the moment, public discussion about whom the PDIP could nominate focuses on three figures. These are Puan Maharani, Ganjar Pranowo, the Governor of Central Java and President Joko Widodo. This is a complicated situation. Puan Maharani has extremely low poll ratings – sometimes below 4%¹² - and thus almost no *elektabilitas*,¹³ but she has the support of the party machine under the direction of her mother, Megawati, who is the chairperson. On the other hand, Ganjar Pranowo, scores relatively well in *elektabilitas* polls, many times that of Puan. Ganjar has high social media presence based on a positive image of his tenure as Governor.¹⁴ He is surrounded by a team that includes experienced activists from the anti-Suharto movement period. Recent events, however, show that he does not have the support of Megawati and the party machine, which has instead allocated considerable resources to Puan's billboard profile campaign. Ganjar was even excluded from a party machine cadre preparation event that was organised by Puan.

Ganjar's further advantage is that the position of governor – like mayor or head of district – is a better launching pad than either being a Minister, which Puan was in Widodo's first presidential term or Speaker of the Parliament. Incumbent political figures at the local level can more easily claim association with any successful policy implementation that is palpable locally. This was the precedent set by Widodo's own rise from Mayor of Solo to Governor of Jakarta to the Presidency. On the other hand, the Ministers as well as the Parliament have become the focus of popular discontent. Four ministers have recently been arrested for corruption.¹⁵ In early October, two senior ministers have been implicated in the Pandora Papers scandal.¹⁶ Although Puan has not been convicted of any corruption charges, her name was linked to a corruption scandal that had to do with welfare funds in the media in late 2020 and early 2021.¹⁷ Shifting from a Ministry to the position of Speaker of the Parliament may provide her with a major political platform, but that also highlights her involvement in the almost unanimous support of parliament for unpopular laws that shrank the competency of the Corruption Eradication Commission and the Job Creation (Omnibus) Law weakened protection for workers.

In many ways, Ganjar fits the profile of a younger PDIP leader with an image of success at the gubernatorial level while Puan is tainted by being part of a corrupt national elite and an unpopular parliament.¹⁸ However, to date, the party machine under Megawati, appears to be committed to advancing Puan's profile.¹⁹ It is possible that this is preparation to nominate Puan as a Vice-Presidential candidate, but this would most likely be with a presidential candidate from another party, not Ganjar. Thus the PDIP is now constrained by the contradiction between having a candidate popular in the polls but not popular with the party hierarchy.

Another possible PDIP candidate is President Joko Widodo, although for Widodo to stand for a third term, the parliament would need to amend the Constitution. Puan Maharani was one of the first to mention this possibility back in November, 2019.²⁰ In June, 2021, Tempo magazine published reports of meetings being held by Ministers and the heads of various polling groups planning for either Widodo to stand again or for emergency regulation to extend his presidency because of the Covid pandemic.²¹ However, in September, Widodo issued a statement that he had "no intention" of either standing again or extending his presidential term.²² However, given the apparent lack of support for Ganjar from the party hierarchy and the very low popularity of Puan, the spectre of a manoeuvre to secure a third period for Widodo cannot be ruled out.

This contradiction inside the party that holds the most strategic position for coalition creation adds to the general uncertainty. It also forms the terrain for the potentiality of candidates from smaller parties or of those not tied to parties.

Non-PDIP Candidates.

The two non-PDIP candidates that have significant poll ratings are Prabowo Subianto, current Minister of Defence and Chairperson of the GERINDRA Party, and Anies Baswedan, current Governor of Jakarta. Prabowo's GERINDRA continues to state that Prabowo will be their Presidential Candidate in 2024. GERINDRA has just under 14% of the seats in the DPR and would need one other party to join in nominating Prabowo. To date, there have been no clear signs of GERINDRA's stance on this. However, as mentioned above, since Prabowo's reproachment with Widodo, he has cultivated a close relationship with Megawati. Prabowo had stood as Megawati's Vice-Presidential running mate in 2009. With this reproachment, there is considerable speculation that there may be a chance of a Prabowo-Puan candidacy and many polls²³ put forward this candidacy as one option.²⁴ Indeed there has even been speculation in the media of a Megawati-Prabowo candidacy, although most commentators consider this to be very unlikely.²⁵ In some polls, a Prabowo-Ganjar pairing obtained better results than a Prabowo-Puan ticket.

One set of candidates outside of a PDIP or PDIP-Gerindra that does well in polls is that of Anies Baswedan together with the son of Bambang Susilo Yudhoyono, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY), from the Democrat Party.²⁶ Baswedan now stands out as the contrasting candidate to the Widodo-PDIP axis, especially after the achievement of high vaccination coverage in Jakarta, thanks to which Baswedan's popularity has improved.

Baswedan is in a unique figure in a very opportune position. Although nominated by a coalition of PKS and GERINDRA to stand as Jakarta Governor, he is not tied to any party. He began his quest for the Presidency by intending to step forward as a candidate at a planned 2012 Democrat Party convention. When that Convention did not happen, he became one of the most prominent campaigners for Joko Widodo in 2013-4. Widodo appointed him Minister of Education only to remove him later. He became an opponent and critic of Widodo and stood for the governorship of Jakarta with PKS and GERINDRA support against candidates supported by the PDIP. He is strangely in a similar position as Widodo. Widodo is acceptable to all parties, except the Democrat Party, while Baswedan is acceptable to all parties except the PDIP. While AHY scores low in the polls, the Baswedan-AHY pairing scores well and ahead of a Prabowo-Puan combination – approximately 36% to 22%.²⁷

CONCLUSION

The lack of policy-based natural divisions between the parties means that almost any combination of parties to nominate presidential candidates is possible. The primary obstacle to some combinations is personal rivalry. There is also no candidate with popularity as high as what Joko Widodo had enjoyed in 2014 and 2019. These two facts have given rise to considerable speculation on how things might develop, which parties may make up the next government and who will be President. As a result, manoeuvring has started early.

The preeminent strategic position of the PDIP as the only party that has no formal need of a partner, and the fact of its incumbency, have given rise to an initial wave of speculation of a PDIP-GERINDRA axis competing with a Baswedan-Democrat axis.²⁸ However, the absence of any consolidated divisions among the parties, apart from personal rivalries, means the situation will remain fluid and uncertain for some time yet.

¹ <https://www.thejakartapost.com/academia/2021/09/23/set-the-election-dates.html>

² <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2021-73-political-parties-manoeuving-after-the-jokowi-prabowo-rapprochement-by-max-lane/>

³ <https://tirto.id/mengapa-presidential-threshold-terus-bermasalah-setiap-lima-tahun-fMh8>

⁴ The legislation also allows for a party than won 25% of the vote to nominate a candidate, but no party has ever achieved that since the legislation was passed.

⁵ See Table.

⁶ <https://www.kompas.id/baca/polhuk/2021/06/11/utak-atik-calon-presiden-2024/>

⁷ <https://www.jpnn.com/news/kpu-resmi-tetapkan-semilan-partai-politik-lolos-parliamentary-threshold?page=2>

⁸ Kabupaten is an administrative unit within a province, sometimes called a district.

⁹ <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/kisah-perseteruan-megawati-dan-sby-berawal-dari-pilpres-2014.html>

¹⁰ For an early discussion of how “elektabilitas” became a central idea in contemporary politics, 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

¹¹ <https://www.suara.com/news/2021/05/27/121845/harmonis-dengan-megawati-gerindra-berpeluang-duetkan-prabowo-puan-di-pilpres-2024>; <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210929180730-20-701204/megawati-kenang-bung-karno-masa-orde-baru-sejarah-diblokkan>;

<https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2021/06/10/090034971/megawati-raih-gelar-profesor-kehormatan-dari-unhan-ini-alasannya>

¹² In the poll reported here, Puan scored below 1% <https://en.tempo.co/read/1466162/ganjar-pranowo-outshines-puan-maharani-in-latest-electability-survey>

¹³ See note 12.

¹⁴ <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/ganjar-pranowo-saya-bermedsos-sudah-sejak-jadi-dpr.html>; <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2020/10/30/19294771/gaya-bermedia-sosial-ganjar-pranowo-sosialisasi-kebijakan-hingga-menerima?>

¹⁵ <https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/margith-juita-damanik/selain-edhy-prabowo-ini-deretan-menteri-jokowi-yang-ditangkap-kpk>

¹⁶ <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2021/10/05/12572651/luhut-pandjaitan-disebut-dalam-pandora-papers-ini-penjelasan-jubir>; <https://www.thejakartapost.com/paper/2021/10/05/coordinating-ministers-named-in-pandora-papers.html>

¹⁷ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1416862/investigasi-korupsi-bansos-pemred-majalah-tempo-verifikasi-sudah-dijalankan>

¹⁸ It should be noted that Ganjar has also been affected in reports on a corruption affair from when he was a member of parliament in an earlier period: <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1203978/kpk-akan-periksa-lagi-ganjar-pranowo-dalam-kasus-korupsi-e-ktp>

¹⁹ <https://fulcrum.sg/politicians-billboard-war-underscores-absence-of-policy-contestation/>

²⁰ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4798084/puan-minta-wacana-jabatan-presiden-3-periode-dikaji>

²¹ <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1474777/sejumlah-menteri-dan-eks-pejabat-diduga-rancang-jokowi-3-periode>

²² <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210911173934-32-692971/jokowi-tolak-tiga-periode-atau-tambah-masa-jabatan-presiden>

²³ <https://kabar24.bisnis.com/read/20210908/15/1439909/akankah-prabowo-puan-maju-di-pilpres-2024>

²⁴ <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/2203078/duet-prabowo-puan-paling-mungkin-diwujudkan-di-pilpres-2024>; <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5667858/survei-pasangan-capres-2024-anies-ahy-tertinggi-disusul-prabowo-puan>

²⁵ <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20210608112020-32-651630/wacana-megawati-prabowo-capres-dinilai-tak-schatkan-demokrasi>

²⁶ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5667858/survei-pasangan-capres-2024-anies-ahy-tertinggi-disusul-prabowo-puan>

²⁷ <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-5667858/survei-pasangan-capres-2024-anies-ahy-tertinggi-disusul-prabowo-puan>; <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/simulasi-head-to-head-capres-2024-prabowo-puan-kalah-dari-anies-ahy.html>,

²⁸ <https://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/02/24/prabowo-vs-anies-2024-presidential-election-survey.html>

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