

PERSPECTIVE

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Jokowi's High Approval Ratings Make Him Potential Kingmaker

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Mr Prabowo Subianto visiting President Joko Widodo on the first day of Lebaran on 22 April 2023 in Solo, Indonesia. Photo: (Facebook/Presiden Joko Widodo)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

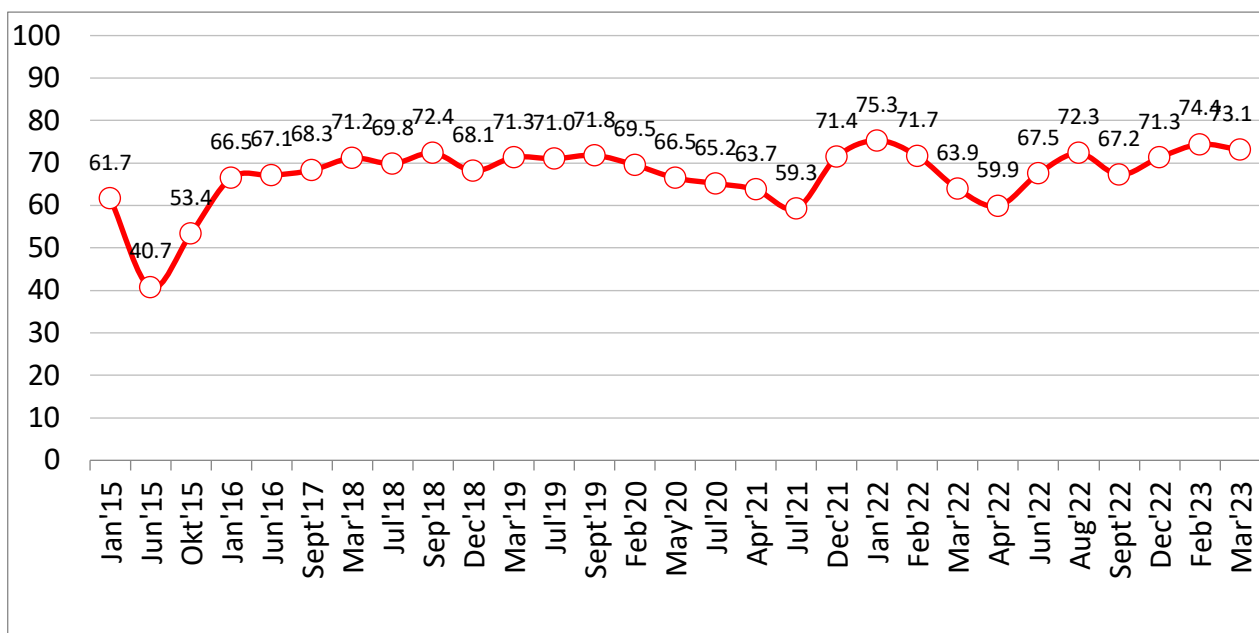
- Jokowi has maintained high public approval, with a 73.1% approval rating in March 2023. The economy, perceived to be improving post-pandemic, is the primary source for his public satisfaction.
- President Jokowi's approval rating reflects the public's opinion of his administration and affects the electoral fortunes of certain political parties and candidates. However, the relationship between satisfaction with Jokowi's performance and party choice was not strongly related to the party's position in or outside government.
- Support for the PDIP, NasDem, Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, and Democratic Party correlates positively with satisfaction with Jokowi's performance. In contrast, support for Islamic parties like the PKS, PKB, and PPP correlates negatively with the president's performance.
- Support for Ganjar Pranowo is positively related to President Jokowi's public approval. Ganjar will benefit greatly if the public consistently evaluates Jokowi's performance favourably. On the other hand, support for Anies is negatively related to Jokowi's public approval, meaning Anies will benefit electorally if Jokowi's performance declines.
- Recent surveys indicating an increase in Prabowo's electability as a presidential candidate cannot be separated from Jokowi's support. Jokowi's endorsement not only allowed Prabowo to survive the threat of the electoral support base collapsing due to the loss of Islamist votes to Anies, but also opened up new channels of support from Jokowi supporters.

INTRODUCTION

The level of satisfaction with the president's performance (presidential approval rating) is a report card that describes the government's success or failure in the eyes of the public. Similar to a report card, the value listed indicates the public's perception of the government's ability to address people's concerns. The level of satisfaction also serves as a means to continue gaining the public's trust and support. If it is good, the public will have more trust in the government and will support its policies. However, if it is bad, the government will receive public sanctions, and thus lower support to remain in power.¹ Moreover, in the period leading up to the end of Jokowi's term as president in October 2024, he is expected not to issue any major policy changes and only focus on finishing his agenda and cementing his legacy.

Interestingly, even during the pandemic, President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has enjoyed high public approval (Figure 1). Despite its slow and poor responses to the spread of the pandemic in the initial stages, the Jokowi administration still managed to maintain high public trust. Even the massive blow to the economy in 2020 did not shake the public's perception of Jokowi much. According to the March 2023 survey conducted by the independent polling institute INDIKATOR, Jokowi has a 73.1% approval rating (Figure 1). If we put it in a bigger perspective, this high public approval is the second highest in the world among the leaders of democratic countries, as compiled by the Morning Consult's Political Intelligence. Jokowi was only outpaced by Indian PM Narendra Modi in March 2023 with a rating of 78%. However, Jokowi's approval rating is ahead of U.S. President Joe Biden and British PM Rishi Sunak, among others.²

Figure 1: Trends in Public Satisfaction with President Jokowi's Performance (%)



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

The main factor explaining Jokowi's stellar approval rating is the economy. The economic recovery is evident from the growth that began to move towards a better direction after Indonesia experienced its deepest contraction in 2020. Even then, Indonesia's economic recession was a comparatively modest 2.1%, in stark contrast to the 13% in GDP collapse in 1998.³ This modest contraction was largely due to government intervention, especially through social safety net policies and social assistance programmes.⁴ Surveys also show that public satisfaction is due to the large proportion of voters who received social assistance.⁵ The economic recovery went very well throughout 2022 and continues until the first quarter of 2023, with an estimated growth of around 5%, even amidst the threat of a world economic slowdown and global recession.⁶ Aside from economic factors, Jokowi's approval rating has also increased due to the government's perceived success in handling the pandemic.⁷

HIGH PUBLIC APPROVAL AND ITS ELECTORAL IMPACTS

In addition to serving as an indicator of the success or failure of the government, the approval rating for President Jokowi's performance influences the support of political parties and 2024 presidential candidates. In this context, government-supporting parties may benefit from the president's positive coattail effect. When the president's approval rating rises, so will the level of support for government-supporting parties, and vice versa. The same logic applies to political parties not affiliated with the government. These parties' vote share tends to be inversely proportional to the president's approval rating. People dissatisfied with the government's performance will vote for opposition parties. As a result, voting for opposition parties is expected to rise in tandem with a fall in the president's approval rating.

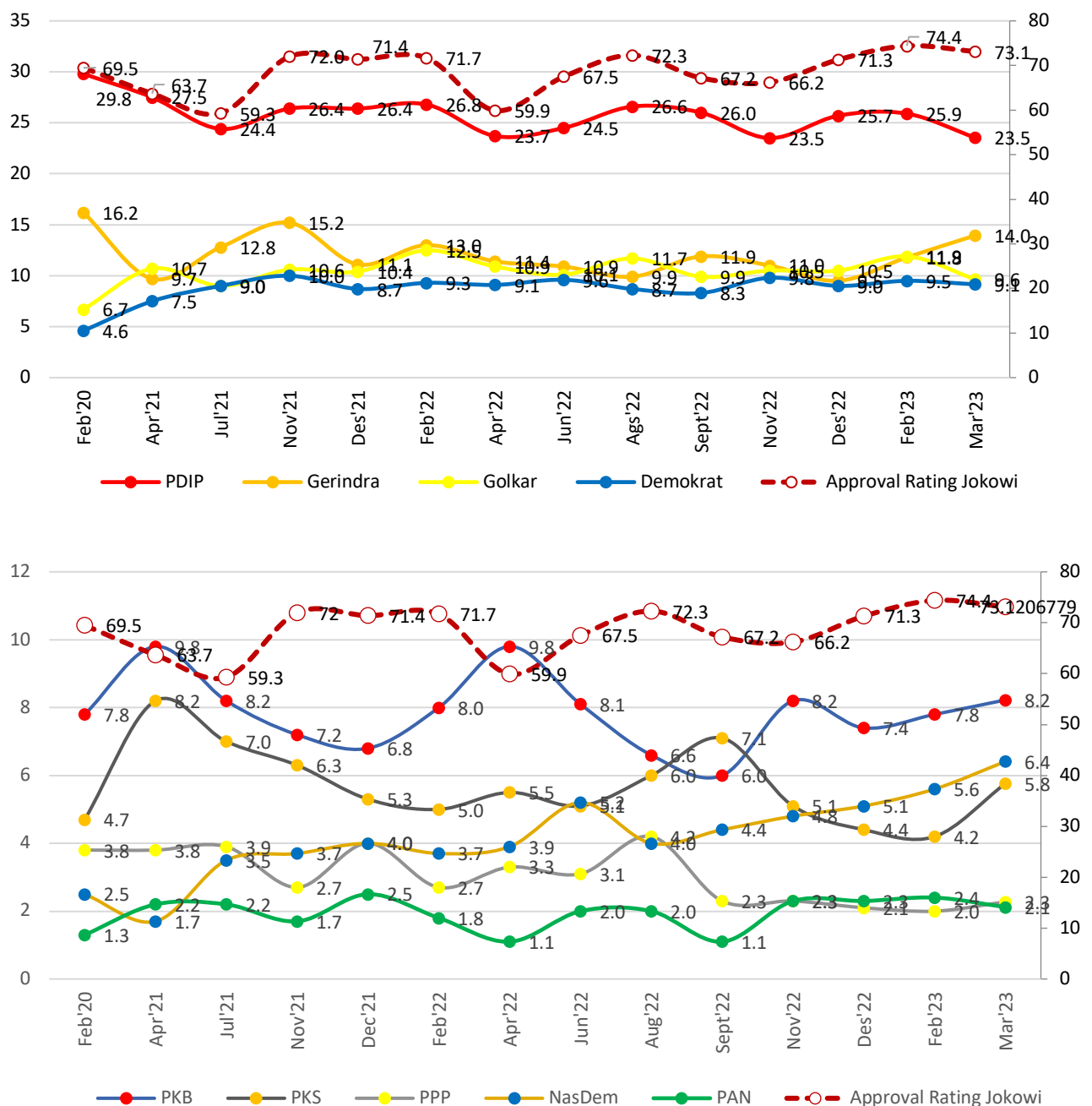
However, empirical data are not so black and white. The correlation between the level of satisfaction with Jokowi's performance and the party's choice has not been strongly related to the party's position in or outside government (Table 1). The correlation analysis of party choice and presidential performance in Table 1 shows that support for PDIP, NasDem, Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, and Democratic Party⁸ is positively associated with satisfaction with Jokowi's performance. Support for NasDem and PDIP obtained the highest correlation scores. In other words, the two parties' support has grown significantly over the last three years, and if satisfaction with the President's performance falls, so will the support for PDIP and NasDem.

Table 1: The Relationship Between Party Choice and Jokowi's Public Approval (2020 – 2023)

	APPROVAL RATING JOKOWI
PDIP	0.304
GERINDRA	0.170
GOLKAR	0.253
DEMOKRAT	0.078
PKB	-0.562
PKS	-0.501
PPP	-0.361
NASDEM	0.433
PAN	0.282

A correlation analysis based on surveys conducted over the last three years also revealed a negative relationship between Jokowi's performance and party choice, not only for the opposition party, PKS, but also for the two Islamic parties that are part of the government coalitional parties, PKB and PPP. In fact, the PKB correlation score is very high, roughly equal to the PKS correlation score (Table 1). This demonstrates that the relationship between Jokowi's approval rating and political parties does not always follow a linear pattern. Support for a particular political party can negatively correlate with Jokowi's approval rating, even if the party is part of the government coalition. This situation can arise, for example, if the party's elite and lower-level base supporters share different goals.

Figure 2: The trend of national surveys (%), February 2020 - March 2023



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

Meanwhile, the correlation between President Jokowi's approval rating and presidential candidate support is more apparent than the correlation with party electability. Presidential candidates perceived by the public to be close to Jokowi, whether due to similarities in political parties or leadership traits, tend to experience ups and downs in support that correspond to the President's approval rating. On the other hand, a presidential candidate perceived to be in

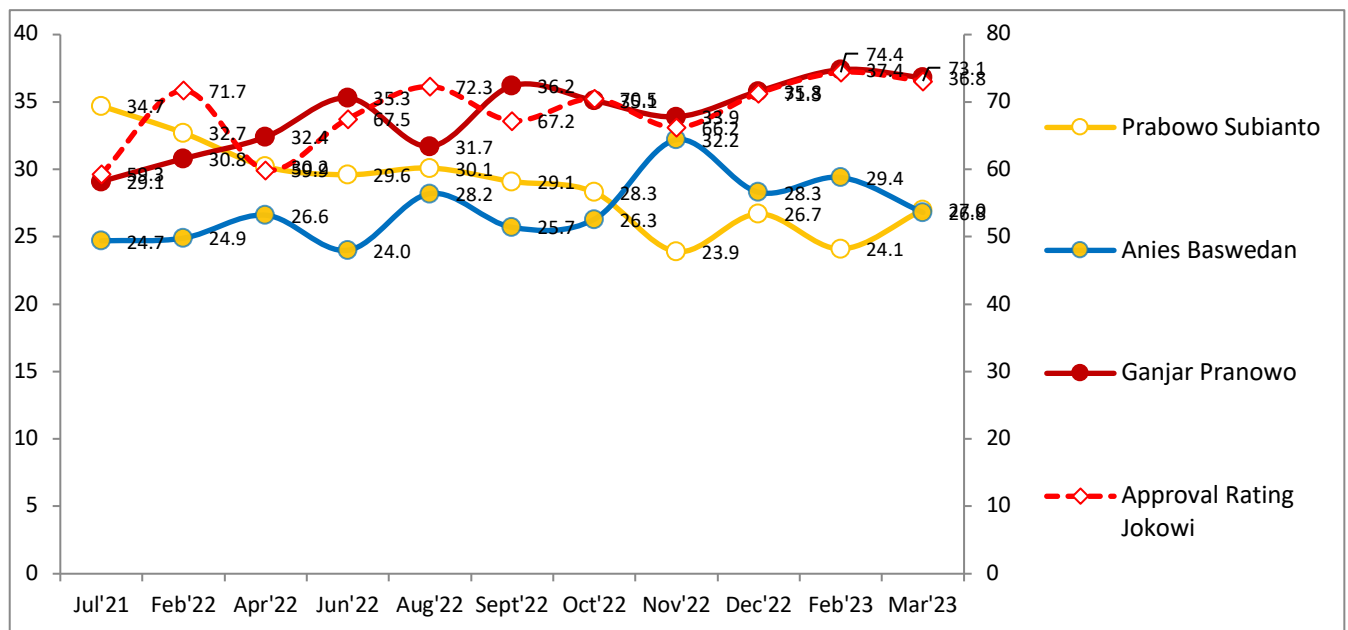
opposition to Jokowi faces ups and downs in gaining support that is opposite to the President's approval rating.

The popularity of presidential candidates may or may not correlate with Jokowi's approval rating. This is because each presidential candidate's support base is different. It is possible that the support base for one presidential candidate is not overlapping with Jokowi's support base. Furthermore, the perception of how close a figure is to President Jokowi is fluid. This is clear in the case of Prabowo Subianto. Figure 3 shows that Jokowi's performance is in contrast with the pattern of support for Prabowo from 2020 to the end of 2022. Prabowo was Jokowi's main opponent in the last two presidential elections. This means that previously, those who were unhappy with Jokowi voted for Prabowo. However, since Prabowo has joined the cabinet and recently received open support from Jokowi as a 2024 presidential candidate, many pro-Jokowi voters have warmed up to Prabowo (Figure 3).

In contrast, the support for Anies was initially consistent with people's level of satisfaction with Jokowi. This was largely because Anies was Jokowi's former campaign spokesperson in 2014 and his first-term cabinet member. However, Anies' electability trend now appears to be the inverse of Jokowi's approval, especially after the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election.⁹ Anies' electability was even lower when Jokowi's support rose from December 2022 to March 2023, reaching around 73%.

The pattern of Jokowi's performance evaluation is highly correlated to support for Ganjar. As a result, Ganjar will benefit greatly if the public consistently evaluates Jokowi's performance favourably. Ganjar's electability fell slightly in the March 2023 poll when Jokowi's approval rating fell, though not so significantly.

Figure 3: Trends in the Support Patterns of Three Presidential Candidates and Satisfaction with the President's Performance (%)



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia

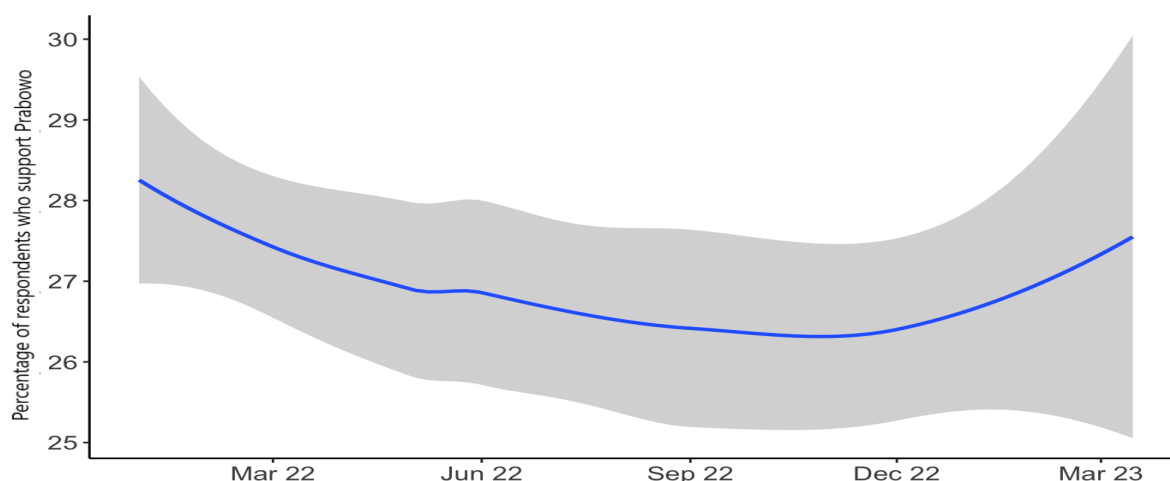
JOKOWI PLAYS KINGMAKER

The high approval rating of Jokowi has positioned him as the kingmaker who can determine the choice of presidential candidates in 2024. Furthermore, in the most recent Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) poll, conducted in early April 2023, satisfaction with Jokowi reached 76.8%.¹⁰ Political parties are indeed responsible for presidential nominations, but as the president with seven parties supporting the government, Jokowi has a significant role in determining the presidential and VP candidates who will run in the 2024 Presidential Election. In addition, there was no dominant presidential candidate before the March 2023 survey, so Jokowi's endorsement will influence electoral dynamics, particularly among Jokowi's supporters.

The March 2023 INDIKATOR survey results show an interesting shift between the top three presidential candidates, Ganjar, Prabowo, and Anies, in relation to Jokowi's move in endorsing Prabowo. The increase in support for Prabowo appears to be consistent in various simulations. Meanwhile, the other names tended to stagnate or deteriorate.¹¹ If there are three competing names, Ganjar continues to be at the top. Prabowo has grown stronger and is currently tied with Anies, who tends to see his electability weaken. Ganjar was chosen by 36.8% of respondents (down slightly from 37.4% in February), Prabowo with 27% (up from 24%), and Anies with 26.8% (down from 29.4%). Prabowo seems to be closing the gap with Ganjar.

What has boosted Prabowo's electability in recent months? Given the downward trend in support for Prabowo since 2020 and even being overtaken by Anies in late October 2022, many parties are sceptical that Prabowo will be able to fight his two new rivals, Ganjar and Anies. But the trend shifted in November 2022, when Jokowi publicly declared his support for Prabowo as his successor at the Perindo anniversary event (Figure 4).¹² Since then, Jokowi has issued increasingly open statements in support of Prabowo and intensively invited him to some events.

Figure 4: Trend in Prabowo's electability, 2022 - 2023¹³

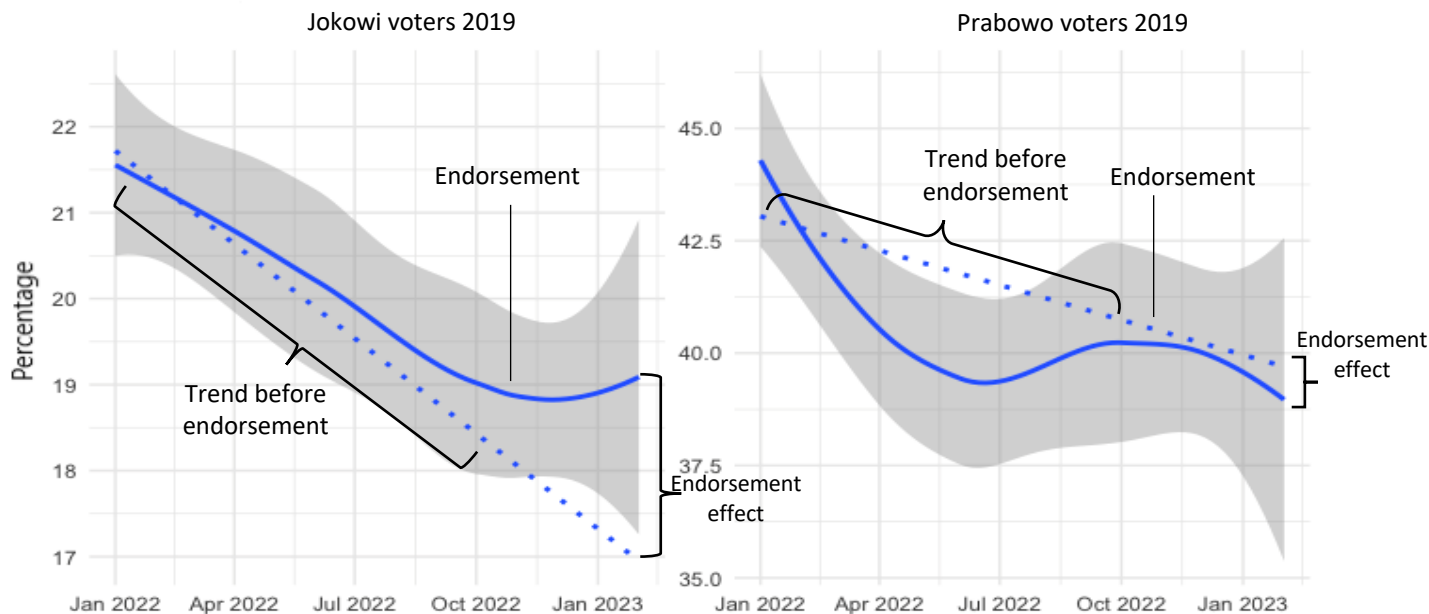


Indeed, Jokowi has occasionally signalled his support for Ganjar. Still, they are wrapped in analogous languages,¹⁴ whereas his support for Prabowo is relatively more open. Ganjar is a PDIP cadre, and Megawati has repeatedly reminded Jokowi, even in his presence at the PDIP's 50th anniversary, that determining her party's presidential candidate is her prerogative. Therefore, supporting Ganjar publicly would strain Jokowi's relationship with Megawati.

Meanwhile, Jokowi has had no major difficulties in showing his support for Prabowo. Prabowo even appears to have enjoyed the backing of the President. He stated that President Jokowi might be educating him on leading the country, so he often invites Prabowo on official visits.¹⁵

So, what is the electoral impact of Jokowi's endorsement of Prabowo? The left panel of Figure 5 shows that Jokowi's endorsement has reversed the trend of declining Prabowo support among Jokowi's 2019 voters. The solid line depicts Prabowo's support trend before and after Jokowi's endorsement, indicating a 2% increase in Prabowo's electability among Jokowi's 2019 voters. The dashed line represents Prabowo's electability trend without Jokowi's support. The number of Jokowi voters (who said Jokowi was their choice in 2019) in post-election surveys is generally higher than the actual election results, implying that the Jokowi endorsement effect is more significant than the estimate above. The March 2023 poll also revealed that the likeability of Prabowo had increased by 5% in recent months, owing primarily to Jokowi voters' support.¹⁶

Figure 5: The intention to vote for Prabowo and the effect of Jokowi's endorsement



The right-hand panel of Figure 5 shows no discernible effect from Jokowi's endorsement among Prabowo voters in 2019. Even before NasDem declared Anies as its presidential candidate in October 2022, most of Prabowo's voters in 2019 had shifted to Anies. This demonstrates that regardless of Jokowi's support, Prabowo has lost a portion of his support base, particularly in conservative Muslim circles. This is because he joined Jokowi's cabinet as Minister of Defense. What's left is Prabowo's core voter base. However, as depicted in the graph, the effect of Jokowi's endorsement on Prabowo's voters in 2019 was negligible. Jokowi's support not only allowed Prabowo to survive his electoral support base collapsing due to the loss of Islamist votes to Anies but also opened the door for new channels of support from non-ideological groups supporting Jokowi in 2019.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Jokowi's support for any presidential candidate has a significant electoral impact. This effect, however, is highly dependent on Jokowi's public popularity and competition among presidential candidates. If Jokowi can maintain his high popularity, he will significantly impact the 2024 presidential election. So far, if the President's approval rating is high, Ganjar and Prabowo receive the most electability support. Anies, on the other hand, comes under pressure if Jokowi is able to maintain public satisfaction with his government. The latter explains why Anies' electability has declined, even though he has recently been more active in campaigning after being named a presidential candidate by the NasDem in October 2022. Anies will find it difficult to sell a narrative of change in a situation where 73% to 76.8% of citizens are satisfied with Jokowi's performance. He will struggle to win if he relies on anti-Jokowi groups because this segment of voters seems to be dwindling and becoming insignificant. He must also make

inroads among Jokowi's supporters to win, but Anies has already been framed as Jokowi's polar opposite. Anies has a good chance if positive perceptions of the government deteriorate, particularly in dealing with economic issues.

The Ganjar and Prabowo camps cannot rely solely on Jokowi's satisfied voters, since public satisfaction is limited. Nevertheless, the satisfaction with Jokowi's performance will provide a hospitable environment for Ganjar or Prabowo's support to grow. The problem is that Jokowi's supporters are currently split between the two. Prabowo's ability to retain his core voter base while simultaneously attracting Jokowi's 2019 voters gives him an advantage in the current political landscape.

Moreover, the April 2023 LSI survey shows the development of a tectonic shift in electoral support after Indonesia failed to host the U-20 World Cup. In the simulation of the top three presidential candidates, Ganjar Pranowo experienced a significant decline from 35% in February to 26.9%, while Prabowo's electability increased from 26.7% to 30.3%, while Anies remained relatively unchanged at around 25%.¹⁷ Ganjar Pranowo's statement of opposition of the Israeli national team's presence was publicly perceived as the main culprit behind the cancellation by FIFA of the U-20 Football World Cup to be hosted in Indonesia. Some Jokowi-satisfied voters shifted their support to Prabowo because Ganjar was considered responsible for the failure of the U-20 World Cup, which could have become a legacy of Jokowi's government.

Regardless of Prabowo's recent momentum after Ganjar's blunder, the current polling still shows that no presidential candidate can win the Presidency outright in one round (winning 50% plus 1 vote). But the momentum remains in Prabowo's hands. If Anies does not advance to the second round, his supporters will back Prabowo. If Ganjar were to lose in the first round, his supporters would also favour Prabowo over Anies. If Prabowo fails, Ganjar and Anies will try to woo his support as the kingmaker in the second-round Presidential run-off. The endorsement of Jokowi has made Prabowo's imminent third-time presidential run competitive once more.

ENDNOTES

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- ⁹ Marcus Mietzner and Burhanuddin Muhtadi, “Explaining the 2016 Islamist mobilisation in Indonesia: Religious intolerance, militant groups and the politics of accommodation,” *Asian Studies Review*, Volume 42 (3), 2018.
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- ¹¹ INDIKATOR, “Dinamika Elektoral Capres dan Cawapres Pilihan Publik dalam Dua Surnas Terbaru,” 26 March 2023, <https://indikator.co.id/rilis-indikator-26-maret-2023/>
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- ¹⁶ INDIKATOR, “Dinamika Elektoral Capres dan Cawapres Pilihan Publik dalam Dua Surnas Terbaru,” p. 53.
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