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Who will be Indonesian President in 2014?

By Maxwell Lane (Guest Writer)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Presidential candidates in Indonesia have to be nominated by a political party (or combination of parties) that have either won 20% of the national vote in the parliamentary elections or control 25% of the seats in the House of Representatives (DPR). Some parties have already made clear choices.

- An analysis of candidate choice must however take into consideration the steady alienation of the majority of the population from existing political processes and actors.

- Voter abstention (*golput*) has steadily increased for both national and local elections since the 1999 elections. This reflects the alienation of the masses from the system and is reinforced by declining support for all of the political parties. The most popular party in the polls, the PDIP, is scoring only 20% and all other parties are scoring 12% and below.

- It is increasingly possible that the 2014 elections will take the form of a contest between two modes of political campaigning: an appeal to the charisma of power (*pejabatism*), and the deliberate rejection of this previous mode.

INTRODUCTION

The usual path to become a presidential candidate in Indonesia is to be nominated by a political party or combination of parties that have either won 20% of the national vote in the parliamentary elections or control 25% of the seats in the House of Representatives (DPR). Some parties already have made clear choices: Golkar (Party of Functional Groups) has nominated ex-Suharto loyalist and tycoon Aburizal Bakrie (although former vice-president Yusuf Kalla still lurks in the wings as a possible challenger); Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement Party) decided on ex-Suharto general and semi-tycoon Prabowo Subianto; Hanura (People's Conscience Party) nominated ex-Suharto general Wiranto; and Nasdem (National Democrat Party) chose ex-Suharto loyalist and tycoon Surya Palo. The lead party in the ruling coalition, the Democrat Party (PD), has not yet decided on its candidate although it has now moved to bring former General Pramono Edhie Wibowo, into the leadership.

The party that does have a chance of winning 20% of the popular vote is the PDIP (Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle), but it has also yet to determine a candidate. In the past, it has nominated Megawati Sukarnoputri. There is also a possibility that the PDIP could nominate the current governor of Jakarta, the popular Joko Widodo.

However, an analysis of candidate choice must take into consideration the steady alienation of the majority of the population from existing political processes and actors.

"REFORMASI" AND POLITICAL ALIENATION

During the 1990s, peaking in 1997-1998, a movement developed demanding *reformasi* whose main demands were the departure of President Suharto, withdrawal of the army from politics, liberalization of repressive political laws, and the ending of KKN (Corruption, Collusion and Nepotism). The sentiment of this movement reflected a desire for a shift away from an authoritarian system which defended a self-seeking elite to a political system where the *rakyat* (the common people) would be listened to and its interests promoted over that of the elite. It was a movement strong enough to dislodge an authoritarian leader defended by the military.

By 1999, elections were held under a liberal election law. The movement had emerged after almost 30 years of deep authoritarian rule built upon a period of extreme repression and political engineering from 1965 to 1971. It was thus unable to build on any pre-existing organizations, such as trade unions, political groups or popular associations. Perhaps even more important to note is that, by the 1990s, all political traditions that may have provided an ideological basis for opposition—such as liberalism, liberal democracy, social democracy, socialism, and communism—had been eliminated.

This meant that the movement was unable to create a solid infrastructure of its own. Nor did it have time to develop authoritative leadership. During 1997 and 1998, political figures who had been either closely associated with the New Order[1] or who had been acquiescing marginal participants, such as Megawati Sukarnoputri (a silent M.P. under Suharto) and Amien Rais, a member of the Suharto-headed Indonesian Islam Intellectuals Association (ICMI), were able to piggy-back on the movement to win a national profile.

The consequence has been that the *reformasi* movement did not develop the structure to contest power with the various components of the New Order. Suharto, his family and his closest political allies had their power terminated, but all the other components of the system he established still dominated the scene. The movement's *temporary* character meant that no section of society that was a part of the movement, or sympathetic to it, was able to organize itself sufficiently to become a serious political institution.

The collapse of authoritarian rule also quickly revealed the structure of the broader ruling class that had developed during the New Order period. It comprised a small number of ex-crony tycoons, a few scores of middle level tycoons based in Jakarta, Surabaya, Makassar and Medan, and thousands of smaller capitalists operating at the *kabupaten* (district) or provincial level, sometimes connected to the civil service via family ties. The tycoons quickly entered into competition with each other. Two even established their own political parties.[2] Their party from the New Order era, Golkar, weakened rapidly. With no united national tycoon bloc (and no *reformasi* bloc either), the elite at the local level, on all islands, including Java, quickly supported calls for decentralization of budgetary power.

Almost ten years of high prices in commodities such as coal and palm oil, had financed widespread corruption among these elites, and facilitated a rapid expansion of a middle class with high levels of disposable income. This class now makes up perhaps 10% of the population. However, the vast majority of the working population lives on less than $5 per day, many on less than $2. According to the Indonesian Bureau of Statistics, both agricultural and non-agricultural workers earning less than $200 per month have experienced a decline in real wages over recent years. The growth of the middle class is something the government has proclaimed as a measure of its success. However, the visibility of its high levels of consumption, haughty behavior and the high profile of corruption cases have exacerbated the sense of alienation among the remaining 90%.

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1 The "New Order" was coined by the second Indonesian President Suharto as he came to power in 1966, to contrast his rule from that of his predecessor, Sukarno.

2 They include Surya Palo, who formed Nasdem, and Prabowo Subianto, who formed Gerindra. Both had previously vied for leadership of Golkar. Media tycoon Hary Tanoesoedibjo, who had been with Nasdem, has now switched to Wiranto's Hanura party, which has announced a Wiranto-Hary Tanoe pairing for the President-Vice-President candidacy.

POLITICAL MANIFESTATION OF ALIENATION

Voter participation for the 1999 elections was high at almost 90%. Since then, for both national and local elections, voter abstention (known as *golput*) has steadily increased. The term *golput* emerged in the 1990s when students protested against Suharto with a call to boycott the elections. The *golput* numbers, including those who do not register as voters and those who have registered but do not vote or intentionally spoil their votes, now regularly reach between 40-50%. Even in the 2012 elections, the *golput* figure was almost 40% for the governor of Jakarta where "popular" former Mayor of Solo, Joko Widodo, stood. This reflects the alienation of the masses from the system and is reinforced by declining support for all of the political parties. Only the very new parties increased their vote to below 5% from their zero starting point. In 1999, PDIP scored 33.74% of the vote. By 2009, this had fallen to 14.03%. Most polls now put the PDIP at a higher figure of around 20%, but this is still way below its 1999 support rate. GOLKAR has gone from 22.4% in 1999 to 14.45% in 2009 and polls now put it around 12%.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democrat Party (PD) scored 7.45% in 2004, which increased to 20.85% in 2009, based on the popularity of its leader. However, following a series of corruption scandals among its leadership, the PD is now scoring less than 10%. Another newer party, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), scored 7.34% in 2004 and about the same (7.88%) in 2009. However, it has also been hit by high level corruption and sex scandals and is facing declining approval ratings.

To put it bluntly, Indonesia is now a country where the most popular party in the polls, the PDIP, is scoring only 20% and all other parties are scoring 12% and below.

JOKO WIDODO AND THE CONTRADICTIONS OF ALIENATION

Direct elections were introduced for the position of President and Vice-President at the national level in 2004. Previously these were elected by the Peoples' Consultative Assembly (MPR). Additionally, reflecting the influence of the newly liberated (from centralized crony rule) local bourgeoisie, direct elections were introduced for the positions of governor, *bupati* and mayor. These are in addition to the five yearly elections for national, provincial and local parliaments.

This shift to extensive electoral activity is a break with the political culture of the previous decades. Rather than the charisma or "awe" of power and authority associated with a dominant state official (*pejabat*), a "revolutionary" new principle is introduced: a politician must be popular, whatever the basis for that popularity. The first response of parties was to recruit television or religious celebrities, although this does not seem to have stopped the decline in their support.

There are now two modes of political campaigning. One is based on an appeal to the charisma of power and authority, *pejabat*ism, a mode inherited from the previous era. The other is based on the deliberate rejection of this mode. The most well-known representative of the new mode is the current governor of Jakarta, Joko Widodo. As the PDIP candidate for mayor of Solo in 2004, he won with the usual 30 plus per cent. But in 2009 he won the election with 91% of the votes. In Jakarta, in 2012, he won a very high 43% in the first round against five other candidates, including the incumbent Fauzi Bowo, who was backed by President Yudhoyono and his coalition. Bowo scored 33%. Voter abstention was however still almost 40%.

Unlike all other officials, Joko Widodo had no pictures of himself placed anywhere in public. He disarmed the village militia and negotiated directly with squatters and street peddlers. He seldom wore uniforms and dressed casually (often in a checked short-sleeve shirt, for example). He met with demonstrators, rather than dispersed them. He was appealing to the *reformasi* sentiment for the *rakyat* (the common people) to be listened to. He also implemented in Solo what can be described as social safety net policies, somewhat increasing expenditure on health, education and small scale *kampung* (village) infrastructural development. He was able to do this during his eight-year tenure by reallocating some budget items, but, more crucially, as a result of receiving large increases of revenue from the national government. His budget in his final year was 400% above what it was when he first became mayor. This 400% increase reflects a 400% increase in national government revenue between 2004 and 2013 (mainly a result of high coal prices).

DYNAMICS OF THE 2014 ELECTIONS

In this situation, it is increasingly possible that the coming elections will take the form of a contest between these two modes of politics and the interests they are connected with at this stage.

The PDIP's "revival" from 14% in 2009 to 20% in current polling is a result of it being seen as being separate from the establishment and having some of the populist gloss of figures like Widodo rubbing off onto it. Other figures like Tri Rismaharini, mayor of Surabaya, and PDIP Members of Parliament like Rieke Pitaloka and Ribka Tjiptaning, who exhibit a maverick social democratic style, have also helped. Pitaloka, especially, played a leading role in a campaign for a Social Insurance Law, which was passed in Parliament in 2011. Megawati has also used this period to talk about the ideological reorientation of the party and regeneration of cadres.

Megawati may try to adopt some of Widodo's methods as a presidential candidate, take Widodo on board as a Vice-Presidential candidate, or she could decline to be nominated and support Widodo as presidential candidate instead. On May 28, Megawati's daughter, Puan Maharani, chairperson of the PDIP Central Leadership

Council, indicated that the party had certainly not ruled out Widodo being its nominee, while urging him to maintain a focus on his current task as Jakarta governor.[3] Widodo in the meantime has changed his earlier public assurance that he would stay governor in Jakarta; and now suggests that whether or not he runs for President is "up to Ibu Mega."[4]

On June 27, the Indonesian Academy of Sciences (LIPI) issued survey results naming Widodo as the most electable presidential candidate with a 22% support rate. The other candidates rated as follows: Prabowo Subianto at 14.2%, Aburizal Bakrie at 9.4%; Megawati Soekarnoputri at 9.3%, Jusuf Kalla at 4.2%, and a few others scoring below 2%.

An early decision to nominate Widodo may be seen as too sudden an abandonment of his Jakarta responsibilities. This could backfire if he is seen as an ambitious *pejabat*. The shift to a new basis for popularity requires having policy achievements. Therefore, Widodo will need to be seen as making progress before the PDIP announces a decision. Moreover, his honeymoon period as governor may already be over, since he has angered the trade union movement by approving hundreds of companies' requests to postpone the implementation of the recently instituted minimum wage.[5] The PDIP may also be postponing its decision till it becomes clearer who its main challenger may be.

Meanwhile, Yudhoyono's PD has been in crisis mode following a series of corruption scandals at its top levels. While Yudhoyono's son and wife have been touted as possible presidential candidates, it seems that such a vulgar dynastical path may be difficult to follow through in the light of the scandals. Without other candidates of stature, former Chief of Staff of the Army (2011-13), Pramono Edhie Wibowo, who was made a member of the Board of Governors in June, is a possible candidate, although nominating him would have to be a very late move that by no means guarantees success.

Another former general who has declared his candidacy is Prabowo Subianto of GERINDRA. Subianto is more controversial and more strongly associated with the New Order's reputation for repression. He played an active role in 1997 and 1998 in trying to preserve the Suharto government in the face of popular opposition, even to the extent of organizing the kidnapping of student activists. He was eventually dismissed from the Army for these actions. Subianto's difficulty is that Gerindra is also unlikely, based on present indications, to win more than 20% of the popular vote. In 2009, Gerindra only received 4.4% of the popular vote, while recent polls suggest that its support rating is at 11%. Subianto's profile is based more on a perceived

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3 http://us.politik.news.viva.co.id/news/read/416449-puan--pdip-pertimbangkan-usung-jokowi-jadi-capres, 28 May, 2013.

4 http://www.merdeka.com/politik/jokowi-soal-capres-tanya-ibu-mega.html

5 http://megapolitan.kompas.com/read/2013/04/22/16054279/Somasi.Tak.Ditanggapi.Buruh.Gugat.Jokowi, April 2013.

comparison, in some segments of the electorate, with Yudhoyono, where the latter is seen to be without combat experience and to be indecisive, while the former is seen as a decisive combat officer. However, this niche will not come into play since Subianto will not be facing Yudhoyono in the 2014 election.

In the 2004 election, Subianto stood as Vice-President in a Megawati-Subianto team. Could this happen again? Gerindra's parliamentary record has seen it align more frequently with the ruling coalition than with the PDIP. Even in June this year when Gerindra voted against fuel price increases, along with the PDIP (and Hanura and PKS), it did so in a last minute switch. Gerindra and Prabowo used rhetoric that is similar to those of the PDIP on the "peoples' economics" and so on, but it has also spoken out *against* wage rises and labour demonstrations[6] while the PDIP has associated itself *with* such demands.

More fundamentally, Subianto and Gerindra clearly are of the old mode of politcs. This is reflected in Gerindra's preference for ending local elections and its support for retaining prison sentences for "insulting" public officials.[7]

Other potential candidates are Golkar's Bakrie or Kalla and Nasdem's Surya Palo. Their status as tycoons will make them weak candidates against Widodo or a Megawati-Widodo pairing, although Kalla's status as a tycoon is less emphasized. All these parties will not differ greatly in voter support, which will be weaker than 20%. Which ones will have the upper hand in negotiations is difficult to predict at this stage.

LIMITATIONS OF THE NEW DYNAMICS

The "new politics", however, has a shallowness to it, even if the social contradictions that have facilitated its emergence are real. It will also be very difficult to retreat from elections (although Subianto has raised the idea of ending direct elections at the local level). Nor will the context change, namely, high levels of corruption among a self-interested elite, a growing middle class with ostentatious levels of corruption and declining real wages and conditions of 180 million rural and urban workers.

Widodo's and the PDIP's "populism", if it can be called that, most likely is a transitional phenomenon. Its emergence and rise heighten expectations and legitimize appeals to the common people, the mass of the poor. Widodo's appeal to the common people is explicitly aimed at encouraging them not to organize or mobilize. Widodo has not tried to build or strengthen the PDIP or any other organization as a vehicle for organisation and mobilization. His approach is primarily electoral, aimed at mobilizing votes rather than movements.

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6 *http://www.asia-pacific-solidarity.net/southeastasia/indonesia/indoleft/2012/detik_prabowocriticiseswork-ers_181212.htm*

7 *http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/03/27/gerindra-wants-president-s-critics-jailed.html*

The ultimate vote orientation in Widodo's politics can give it a very opportunistic character. This was reflected in the PDIP's and Widodo's alliance with Gerindra and Subianto for the Jakarta gubernatorial election, with Widodo running with a Gerindra member as deputy governor.

A clear possibility is that the existence of rival modes of politics will be reflected in a contest between the PDIP, with Widodo involved, even as presidential candidate, and a coalition that will select a candidate representing firmness and authority, such as former military figures (Wibowo or Subianto, for example). However, the shallowness and opportunism of the "populist" alternative mean that it is not impossible to envisage an alliance composing both modes of politics, such as another PDIP-Gerindra coalition in the form of a Megawati-Subianto or Widodo-Subianto candidature. Gerindra, however, recently stated that it would support Widodo for the presidential election in 2019 but not in 2014.[8] Under this cloud of uncertainty, perhaps the most certain thing is that the likely "winner" of the election will be *golput*. The political gap between *reformasi* sentiment/aspirations and what the system is offering will not be bridged by 2014.

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8 http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2013/05/19/2247518, May 19, 2013

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