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Indonesian Presidential Election Forcing Rejuvenation of Parties

By Ulla Fionna

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- With Indonesian elections just six months away, speculation is mounting on who will become the next directly-elected president. Direct local elections and the current presidential electoral system have political parties engaging in strategic selection of their presidential candidates.
- Partai Demokrat's (PD) heavy reliance on the pulling power of President Yudhoyono has limited its capacity to develop internal cadres. The party has now held a national convention to screen a list of candidates. The strongest of these is the current president's brother-in-law, demonstrating that the party is under the strong grip of traditional party authority and dynastic politics.
- Although Megawati Sukarnoputri also exerts strong control over Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP), the party currently houses a number of popular local leaders, suggesting that a process of regeneration is in place and that the party has managed to nurture local candidates for national leadership. While the party has been delaying the announcement of an official candidate for the presidential race, there are strong signs that Jakarta governor Joko Widodo is the favourite for the position.

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INTRODUCTION

With Indonesian elections about six months away, speculation is mounting about who will be running to become the next directly-elected president. Which *sosok* (figure) will be chosen to represent the respective parties will be a crucial matter and will strongly influence how the presidential campaign is managed. Parties need therefore to choose their potential candidate very strategically.

Be that as it may, many parties are unable to escape the grip of traditional party authority or dynastic politics. These are either forced to nominate 'old faces' or run the risk of not fielding a credible internal candidate. The nomination of veterans such as Aburizal Bakrie (Partai Golkar/Golkar Party), Wiranto (Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat/People's Conscience Party), Prabowo Subianto (Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya/Great Indonesia Movement Party), and the lack of suitable candidates in Partai Demokrat (PD, Democratic Party) are evidence of this succession problem. Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP, Indonesian Democratic Party Struggle), on the other hand, has developed an alternative system of candidate selection through nurturing local candidates for national leadership.

By all accounts, the battle among the parties to present the most credible presidential candidate will be uncompromising. This essay analyses the strategies of two major parties in their bid to win the popular vote.

PD'S NATIONAL CONVENTION: THE SEARCH FOR SUCCESSOR

PD is by most accounts a success story. It was built as a political vehicle as late as in 2001 to carry Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in his bid for presidency in the 2004 elections. The party has since then been riding on his success. After a rushed set-up, Yudhoyono's meteoric rise in popularity propelled PD to become the fourth largest political party in 2004 with 7.04% of the votes, behind Partai Golkar (Golkar Party), PDIP, and Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, United Development Party). The party's strength grew further in the 2009 elections. It secured more than 20% of the votes and tripled its number of seats in the legislature from 55 seats in 2004 to 148 seats.

Arguably, Yudhoyono's popularity single-handedly carried his party in the last two elections. However, relying too much on one *sosok* has its consequences. Since the landslide victory in 2009, it appears that Yudhoyono has been losing his grip over the party with intensifying rivalry developing between his supporters and loyalists of Anas Urbaningrum who became party chairman the following year. Yudhoyono countered Anas' victory by establishing the Majelis Tinggi (High Assembly, MT) and tasked it with all strategic decisions. Anas' power diminished after he allegedly took a bribe

in relation to the construction of the Hambalang sports centre project¹. Although he resigned, the party's public standing took a heavy beating from corruption scandals which also included criminal charges levied on other PD officials: Muhammad Nazaruddin (former party treasurer), Angelina Sondakh (former secretary general), and Andi Mallarangeng (former Sports and Youth Minister).

As Yudhoyono's second term comes to an end, PD is searching for a successor. The President has consulted a few of his trusted party leaders, and has arranged a party convention for nominees who have been shortlisted to become its presidential candidate. Modified from the American party convention, PD has made a list of internal candidates, and another for external candidates. Although technically anyone can register to be included as candidate, it is really the Komite Konvensi Pencalonan Presiden (Committee of Convention for Presidential Candidates)—headed by Yudhoyono and made up of public and party officials—who eventually decides who goes onto the list. The individuals who were considered included former vice-president Jusuf Kalla of Golkar Party, and former Constitutional Court chief justice Mahfud MD. However both of them have declined PD's invitation to join the convention.

Yudhoyono is said to be uneasy about the possible inclusion of his wife, Kristiani Herawati or 'Bu Ani' as she is affectionately called, and her brother's name in the list. Although his wife's name was eventually dropped, her brother—former army general Pramono Edhi Wibowo (whose familial connection made him a sort of heir apparent)—is now one of the strongest candidates from within the party. The other ten candidates who have been invited to join the convention, who have been interviewed, and who have made it to the final list are: Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) member Ali Masykur Musa; Paramadina University' Rector Anies Baswedan; State-Owned Enterprises Minister Dahlan Iskan; Indonesian Ambassador to the US Dino Patti Djalal; former Indonesian Military (TNI) commander Endriartono Sutarto; Trade Minister Gita Wirjawan; Regional Representatives Council (DPD) Speaker Irman Gusman; House Commission I member Hayono Isman; speaker of the People's Representative Council and PD official Marzuki Alie; and North Sulawesi Governor Sinyo Harry Sarundajang.

These candidates have started their political campaigns. They will subsequently participate in a series of public debates scheduled from January to May 2014 which will focus on their mission, vision, programme, and problem-solving ideas. And unlike the US system where voters directly cast their ballots, the committee will contract a reputable and independent pollster to poll and decide on the final candidate. The party has voiced its confidence on this new process and has positioned it as a breakthrough in giving equal chance to the candidates in their campaign effort. It has also sought to assure voters that the final decision will be transparent with the survey being conducted by credible polling agencies.

¹ Anas is presently under house arrest and is yet to be tried. He has managed to declare a new mass organisation called Indonesian Movement Association/Perhimpunan Pergerakan Indonesia.

In any case, it is in PD's interest to pick the best candidate to pit against candidates from the other parties.

A CRYPTIC ENDORSEMENT OF JOKOWI?

As a successor to Sukarno's Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian Nationalist Party) and Partai Demokrasi Indonesia (PDI, Indonesian Democratic Party), PDIP has always been a major party in Indonesia. Headed by Megawati Sukarnoputri—the country's former president (2001-2004) and Sukarno's daughter—PDIP has grown to become a strong opposition party since 2004. While other major parties such as Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party) and PD have been struggling to boost their electability, PDIP has managed to stay ahead in the polls. A survey done in late August by Kompas put PDIP in the lead with 23.6 per cent; and Forum Akademisi Informasi Teknologi even gave PDIP 34 per cent – surpassing the threshold to nominate presidential candidate without coalition.²

Legal cases being expedited against members of other parties and the tendency for a candidate's popularity to affect voting behaviour have certainly worked in favour of PDIP who counts Indonesia's man-of-the-moment among their ranks—Jakarta governor Joko Widodo, known locally as Jokowi. Garnering an average of more than 20 per cent in most polls since early 2013, his candidacy has been the subject of much speculation.

Jokowi certainly fits the profile of a candidate that PDIP would endorse and put forth for election: he is a Javanese and already possessed local leadership experience as mayor of Solo before becoming Jakarta's number one man. While the party has been delaying the announcement of an official candidate for the presidential race, there are strong signs that Jokowi is tipped for the position. For instance, he was given the symbolic role of reciting *Dedication of Life*—a speech which was first written and read by Sukarno in 1966 when he was in office—at the party's National Working Meeting in September at which electoral strategies and national leadership issues were discussed. He has also been deployed by Megawati to draw support for other PDIP candidates in other localities, and he usually becomes the primary attraction in these events.

Paving the way for a regeneration of party leadership, Megawati herself has reiterated that she would not compete in the race. Referring to her previous losses, including a crushing defeat in the 2009 poll when she captured about a quarter of the votes compared to more than 60 per cent for Yudhoyono, she identified herself

² Bestian Nainggolan, "Survei Kompas: Sosok Selamatkan Partai", *Kompas*, 27 August 2013; Elvan Dany Sutrisno, "Jika Capreskan Jokowi, PDIP Tak Perlu Koalisi," *detiknews*, 27 August 2013. The threshold to nominate presidential candidate without coalition is 20% of seats in the People's Representative Council (DPR, Dewan Permusyawaratan Rakyat), or 25% of total votes.

as a 'grandmother who has lost three times before' and does not stand a chance.³ PDIP's internal polls in its branches in July have also indicated strong support of 60 per cent for Jokowi compared to 30 per cent for Megawati. However, conservative members within the party prefer Megawati to run again, while other factions have suggested that Jokowi should pair up with Puan Maharani (Megawati's daughter and the Chair of PDIP Fraction in People's Representative Council) or with a candidate from other party/-ies.⁴

Whichever the scenario PDIP will eventually choose, the party has set a high vote target of 27.02 per cent for the 2014 elections. And the voters' demand seems already clear: Jokowi for president. Opinion polls conducted by Forum Akademisi Informasi Teknologi indicated that—if he runs—PDIP will not only emerge the big winner, but there will also be less non-voters (*golongan putih/golput*). Around 25.5 per cent of voters have indicated that they will not vote if Jokowi does not run, while the figure drops to 19.7 per cent if Jokowi does.⁵ In any case, Jokowi's popularity means that Megawati is likely to give way to him.

ESCAPING THE DYNASTIC TRAP

Direct local elections and the current system of presidential appointment have meant that parties have to engage in strategic selection of their presidential candidates. However, credible and/or popular candidates are hard to find. The comparative analysis of PD and PDIP demonstrates this dilemma: while PD's heavy reliance on the pulling power of Yudhoyono has limited its capacity to develop internal cadres, PDIP—although similarly also reliant on Megawati's leadership—has managed to nurture local candidates for national leadership.

Yudhoyono has continued to carve out his personal influence by accumulating and exerting power as the chairman of PD's Dewan Pembina (Advisory Council). In addition, his wife, son, nephew, and brothers-in-law occupy various leadership positions within the party. PD's difficulty in developing internal cadres is compounded by the fact that its strongest presidential candidate is also Yudhoyono's brother-in-law, retired military general Pramono Edhi Wibowo. Pramono was provided with a recruitment short-cut, by virtue of his appointment as a member of the Advisory Council merely four days after joining the party, and then named as one of the 11 candidates for the party convention. These developments point towards PD's desperation especially as the popularity rate of all its 11 candidates is negligible, according to polls. To make matters worse, Pramono's candidacy also serves as further evidence of the dynastic and colluded politics in the party. It is also noteworthy that PD invited

³ Seto Wardhana, "Restu Mantan untuk Sang Calon", *Tempo*, 11 August 2013, p. 35.

⁴ "Di Panggung Punggung Partai Banteng", *Tempo*, 15 September 2013, pp. 37-38.

⁵ Elvan Dany Sutrisno, "Jika Capreskan Jokowi, PDIP Tak Perlu Koalisi," *detiknews*, 27 August 2013.

Jokowi, perhaps another sign of its desperation, as potential candidate for the national convention – an invitation that the PDIP loyalist declined.

In contrast, although Megawati also has the last say in PDIP, the party has successfully housed a number of candidates that are attracting a lot of voter attention. And although staying in opposition has given the party limited access to state budgets, this also means that it has had fewer opportunities to engage in corrupt practices which have resulted in a much better and cleaner image for the party.⁶ At the same time, Megawati demonstrates a much more open mind on candidacy in contrast to Yudhoyono. Although her daughter Puan Maharani is also a strong party candidate for presidency, Megawati has been keeping an eye on other rising candidates. Puan, who chairs the PDIP faction at the House of Representatives, credits the rise of Jokowi as evidence of party regeneration. She claims that regeneration was initiated ten years ago within the party, with the party monitoring local leaders for promotion to higher levels in the party's administration.⁷ While commentaries suggest that grassroots recruitment in PDIP may not be a defining feature of the party's succession strategy,⁸ Puan's claim supports evidence of a successful monitoring mechanism that serves to identify promising local leaders.

Aside from Jokowi, PDIP is building up promising political careers for several other local leaders in Indonesia, such as Ganjar Pranowo (Central Java governor) and Rustriningsih (former deputy governor of Central Java). The party has even laid claims to being behind the rise of Surabaya mayor Tri Rismaharini. The new breed of PDIP cadres demonstrates that Indonesian parties are capable of nurturing their own file-and-rank members without relying on dynastic politics. They have also boosted party reputation by projecting a cleaner image, which is a strong draw for voters who are fed up with the numerous corruption scandals emanating from the country's political elite.

If PDIP manages to keep this momentum up and achieve a majority win in the 2014 general elections, the party will have a strong position entering the presidential elections. However, if elected into government, they will need to live up to voters' expectations of cleanliness – which is a different matter altogether.

⁶ This is the case particularly compared to PD, which after the arrests of multiple cadres, is now perceived by as much as 51% of survey respondents as the most corrupt.

⁷ Andi Muttya Keteng, "Jokowi Nyapres, Regenerasi PDIP Sukses?", *Liputan 6.com*, 6 September 2013.

⁸ For example Ulla Fionna, *The Institutionalisation of Political Parties in Post-authoritarian Indonesia: From the Grassroots Up*, (Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 2013).

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