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## **Indonesia's 2014 Legislative Elections: The Dilemmas of "Elektabilitas" Politics**

*By Max Lane*

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The continuing trend of low turnout of voters alongside the abysmally low votes for even the leading parties reveal again that alienation of the mass of the voting public from the political parties is growing steadily.
- The focus in the lead-up to the elections has been on the electability of candidates, rather than policy issues or questions of direction for the country. This reflects the reality that none of the parties is proposing any dramatic shift away from current socio-economic policy parameters, such that there are no serious policy differences to debate.
- The three main contenders for the presidency – Joko Widodo, Prabowo Subianto and Aburizal Bakrie – have packaged their campaigns around styles of communication and governance. However, it is also notable that Prabowo's militarist style may have more serious implications for the substance of governance.

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- The results for the PDIP were much lower than expected, generating discussion on the absence of a “Jokowi effect”. This can be best understood in the light of the shallowness of Widodo’s “populism” and the ambivalence of the hope that it has inspired. The resulting absence of political leadership also meant that the PDIP had no central campaigning thrust.
- Widodo will need to use his personal popularity, which is higher than the PDIP’s, to help him win big in the July presidential election. This may compensate for the PDIP’s small parliamentary base and improve the party’s and Widodo’s bargaining position. Given the alienation between the electorate and political parties, this will require a campaign that offers more than an emphasis on style of communication.

## INTRODUCTION

On April 9, 2014, around 200,000 people stood for election to 20,257 seats in the Regional and Provincial Legislative Councils (DPRD), the House of Representatives (DPR) and the Regional Representatives Council (DPD). Of these, 6,607 candidates from 12 parties competed for the 560 seats in the DPR, while the remainder ran for the 132 seats in the DPD, the 2,137 provincial seats and the 17,560 regional seats. There are 1,344 new seats, mostly in the regional parliaments and 123 in provincial parliaments.

One week after the elections, more and more reports have surfaced of cheating during vote counting. Most of the reports are about switching counting of ballot papers for one candidate to another for money. This is possible with the bribery of election officials. Initially, complaints came from candidates who had been unable to mobilise enough supporters to be scrutineers at the very large number of voting centres in each constituency. Their ballot papers were especially vulnerable. If those who lost votes due to cheating can document this, there may be a round of court cases disputing votes in different constituencies. It is difficult to know the extent of cheating at this time, but it is unlikely to change the overall picture presented by the election results.

## WHAT HAVE THE ELECTIONS REVEALED?

Overall, the elections have confirmed the alienation between the mass of the population and the existing parties.

### *GOLPUT the winner*

Most election analysts are confirming a formal absentee voter rate (GOLPUT) at 34%, up from 29% in the 2009 elections.<sup>1</sup> This only includes the percentage of registered voters who did not vote. It does not include people who are eligible to register to vote but did not. Nor does it include spoilt votes.<sup>2</sup> It is probable that the real absentee vote is at least 40%, i.e., at most only 60% of the population voted.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.iberita.com/25005/hasil-quick-count-pemilu-lsi-menyatakan-angka-golput-kalahkan-perolehan-suara-pdip> The 34% figure appears to be a consensus so far among commentators.

<sup>2</sup> While no doubt small in number a new phenomenon has been people writing political slogans on their ballot papers. Some of these have appeared in the social media with voters using their mobile phones to photograph them, or other people photographing them when they are held up for the public to see in the counting process. Slogans have included: "Betrayers all of them", and "People representatives, or conglomerates representatives". One photograph was widely circulated with election officials holding up a ballot paper with a big hammer and sickle drawn on it.

There was a massive television advertising campaign, backed also by the party leaders, urging people not to “GOLPUT”. On Election Day, television hosts as well as politicians were still confident that there would be a drop in GOLPUT. Moreover, there was the assumed impact of the presidential candidature of Joko Widodo, namely, that his popularity would *automatically* result in a higher voter turnout. This assessment failed to take into account the shallowness of Widodo’s populism.<sup>3</sup>

Absentee voting either as a form of protest or a manifestation of lack of interest in the existing parties has a long history. The word GOLPUT, an acronym of Golongan Putih (White Group), goes back to 1971 and the first protests against electoral manipulation. The steady upward trend in GOLPUT was what required an intense *Don’t GOLPUT* campaign, but to no significant avail.

In fact, during 2013 there were elections for regional and provincial heads in nine different provinces, with all candidates being associated with the same parties standing in April. GOLPUT non-voting ranged from highs of 51% in North Sumatra, 49% in Central Java and 44% in Bandung, to a best case scenario of 25% in Bali. Others hovered around 35-37%.<sup>4</sup> Most of the private polling was indicating 60% distrust in all parties.<sup>5</sup>

The one apparent exception to the limited impact of the “Jokowi effect” is the GOLPUT and PDIP vote in Solo city, where Widodo had been mayor between 2005 and 2012. PDIP won 56% of the votes. There, GOLPUT was down to 26%. 56% is a big increase on PDIP’s 2009 vote of 32%, but considerably lower than Widodo’s own remarkable 91% vote share when he stood for a second term as mayor in 2010. It was winning that 91% vote share that boosted his standing as a national figure and gave him the opportunity to make a bid for the governorship of Jakarta and eventually win it. The PDIP also did better in Jakarta with 30% of the vote, but there may be more factors at play than a simple “Jokowi effect”.

### *Low party votes*

No party received a vote share that allowed it to say that it was a nationally popular party. PDIP is now often exaggeratingly called the “winner”. The PDIP “won” with just under 20% of the vote, which – given that only 60% of the eligible population voted – represented a mere 12% of eligible voters.<sup>6</sup> This is hardly a win and actually gives the PDIP no significant head-start over the “runners-up”, Golkar at 15% (i.e. 9% of eligible voters) and GERINDRA at 11% (i.e. 6.6% of eligible voters). All of the

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<sup>3</sup> On the shallowness of Widodo’s populism, see Max Lane, “Who will be Indonesian President in 2014?”, *ISEAS Perspective*, 18 July, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> “Daftar Persentase Pemilih Dalam Beberapa Pilkada Terakhir di Indonesia,” <http://www.rumahpemilu.org/in/read/2186/Daftar-Persentase-Pemilih-Dalam-Beberapa-Pilkada-Terakhir-di-Indonesia>.

<sup>5</sup> See [http://www.indikator.co.id/uploads/20130723190925.23\\_Juli\\_2013\\_Rilis\\_INDIKATOR.pdf](http://www.indikator.co.id/uploads/20130723190925.23_Juli_2013_Rilis_INDIKATOR.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> For the Quick Count results currently available, see: <http://indonesiasatu.kompas.com/quickcount>

other 9 parties scored even less support.<sup>7</sup> The only thing which allows the PDIP to behave as an actual winner is that its presidential candidate, Widodo, is scoring the highest in all the polls.

The PDIP was clearly shocked by its low vote share.<sup>8</sup> Although it has increased from 14% in 2009, throughout 2013 it was scoring at least 20% and had climbed above that in opinion polls since the announcement of Widodo as its presidential candidate on March 14.<sup>9</sup> On the afternoon of Election Day, appearing on Metro TV, Ganjar Pranowo, PDIP figure and Governor of Central Java, was still insisting that the PDIP would get 27% of the vote share. The PDIP was assuming that with at least 25% of the vote share, it would not need to form a coalition with any other party to formally nominate Widodo in May. The failure to get anywhere near 25% of the vote share has forced the PDIP to rapidly seek a partner to nominate Widodo. PDIP and Widodo quickly secured the support of tycoon and former GOLKAR heavyweight but now founder and chairperson of the Nasional Demokrat (NasDem), Surya Paloh. Nasdem received around 6.8% of the votes, so a PDIP-Nasdem coalition was just enough to meet the 25% criterion and get Widodo nominated as a presidential candidate.

The low vote that the PDIP received despite Widodo's popularity itself must be read as another manifestation of the alienation of the mass of the people from the parties. This picture is reinforced by the fact that all of the parties received such low votes. While the PDIP found that its celebrity candidate could not stir voters into action, neither did any of those parties blessed with billionaire tycoons as backers and big budgets (GOLKAR, GERINDRA, NASDEM, HANURA) do any better. Islamic parties, with the benefit of access to the huge network of mosques, did not show impressive results either.

There was also little visible spontaneous participation in campaign activities. In the rallies and motorcades that I witnessed in Central Java and Jakarta, it was clear that only paid-up party supporters were involved. Television and social media photographs of campaign activities showed crowds that were inevitably all dressed in party colours.

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<sup>7</sup> For a useful survey of the all the parties see Ulla Fionna and Alexander Arifianto, "Getting to know the Contestants of the 2014 Indonesian Parliamentary Elections", *ISEAS Perspective*, 10 March, 2014. [http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2014\\_14-Contestants\\_2014\\_Indonesian\\_Parliamentary\\_Elections.pdf](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS_Perspective_2014_14-Contestants_2014_Indonesian_Parliamentary_Elections.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.straitstimes.com/news/asia/south-east-asia/story/jokowi-confident-big-win-pdi-p-indonesias-parliamentary-polls-2014040>.

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2014/03/31/pencapresan-jokowi-angkat-pdi-perjuangan-melampaui-25-persen-suara>.

## ELECTABILITAS, EMPTINESS AND ITS IMPACT

The PDIP nominated Widodo as their presidential candidate in March before the legislative elections in the hope that it would boost their vote share. This was their only strategy, although some advertising also continued to feature Megawati and her daughter Puan Maharini, rather than Widodo<sup>10</sup>. Widodo's communication style – contrasting with the old-style, haughty approach of *pejabatism* - and the public's identification of him with social safety net policies<sup>11</sup> (although they were not his ideas) had won him his popularity.<sup>12</sup>

Aburizal Bakrie's campaign strategy for Golkar based itself on the assumption that there was a growing nostalgia for the Suharto era. He repeatedly emphasised this, and also promoted and mobilised some of Suharto's children in his campaign. "It was better in my time, wasn't it?" was a common refrain, referring to a sticker that can be seen here and there on cars, where these words are seen to be coming from Suharto. (This was countered by another sticker with the same words but a picture of Suharto strangling somebody.)

GERINDRA built itself around former Lieutenant-General Prabowo Subianto, whom it has packaged as a military leader. Prabowo appeared at many rallies wearing a *keris* (Javanese and Malay symbol of the ksatria or warrior) in his belt. At the rally launching his campaign, he rode in on a horse, *keris* in waist, and surrounded by men dressed in traditional dress, lined up in a very martial manner. Since the last elections in 2009, his supporters have played up his image as "tegas" (firm) in contrast to current President Yudhoyono's image as vacillating, hesitant and slow to act. However, packaging him this way did, at the same time, remind another constituency that Prabowo was dismissed from the Army after 1998 for actions such as the kidnapping of democratic activists and instigating violence.<sup>13</sup> In some ways, GERINDRA offers the only difference which goes beyond style – a shift to militarist governance.

PDIP and GERINDRA's campaigns succeeded in increasing their vote shares compared to 2009, but neither came near their targets of 27% and 20% respectively. Golkar's campaign did not gain it any increase in votes at all.

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<sup>10</sup> Rumours are rife that Puan Maharini and Widodo do not get on. Tensions between Puan and Widodo may be undermining the PDIP's campaigning and politicking efforts.

<sup>11</sup> The social safety net policies in Indonesia (health, education, cash hand-outs) originate from the Washington Consensus and have been implemented alongside major cuts in subsidies to fuel, basic consumer commodities and agricultural inputs (fertilizers, etc.).

<sup>12</sup> On *pejabatism*, see Max Lane, "Who will be Indonesian President in 2014?", *ISEAS Perspective*, 18 July, 2013.

<sup>13</sup> An interview with General Wiranto, Prabowo's immediate commander in 1998, has been widely circulated on the internet during the campaign. During the interview Wiranto was asked about Prabowo's dismissal from the armed forces and whether it was proved that he had been involved in kidnappings, Wiranto replied: "Of course, otherwise he would not have been dismissed [from the army]." <http://news.okezone.com/read/2013/01/18/62/748188/wiranto-prabowo-dipecat-dari-militer-karena-penculikan>.

There was no serious discussion of vision, direction for the country, or central policy questions. The intense discussion for months up to the elections was only which candidates had “elektabilitas” (electability). “Elektabilitas” took on an existence of its own, based purely on opinion polls. Campaign rhetoric and advertising assumed grossly vague and abstract forms. All parties had manifestos and policy materials on their websites, but it was not the real “content” of their campaigns.<sup>14</sup> Each, in general, was selling a different style; but we should note that in Prabowo’s case, his militarist style has implications for democratic governance.

Their emphasis on style is underpinned by a shared outlook on the basic issues of Indonesian socio-economic development. *No party profiled during the campaign any proposals to seriously move away from the basic parameters of current policies.* This shared outlook also underpins the ease with which all of the parties have been able to announce after the elections that they are willing and able to coalesce with any other party. GOLKAR, GERINDRA and PDIP will not be in the same coalition to nominate presidential candidates – as they each have their own. But they all have said they wished to work together in the parliament, as have the Islamic parties. Final coalition formations will be decided by power-sharing deals, no matter what the party leaders’ rhetoric.

No party can expect to win while telling the Indonesian public – made up of 180 million voters most of whom are poor and have no job security – that they plan no real change in direction, just some minor adjustments here and there. Their emphasis must be where there may be real differences - styles of communication and governance.

This is an insufficient basis for overcoming the public’s alienation and inspiring participation. Such a lack of leadership has meant the lack of a sense of central campaigning and has encouraged chaotic, and often contradictory, campaigning at the local level. This can present an image of a mass of self-interested individuals with few ideas for real change. The PDIP’s campaign in particular was often characterised by political chaos at the local level, even to the extent of PDIP candidates seeing others on their own party list as their main competitors. Widodo had no impact on this state of affairs.

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<sup>14</sup> On what Joko Widodo “stands for”, see John McBeth, “Indonesian Elections: Jokowi’s Policy Stance a Mystery”, <http://www.asianewsnet.net/INDONESIA-ELECTIONS-Jokowis-policy-stance-a-myster-58612.html> .

## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, JULY 2014

The PDIP has now established an agreement with Nasional Demokrat to jointly nominate Widodo. At the time of writing, neither GOLKAR nor GERINDRA has yet announced a coalition that can nominate either Bakrie or Prabowo. The horse-trading continues.

It is important at this point to address a question that is expressed in an often quoted slogan by some campaigners for Widodo: “PDIP No! Jokowi Yes!” That is, to what extent is there a separation in *some* voters’ minds between Widodo and the PDIP? There is little doubt that such a separation exists. During 2013 and into 2014, all opinion polls showed Widodo scoring higher than the PDIP. Exit polls on April 9 indicated that significant percentages of voters for all the parties, except GERINDRA and GOLKAR, said they would vote for Widodo in the presidential election. The polling group, *Indikator*, conducted exit polls that showed a 44% support rate for Widodo as against 25% for Prabowo.<sup>15</sup> What explains this?

At one level, this is another manifestation of the extensive popular alienation with all the parties. The more all the political parties are distrusted and disliked, the more political parties *per se* are rejected. As this sentiment deepens, peoples’ hopes settle on individuals and not institutions. But their hope is skeptical. One researcher with long experience in Jakarta’s urban poor areas, Roanne Van Voorst, captured the ambivalence in a recent article on her dialogue with people she had been observing over a long time:

He [Jokowi] won’t stick to these promises, added my respondents hastily, and that, they said, is not the point... Jokowi is a politician and politicians do such things all the time. And Abdul explained to me that ‘even though he has good intentions, he will still cooperate with other politicians, so eventually he cannot do what he promises’.<sup>16</sup>

This widespread sentiment flows primarily from Widodo’s practice of regular visits, known as *blusukan* – as brief and symbolic as they may be – to kampung (urban hamlet) communities. This is more important than his actual record, which some researchers have thrown doubts on. The “pro-people” stance of Jakarta governors has often been measured based on their record of evictions of poor people from their communities. Researcher Ian Wilson, with a long experience of Jakarta urban poor communities, writes:

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<sup>15</sup> <http://penaone.com/2014/04/09/jokowi-menang-telak-atas-prabowo/>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2014/04/16/hope-cynicism-and-jokowi-in-a-jakarta-slum/>.



According to the Jakarta Residents Forum (FAKTA) over 19,000 people were evicted by the administration in 2013. Less than 40 percent were offered alternative accommodation, in the form of rental apartments often far from places of work and school.<sup>17</sup>

As the quote from Van Voorst's article shows, the respondents know that Widodo will disappoint them, but they still hope.

The question is whether this kind of hope will be sufficient by itself to ensure Widodo's victory in the face of what will be intensified campaigns by both Prabowo and Bakrie. With his current popularity level, Widodo is clearly "ahead in the race" at the moment. However, the PDIP's low vote on April 9 indicates that things can go wrong.

Perhaps his "populist" style of communication and the hope that it inspires will be enough. There is not much more he can do to strengthen his image in this particular respect – apart from responding to the attacks of his opponents over the coming 10 weeks.<sup>18</sup>

Is there anything more he and the PDIP can do? The problem is that they, like all the parties, do not have a radically different program from what has gone before them. They are offering the same but with different rhetoric, perhaps "done better" and communicated in a more grassroots friendly style. Will this be enough to mobilise their chaotic political machine – especially with so many now disappointed and indebted candidates – to campaign effectively for them? The other machines, especially Prabowo's, will mobilise and spend even more money. Can it be enough to inspire the 35-40% who has not voted to do so this time? Will the Prabowo militarist style campaign strengthen its emphasis on returning to "firm" (i.e. authoritarian) rule? Will Widodo end his public silence on the issues of Prabowo's past and his approach to governance?<sup>19</sup>

With approximately only 20% of the seats in the parliament, the PDIP will only make up a third of any majority coalition it is a part of, threatening also the prospect of stable coalitions. The other two-thirds will be made up mostly of parties in the present governing coalition. So, will the PDIP and Widodo consider how any new campaign and policy approach will be viewed by these parties? Or will they defy them and do

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/02/08/floods-housing-security-and-rights-jakarta-s-poor.html>.

<sup>18</sup> For example, a group of Jakarta residents, calling themselves JAKARTA BARU, are now taking Widodo to court in a citizen's suit charging him with breach of promise in that he has betrayed his pledge to serve a full five year term as Governor of Jakarta. The chief lawyer for the group is a candidate for GERINDRA. Widodo has a high profile team of lawyers also representing him. <http://us.metro.news.viva.co.id/news/read/488851-tim-jakarta-baru-akan-gugat-jokowi-ke-pengadilan>.

<sup>19</sup> It has been people outside the PDIP, in the NGOs and among the intelligentsia and activists, who are calling for a vote for Widodo as a means of blocking the return of militarist rule. The small radical Left has been campaigning against Prabowo but backing the GOLPUT sentiment and calling in progressives to form a new party.

something different hoping to win such a big vote for Widodo in July that they can insist on getting their way later.

Nothing is impossible in politics, but there are no signs of such a dramatic turn at the moment.

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