

RESEARCHERS AT SINGAPORE'S INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES SHARE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF CURRENT EVENTS

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Gap Narrows between Candidates in Indonesian Presidential Elections

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Over the last several weeks the gap has narrowed between the two presidential candidates Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto.
- Widodo's economic profile is a reflection of his background as a businessman and former Mayor as his policy platform is based on encouraging regional and middle-level businesses. Prabowo uses the rhetoric of the "Asian Tiger" to suggest an orientation towards large development projects which – he claims – can be funded through the ending of a nearly one trillion US dollar leakage of wealth to foreign economic powers.
- The controversy over Prabowo's dismissal from the Army in 1998 (due to his alleged involvement in the kidnapping of anti-Suharto pro-democracy activists in 1997-1998) highlights issues regarding democracy and human rights. While Prabowo has defended his 1998 actions, when seen together with his militarist style, it has given the impression that he is not a friend to democracy. A significant component of the support for Widodo stems from the fear that a dictatorship would return. Widodo's campaign on the other hand has emphasised achievable changes within the cur-

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rent political and electoral framework through leading by example and a “mental revolution”.

- Prabowo’s ability to increase his support may be linked to his consistent rhetoric against widespread poverty and foreign economic domination, which is felt as a reality by many. On the other hand, Widodo has avoided reference to such a reality and offers only modest change. In the absence of a strong collective memory, it is difficult to question the credibility of Prabowo’s rhetoric.
- There remain groups who question the credibility of both candidates to address the central issues facing Indonesian society.

After an extensive pre-campaign lobbying period to form political coalitions, the presidential election campaigning has been ongoing for three weeks. There have been three nationally televised debates between the two candidates (with each debate focusing on a specific topic) and a nationally televised “dialogue” between the presidential candidates and the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce (KADIN). There has been a flurry of activities as the presidential candidates and their spokespersons immersed themselves in campaigning; billboards and advertising are everywhere.

It has become fairly clear what the division within the Indonesian elite is about. The two candidates, Joko Widodo (from PDI-P) and Prabowo Subianto (from GERINDRA), represent two quite different paths into the future (or back to the past) for Indonesia, but both emerge from within the Indonesian ruling elite. Widodo harks from the new regional elite that blossomed with Indonesia’s experiment with decentralization. Prabowo is very much tied to the old elite of the New Order and, while very wealthy in his own right, is also the brother of an extremely wealthy businessman. He is a former son-in-law of Suharto and the son of a former Suharto minister, who is also a wealthy businessman.¹ At the moment, most polls put Widodo between 5% and 7% ahead of Prabowo, with between 20-30% still undecided. Widodo, although still ahead in the polls, appears to have lost the massive lead he had earlier in the year, when some polls had him at 70%.

The “visions” offered by the two candidates reflect the main division within the Indonesian capitalist class. There are the large conglomerates aspiring to restore their crony status, represented by Prabowo and Aburizal Bakrie (Golkar chairman) and there is the ocean of *kabupaten* (regency) and provincial capitalists, represented by Widodo and Jusuf Kalla, who make up the bulk of the elites of local branches of political parties throughout the country.² Since 2000, *kabupaten* and provincial capitalists have had more space for intervention in politics as a result of the direct election of regional leaders such as bupati (regents), mayors and governors and more budgetary power for local parliaments. Widodo himself is an example of this dynamic, having gone from being a central leader of the Solo business community, to mayor of Solo city and then Governor of Jakarta before standing for the Presidency. Prabowo is from a business family that grew wealthy after his father returned to Indonesia following Suharto’s seizure of power. Both Prabowo and his brother, Hashim Djojohadikusumo, have grown their businesses as rent-seekers in the natural resources sectors.

In the first presidential debate, Prabowo made a point of criticising direct elections for bupati and mayors, arguing for a return to the system where regional parliaments chose them. (Actually, in the old system, the regional parliaments only made recommendations to the President, who made the appointments.) Widodo defended the

¹ See Max Lane, “Who Will be Indonesian President in 2014”, *ISEAS Perspectives*, 18 July, 2013

² See Max Lane (2013), *Decentralisation and its Discontents: an essay on Class, Political Agency and National Perspective in Indonesian Politics* (Singapore: ISEAS) for more discussion on this divide.

current system as more democratic, but suggested that the local elections be held at the same time throughout the country to save money. Prabowo indicated that he did not approve of the formation of more kabupaten administrative units; Widodo supported them if smaller district governments could encourage local business. Prabowo offers – very demagogically and with no detail – promises of big project development to make Indonesia an “Asian Tiger”, while Widodo offers more support for small and medium businesses in the field and to cut “red-tape” (the need for permissions) for all businesses (echoing both his background and the current push by neoliberal organisations such as the International Finance Corporation). Prabowo claims that huge amounts of wealth – almost a trillion US dollars – are being funnelled overseas or constitute a lost potential, which he calls huge “leakages” and emphasises that stopping this leakage is the way to fund the big projects, although he provides no details on how he would stop this. Widodo, however, does not mention the “leakage” of wealth, except with regards to illegal logging and fishing. He defended former President Megawati’s earlier sale of the telecommunications company INDOSAT to overseas buyers on the grounds that there was a financial crisis, but said he would buy the shares back. He took a soft line on any need to renegotiate contracts with overseas companies. When pressed by members of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce on the need for cheaper credit for long-term projects, Widodo responded that he agreed and that more low-interest loans had to be found from overseas.

These different perspectives on economic policy between the kabupaten capitalist and the conglomerate capitalist have not attracted a lot of discussion in the mainstream or social media. The public discussion has been more determined by the difference in political perspectives held by the two candidates.

Prabowo’s political perspective, as he has elaborated for some time now, is very much a return to Suhartoism, but with more pageantry and demagoguery. He asserts his support for democracy, but for “constructive” and not “destructive” democracy, which he raised again in the first national debate, echoing perhaps Suharto’s old term of “Panca Sila Democracy”. He is calling for an end to direct elections for bupati and mayors (although his vice-presidential running mate from a typical locally-based party, the National Mandate Party, contradicted him on this in the first debate). Prabowo’s demagoguery constantly attacks all political parties except his own and all politicians in general. His style, with a *keris* (Javanese dagger) stuck in his belt, a Garuda Bird badge on his shirt and pride in his military record, emphasises his militarism. Prabowo has accepted support from and declared his willingness to work with such organisations as the (notorious) radical Islamic group Front Pembela Islam (Defenders of Islam Front) and the ultra-nationalist Pemuda Pancasila, both semi-militia groups that have acted against human rights and left-wing and religious minorities. He advocates a return to the original 1945 Constitution, which would eliminate many of the liberal democratic-style institutions that have emerged over the last decade.

There is little doubt that this outlook, backed by state power, would be an immediate threat to the expanded democratic space won by the 1990s pro-democracy movement that forced Suharto out of power. It would usher in a period of increasing social and political tension and, probably sooner rather than later, threaten the existence of any democratic space at all. It is this threat against democratic space, and pluralism – space for minorities, especially religious and secular groups – that has galvanised much of the urban, secular, social media-based, big city, lower middle class against Prabowo.

Widodo's perspectives, more by implication than explicit elaboration, promise a continuation of the political status quo. Some of Widodo's supporters point to the emergence of large numbers of volunteer groups and the very impressive JALAN SEHAT (Health Walk) mobilisation that was turned into a Widodo support rally in Jakarta on June 20. The photo of Widodo, wearing a simple white T-shirt holding up the two-finger sign – he is candidate number 2 on the ballot – in front of 100,000 people at the National Monument is already becoming iconic. This new "volunteerism", say these supporters, represents a qualitative improvement in democratic life³. This is a gross over-estimation of the phenomenon. In a country of 190 million voters, the phenomenon is minuscule (especially given that its duration was short and levels of organisation were highly limited beyond "lead-up" demonstrations).

Widodo's "Vision and Mission" document lodged with the Elections Commission (KPU) does explicitly commit to modern human rights norms and to resolving the long series of human rights violations, including the 1965 mass killings as well as the 1998 kidnappings and disappearances, in which Prabowo has been implicated. However, apart from the occasional mention, in passing, reported online, this has not been a campaign theme. Widodo has not taken the opportunity of any of his national television appearances to give a clear public commitment on these issues. Moreover, he has accepted support, in his coalition, from retired military officers whom major human rights institutions also consider to have committed grave violations of human rights, such as General Hendropriyono and Muchdi,⁴ whom many consider to be responsible for the murder of human rights activist Munir. Notably, Widodo is not openly fighting Prabowo on these issues himself, making no clear public commitments, and letting supporters outside the party he actually represents make the promises. Occasionally these supporters make promises that he has needed to rebut straightaway, such as the promise by Musdah Muchdi, Director of the Megawati Institute, to abolish the religion category on ID cards.⁵

³ Ari Dwipoayana, from Gajah mada University, see http://indonesiasatu.kompas.com/read/2014/06/22/1754152/prabowo-hatta.vs.jokowi-jk.mobilisasi.massa.vs.voluntarisme?utm_source=WP&utm_medium=box&utm_campaign=Kknwp

⁴ <http://m.bisnis.com/pemilu/read/20140606/355/233933/ini-35-jenderal-pendukung-jokowi-jk-5-jenderal-diduga-bermasalah> lists the 135 retired generals who are supporting Widodo. The Legal Aid Institute lists five as needing to face accusations of gross human rights abuses.

⁵ <http://politik.news.viva.co.id/news/read/514219-joko-widodo-tidak-setuju-kolom-agama-di-ktp-dihapus>

While Widodo has not taken up the fight with Prabowo on human rights and democratic issues, for that sector of society for whom democratic rights is important, the difference is clear. Whatever deficiencies exist in the status quo, a return to a Suhartoist dictatorship – and a demagogically defended Suhartoism at that – would be a major blow for any kind of democratic progress in the country.

There is no doubt that mass frustration, and even hatred, towards an elite exposed as corrupt, degenerate and “transactional”, i.e. obsessed with enriching themselves with deals, frames much of the current political atmosphere.⁶ Both Widodo and Prabowo try to respond to this. Widodo offers a “revolusi mental” (mental revolution), where corruption will primarily be fought by example and education – but backed by more funds for the Corruption Eradication Commission as well⁷ – which Vice-Presidential candidate Yusuf Kalla promised in the first national debate. Widodo’s whole marketing campaign is based on selling himself as “sederhana, jujur dan merakyat” (“simple, honest and close to the people”). The fact that he is not a deal-making conglomerate cum former crony billionaire, but rather “only” a successful millionaire who was a kabupaten-level furniture exporter with modest lifestyle habits (as far as we can see), helps him sell this image. What has clinched it for him among his lower-class support base has been his willingness to make frequent local visits to where poor people work and live (although not to factories). Prabowo’s response to the corrupt, degenerate and craven elite is to threaten demagogically their subjugation – but again he does not name names or specify how this will be done (not surprising given his ultra-elite status).

It is probably in relation to another aspect of the rhetorical war where Prabowo seems to have been able to increase his poll popularity over the last several months. Prabowo has waged a rhetorical jihad of sorts against the extent of poverty in Indonesia and has continuously proclaimed that this has been made possible by the huge “kebocoran” (“leakage”) of wealth from Indonesia to the outside world. He identifies this leakage as the result of foreign ownership and/or domination of Indonesia’s natural resources and of contracts and agreements which excessively benefit foreign parties. His rhetoric and emphasis on this is consistent and indeed almost jihad-like, even if he avoids being specific about how he would end this situation. In the national debate on foreign policy and defence, he even asked what the use of having tanks and planes was if the people were in poverty. Widodo’s response to the issue of poverty has been much more low-key, flashing his free health and education cards – important symbols of the social safety net that has been built in Indonesia in accordance with the neo-liberal post-Washington consensus, and paid for by abolishing the subsidies that kept down inflation in the past.

⁶ Edward Aspinall, “Indonesia on the knife’s edge”, 17 June 2014, <http://inside.org.au/indonesia-on-the-knifes-edge/> discusses transactional politics and corruption as an explanation for Prabowo’s rise in popularity. The article provides a good description of Prabowo’s political personality.

⁷ This was mentioned by Vice-Presidential candidate Yusuf Kalla in the first national debate.

So the contrast on this issue of poverty and foreign exploitation is a “tegas” (firm) military man who says he will wage a war against poverty and the extraction of Indonesia’s wealth by foreigners, and the former Mayor of Solo offering a social safety net and better management of existing available funds. This contrast may be winning over new support for Prabowo, narrowing Widodo’s lead. Widodo supporters, even the significant liberal NGO and intellectual left supporters who are campaigning for him, and a range of commentators, seem to ignore the fact that the picture that Prabowo paints of Indonesian society – even if he does it for demagogic purposes – is more or less accurate. The overwhelming mass of Indonesians are poor, and in terms of 21st century international living standards of income, education, health, culture and leisure that they see existing in the First World through the media, and manifested before their eyes on a daily basis in the rapidly growing and highly westernized Indonesian middle and upper classes, the 150 million or more poor voters are in fact extremely poor and disgracefully left-behind. There is no doubt that there is a widespread, painful resentment of this very real situation among those 150 million.

To ignore the economic and social conditions created by long-term structures of economic dependence and underdevelopment and confine analysis to the immediate issues of rule of law in human rights, corruption and transactional elite politics in understanding Indonesian developments, especially (but not only) in relation to identifying deeper trends, is a major mistake.

Prabowo appeals for support using demagoguery, claiming he will wage an all-out fight against poverty and foreign extraction of wealth. In line with the status quo that Yudhoyono has presided over and compatible with the agenda advanced by the World Bank, Widodo offers better technocratic management of existing available funds to provide gradual improvements, with assistance in the immediate term in the form of a social safety net for the urban poor – but while articulating no policies or effective rhetoric for **addressing the structural problem of poverty**. If the polls are correct, the mass of voters appear close to being evenly divided on who has the more credible answer. There is probably still time for either candidate to come up with new rhetoric or marketing that could drag a few extra percentage points in either direction.

While the two candidates clearly espouse economic and political perspectives that emerge from their class backgrounds – crony capitalist or regional petit bourgeois capitalist – and their political histories – Suharto military power player and regional post-dictatorship, decentralisation politician, it would be a mistake to conclude that the broad political and business elite is divided so clearly on these lines. Opportunism – or to use the political scientist’s euphemism, transactional politics – has been the obvious motivation behind how the elite is divided, at both national and local levels. There are no doubt plenty of kabupaten capitalists in Prabowo’s coalition, either as individual supporters or as a part of the party machinery of one of the supporting parties. Widodo’s coalition has the open support of conglomerate capitalist Surya Paloh and PDIP members of parliament have certainly suggested that

they have received support from big capital (although there are now criticisms that the money “langsung hilang” – disappears immediately – and is not getting used in the campaign). Without doubt, we will see after the elections many suddenly switch sides or exposed as having supported both sides all along.

The opportunism was on gaudy public display in the period of forming the nominating coalitions. Neither the PDIP nor GERINDRA had enough votes or seats in parliament to nominate presidential and vice presidential candidates and had to seek partners. During that period **almost** all of the parties at one time or another stated that they could work with either Widodo or Prabowo. The exceptions were the National Democrats, under Paloh, that quickly aligned with PDIP and Widodo and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) that made it clear quickly that they would go with GERINDRA and Prabowo. There were a few weeks of vacillation, even with the big players like GOLKAR smiling and shaking hands in public with both candidates. GOLKAR, headed by a classic ex-crony, Aburizal Bakrie, eventually went with Prabowo.

The wheeling and dealing also saw renegades from almost all parties defying the party line. Once the coalitions were formed, the first activity of both candidates was to seek out as many endorsements as possible from other members of the elite, whether they are local level elite such as pesantren leaders or former and recent national political figures.

This campaign for endorsements also targeted retired senior military officers, which has resulted in the most bitter of mutual incriminations. Retired military figures supporting Widodo – such as former intelligence chief, Hendropriyono, who is himself identified by all the human rights groups as responsible for massacres and other human rights violations, described Prabowo as a psychopath. Return insults have been no less nasty. Finally, as many expected would happen, the document prepared by the Military Honour Council that recommended that Prabowo be “diberhentikan dari keprajuritan” (that his military activity be terminated) i.e. that he be removed from the army, was leaked and widely circulated and discussed in the media. This has further exacerbated the rift between retired officers. Prabowo’s former superior, General Wiranto, whose Hanura Party is in Widodo’s coalition, held a press conference confirming the veracity of the document. Wiranto had already confirmed several times that the Council had concluded that Prabowo had to be held responsible for the kidnappings of student and other anti-Suharto activists in 1997 and 1998. Wiranto’s statement was met with insults from retired officers on the other side, and even a demonstration of former KOPASSUS officers. What is unclear is to what extent this bitter clash is reflected among serving officers. Prabowo is the first truly polarizing political figure for both elite and masses for decades. One factor influencing the impact of this kind of division over Prabowo’s past is Suharto’s campaign against a critical historical consciousness, which has been very effective in creating uncertainty among the public about what version of history is credible. There is no

universally or even widely shared historical memory.⁸

Having decided their alignments, the fight becomes a desperate struggle among the elite to gain or protect positions. This is even true for the leaders of the major labour unions who hope for ministerial positions, with some supporting Widodo and some – including the most active union, the Metal Workers Federation – supporting Prabowo.

For the mass of the poor earning between 1 and 5 US dollars a day, the choices are hardly inspiring. Both sides have had big and impressive-looking mobilisations but in the context of 190 million voters, they do not indicate a high level of popular active participation. That section of the liberal-minded educated lower and middle layers of the middle class – the social media sector of society – have probably been the most active, forming volunteer brigades, writing songs, filming ads and making jingles for Widodo. But overall, even as opinions crystallise behind one or another candidate assessing who will credibly improve their situation, the mood remains overall passive. In a society where the political culture has been for 40 years a patron-client culture, where the mass of the population feels dependent on the ruling elite, the elections are about choosing which patron they feel most comfortable being dependent on.

In the parliamentary elections around 65 million people out of 185 million voters did not vote or voted informally. Most commentators and politicians are sensing that the absentee vote will go down for the presidential election, but the decline may not be as great as expected. The low votes for parties and the high absentee votes reflect the alienation of a significant sector of society from the existing parties. There are a number of activist groups and coalitions – such as the Komite Politik Alternatif⁹ -- that are actively advocating an absentee vote on the grounds that neither candidate has solutions. Others – such as the Koalisi Melawan Lupa¹⁰ and Buruh Melawan Lupa¹¹ – focus their attacks effectively against Prabowo, but without explicitly calling for a vote for Jokowi, on the grounds that he has gross human violators also on his team. These groups represent a small minority among organised forces active in the electoral arena.

However, the question also arises as to whether there are sociological trends that may foster the emergence of alternative outlooks to both what Prabowo and Jokowi stand for, and which the alienated masses may respond to. Over the last few years, the primary new political development that may provide a challenge to the client mentality that is still strong and which could link up with voices that reject what elite politics is currently serving up is the activism of the new labour unions, especially the Metal Workers Federation (FSPMI) and unions working with the FSPMI. It has mo-

⁸ See “Memory” in Max Lane, *Unfinished Nation: Indonesia before and after Suharto*, Verso, 2008, pp 91-115.

⁹ See <http://komitepolitikalternatif.blogspot.sg/>

¹⁰ <http://news.liputan6.com/read/2057539/4-tuntutan-koalisi-melawan-lupa-tragedi-mei-98>

¹¹ <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/06/13/1359331/Gerakan.Buruh.Melawan.Lupa.Tuntut.KPU.Diskualifikasi.Prabowo>

bilized hundreds of thousands of mostly factory workers in national actions in 2012 and 2013 – in 2013 in the face of violence from organized anti-union gangs. There are now millions of dues-paying union members who are steadily understanding the usefulness and political potential of mass organisations. In these circles, talk of a new labour party has been increasingly popular. The decision of the FSPMI leadership, taken with no process of mass discussion, to support and campaign strongly for Prabowo, and to enforce discipline to maintain a monolithic line on this despite a clear big vote for the PDIP in the April parliamentary elections in districts where union members reside, has for the moment pressed underground (and into Facebook) discussions of a new party and new political experiments, and even of dissent against the pro-Prabowo line.

However, the emergence of the new unions as a sociological phenomenon and a new political arena will not go away. While there is no guarantee that this will be a fast or smooth process, it is inevitable that the discussion on new parties will re-emerge.

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