

PERSPECTIVE

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Will Jakarta's Ahok Pass the Nomination Hurdle?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Jakarta gubernatorial election will be held only on 15 February 2017, but the present governor, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (nicknamed Ahok), has started making preparations. One of the reasons for this is that he has decided to seek his second term, but as an independent candidate.
- According to present rules, to be eligible as an independent candidate, he has to prove that he has the support of at least 7.5 percent (i.e. 532,213 voters) of the Jakarta electorate. Photocopies of the identity cards of supporters have to be collected and submitted to the General Election Commission by August 2016. Ahok is relying on the civil society organization, Teman Ahok, to help him and more than one million photocopies have been collected.
- Ahok is a reformist who exercises zero tolerance for corruption. In the past four years, he had tried to revitalize the bureaucracy, balance the city budget, clean the rivers and streets, improve the traffic, bulldoze illegal buildings, build cheap housing for squatters, and reduce the unemployment in the city. However, his actions and his style make him a somewhat superhero as well as a target. Political party elite, militant Islam and those who refuse to accept change wanted to ensure that he would not be able to contest in this election.
- Two corruption scandals have suddenly emerged involving the Jakarta government, and the target is the controversial Ahok. Nevertheless, civil society organizations continued to work in order to make him eligible to contest the election as an independent. The political parties (excepting two minor ones) and his other foes are using all available means (including smear campaigning, and using race and religion as weapons) to stop him. There is also an attempt to change the rules and have the required number of IDs to be collected by independent hopefuls raised.

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INTRODUCTION: A NEW TYPE OF POLITICIAN

Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (popularly known as Ahok) is the first Jakarta Governor to be of Chinese descent—and who is a Christian to boot. He has become the symbol of “anti-corruption and change” in Indonesian politics. He is seen as a “superhero” of sorts by many Jakartans, regardless of their ethnic and religious background. At the same time, there are others who consider him a dangerous figure who is bent on upsetting the existing political party system and who may trigger racial and religious conflicts in the process.

On 7 March 2016, he announced that he will be standing for the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, but as an independent candidate. If he were a political party candidate, no evidence of support would be needed, but as an independent candidate, he is required to show proof of having 7.5% of the Jakarta electorate behind him. This means that he has to collect copies of the identity cards of a minimum of 532,213 supporters for submission to the General Election Commission by 7 August 2016. After verification, the decision of the Commission will then be announced on 22 October 2016.

Presently, the big question is, will he pass this nomination process?

Ahok is a controversial figure. He is also a new type of Indonesian politician who does not play by the old rules. Born in Belitung in 1966 as the oldest son of a businessman, he received his high school and university education in Jakarta. Encouraged by his father to enter politics, he first contested in the Belitung Timur election in 2005 and became the first Chinese Indonesian to become the regent in a Muslim-dominated district.¹ In 2007 he contested for the Bangka-Belitung governorship but failed. In 2009 he went to Jakarta to join Golkar and was elected a member of parliament (MP). However, he was not satisfied with the position of MP as he was unable to do much in his three years as a national lawmaker. When he was approached by Prabowo of Gerindra Party to be a candidate for the deputy governorship of Jakarta, paired with Joko Widodo (Jokowi) of the PDI-P, he agreed and left Golkar to join Gerindra. Their rivals, Fauzi “Foke” Bowo-Nachrowi “Nara” Ramli, both “indigenous” and Muslim, used racial and religious issues to attack the Jokowi-Ahok pair but this did not stop the latter from winning the election. Jokowi-Ahok received 53% of the votes in the second round and assumed the governorship and deputy governorship in October 2012.²

Jokowi and Ahok cooperated closely together and began to clean the Jakarta bureaucracy and handle sewerage and transportation issues. They gained some initial success. They also started a relocation programme for squatters in the city and street vendors in the

¹ On the background of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, see Liao Jianyu (廖建裕), Yajiada shoudu tequ houren shouzhang zhong wanxue (雅加达首都特区候任首长钟万学), *Lianhe Zaobao* (联合早报), 16 August 2014.

² On an analysis of the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election, see Hui Yew Foong & Ikrar Nusa Bakti, “The Gubernatorial Race in Jakarta: Background and Implications”, *ISEAS Perspective*, 1 November 2012; also Liao Jianyu, *ibid.*

Tanah Abang area. While the Javanese Jokowi is soft spoken, Ahok is the opposite. He is straightforward, and does not pull punches. His language use is often considered crude and offensive. Under Jokowi, he was already known as a no-nonsense deputy governor who liked to get the job done and who had zero tolerance for corruption.

Ahok also started a new practice in Indonesian politics. He declared his wealth and income when he became the governor. He also made video recordings of every Jakarta municipal meeting to be put on YouTube, and was in fact the only politician in Indonesia who did this. When he first became deputy governor, he discovered that the budget of the city government had a very high mark-up and he immediately called for a meeting. He proclaimed that he would cut 25% off the budget and asked various department heads to resubmit their budget. The budget was subsequently drastically cut and he saved 4 trillion rupiahs for the Jakarta government.³ Jokowi, as governor, introduced *blusukan* where he inspected governmental offices without prior notice and visited many areas to understand the living conditions of the Jakarta population. Many officials who were found to have been irresponsible were replaced. The impressive achievements of these two men eventually made Jokowi a viable candidate for the Presidency. The PDI-P decided to make him their Presidential candidate, and he eventually defeated his opponent, Prabowo.

Ahok thus took over the position of governorship left vacant by Jokowi. In October 2014, Front Pembela Islam (FPI, Defenders of Islam Front), a militant organization that often used violent means to achieve its objectives, opposed Ahok becoming the governor and launched a series of demonstrations in Jakarta, coming into conflict with the police in the process. Ahok suggested that the FPI be dissolved.⁴ Till today, the FPI has not given up on its objective to remove Ahok.

When Jokowi was still the governor of Jakarta, the militant Islamic group also demonstrated and demanded that the Jakarta government replace a Christian village chief, Susan Jasmine Zulkifli, with a Muslim as the majority of the villagers involved were Muslims. Ahok was given the task to settle the issue. He was under pressure from the Interior Minister to give in to the demand. However, Ahok refused to back down, arguing that there was no evidence that the village chief was not capable, and that since Indonesia was a Pancasila state, the village chief should not be removed just because of her religion. Ahok prevailed.⁵

After assuming the position of governorship, Ahok, together with his new deputy Djarot Saiful Hidayat of PDI-P, continued his style of management, and has been as outspoken as before and has been trying to overhaul the Jakarta government. His words and actions continue to antagonize the establishment and the militant Islamic group.

³ [berita2bahasa.com/...22192811-ahok-punya-kiat-hemat-anggaran-...](#) (Accessed 23 May 2016)

⁴ [www.gatra.com/...dan.../105617-habib-rizieq-ahok,-kih,-dan-kamp...](#) (Accessed 25 May 2016).

⁵ [www.kompasiana.com/.../Inilah-Lurah-Paling-Ngetop-Susan-Jasmine-Zulkifli-552813ee](#) (Accessed 25 May 2016)

Just as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was about to leave office and Jokowi was to take over, the opposition parties led by Gerindra decided to amend the Pilkada (Pemilihan Kepala Daerah; local elections) from a direct election to an indirect one, giving regional parliaments nomination rights in a move many suspect was an attempt to stop the emergence of political mavericks such as Jokowi and Ahok. Ahok was infuriated and resigned from Gerindra. Thus, when he became governor, he did so without affiliation to any party. Nevertheless, he continued to receive support from President Jokowi.

To make Jakarta a livable city, Ahok decided to bulldoze illegal buildings and to clean up areas that were both unhealthy and unsafe. Prior to that, he had had low-cost flats built for those who would be affected by the move. Nevertheless, his opponents often challenged his decision and agitated for the squatters to rebel against him.

In February 2016, with the support of the TNI (Tentara Nasional Indonesia; the Indonesian National Army) and the police, he started cleaning up Kalijodo, a red light district, and was determined to have it done before the holding of the Organization of Islamic Conference in Jakarta in early March 2016. Before that, he had also closed down a nightclub in Jakarta, which was notorious for drug abuse and prostitution. Ahok was also determined to continue the work of Jokowi in cleaning up the slums of Tanjung Priok, the seaport for Jakarta.

Ahok continued to reform the Jakarta administration, suing and sacking officials who had imported used buses instead of new buses for the Jakarta transport system. As a testimony to his success on that front, all buses in Jakarta that are municipality-owned are now shiny and brand new. He frequently accepts TV interviews and holds direct dialogues with Jakarta residents, giving straight-forward and often undiplomatic answers. His reputation of being rude and arrogant is used by many of his opponents to criticize and even condemn him.

OPPOSITION TO AHOK

On 25 March 2015, Jaya Suprana, a Chinese Indonesian who is an artist and owner of a jamu (medical herbs) firm, published an article in *Sinar Harapan*, commenting on Ahok's use of language and his arrogant expressions and warned him that he should remember that he was a member of a minority group and his style could jeopardize the Chinese Indonesians. Jaya even cited the FPI leader's comment on Ahok as evidence of his arrogance.⁶ However, Ahok replied five days later through a video interview that was put up in YouTube, where he stated that Jaya represented a group that refused to change. What Jaya wanted, he argued, was a society that was full of corruption and nepotism.⁷

⁶ Jaya Suprana, "Surat Terbuka Untuk Ahok", *Sinar Harapan*, 25 March 2015. (Accessed 12/5/2016)

⁷ Rony C. Kristanto, "Antara Ahok, Jaya Suprana dan Tumbal", *Elsa*, 31/3/2015 (Accessed 12/5/2016).

Other voices came out in support of Ahok and defended his actions and programmes.⁸ They criticized Jaya for confusing the issue and that he did not represent the Chinese Christian community. Ahok was also at odds with the Jakarta regional parliament for questioning the amended municipal budget proposed by regional legislators. Ahok claimed that the regional parliament had inserted new items into the original budget out of self-interest.

Ahok's vision for Jakarta is to make it a modern and functioning city, like Singapore.⁹ Not only would he clean up the rivers and streets and grow gardens to create an environment that was pleasant and safe, but he would also like to provide affordable education and health care to the Jakarta population by introducing a health-card system. He is also keen on creating jobs for the unskilled.

BETWEEN TEMAN AHOK AND THE PDI-P

In less than four years, Ahok seems to have succeeded in improving living conditions in Jakarta and impressed many Jakartans. As nomination time for the Jakarta gubernatorial election approached, a group of Ahok's supporters, mainly young indigenous Indonesians, decided to set up an organization called Teman Ahok or the "Friends of Ahok", to collect ID cards of Jakarta residents willing to support him as an independent candidate. Teman Ahok was established in May 2015 by four university graduates and one undergraduate, aged 23-25 years old.¹⁰ Its leader and spokesperson is Amalia Ayuningtyas, a hijab-wearing young Indonesian Muslim. The group's initial task was to collect at least 532,213 photo copies of Jakarta resident IDs as required for anyone unsupported by a political party to run as a candidate,¹¹ but later, Ahok asked for one million IDs instead, and Teman Ahok accepted the challenge.

At first, only Ahok's name was listed in the form, but later on, the regulation required the name of the deputy as well. As a result, Teman Ahok had to redo the whole process. Nevertheless, Teman Ahok did not give up and re-do. Ahok wanted his deputy Djarot as his partner, but Djarot, being a loyal member of the PDI-P, wished to remain with the party, and might not get party approval to pair with him. Ahok eventually got Heru Budi Hartono, the young chief of the Regional Finance and Assets Management Body in the Jakarta Municipal government to be his deputy. Heru was incidentally Jokowi's right hand man when the latter was Jakarta Governor, implying that the President may endorse the Ahok-Heru partnership.¹²

⁸ Rony C. Kristanto, "Antara Ahok, Jaya Suprana dan Tumbal", *Elsa*, 31/3/2015 (Accessed 12/5/2016).

⁹ megapolitan.kompas.com/.../Ahok.Dianggap.Singapura-kan.Jakart... (Accessed 25/5/2015)

¹⁰ "Siapa saja pendiri Teman Ahok? Inilah profil prifil mereka", *TEMPO.CO*. 15 may 2015.

¹¹ "Jadi calon independen , ini tahap yang harus dilalui Ahok", *TEMPO.CO*. 9 March 2016.

¹² "Jokowi, Prabowo dan Megawati Dipysaran Pilkada DKI. *TEMPO.CO* 10 March 2016.

According to an article in *Tempo* magazine, Ahok has a special relationship with Megawati, the chairperson of the PDI-P.¹³ It was reported that Megawati had showed willingness to support him if he contested the election under the banner of the PDI-P. Had he accepted such an arrangement, however, Teman Ahok may have been required to accept the leadership of the party.¹⁴ Ahok was put in a difficult position, but eventually he selected Teman Ahok instead of the PDI-P.

According to Ahok, he chose Teman Ahok for two reasons. First, the PDI-P candidacy was not confirmed since it still had to go through the party machinery. Should the PDI-P eventually disagree to support him, it would have been too late for him to gather the required support to be an independent candidate. Secondly, he felt that with Teman Ahok, he did not have to worry about fund raising as the organization was able to get its own funding by selling Teman Ahok T-shirts and other activities.¹⁵ He also stated on another occasion that he thought that trust was a vital feature in politics, and he did not want to lose the trust of those Jakartans who had been supporting him, especially the younger generation.¹⁶

FACING AN UPHILL BATTLE

In general, political parties in Indonesia are against independent candidates, and Ahok's opponents moved fast to gather their forces in order to stop him. The first attempt was to change the requirements for independent candidacies. It was proposed that all the ID registration forms had to be accompanied with the paid stamp duty. This would naturally be a great burden for Ahok, and especially for Teman Ahok. The General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum), however, eventually decided not to introduce the stamp duty.¹⁷ The second attempt was through raising the required number of supporters needed for an independent candidacy to be valid from 7.5% to 15% of the whole Jakarta electorate. However, no such amendment to the election law has taken place, but the issue is perhaps the reason why Ahok has asked Teman Ahok to increase their target to one million photocopies. By 19 June 2016, 1,024,632 ID photo copies had been collected.

The political parties and Islamic organizations which are against Ahok also looking for strong candidates to pit against Ahok. It was reported that Gerindra has already approached two ex-generals, Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin and Meldoko, to represent the party.¹⁸ The PDI-D also has a list of names to face Ahok, including Deputy Governor Djarot.¹⁹ The Islamic groups have continued to use mosque meetings to spread the message that

¹³ "Dua sumbu penjepit Basuki", *Tempo*, 13 March 2016, pp.132-133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ "Alasan sesungguhnya Ahok pilih jalur independen, bukan PDIP", *TEMPO.CO* 12 March 2016

¹⁶ Mata Najwa 16 Maret 2016 full-Pertaruhan Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama) di Mata Najwa terbaru. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjDzBohnx4> (Accessed 23 May 2016).

¹⁷ "Gerilya mencari penantang Basuki", *Majalah Tempo*, 1 May 2016, pp. 33-35 (especially p.35.).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Muslims should not vote for non-Muslims to become leaders, especially not as governor of Jakarta.

The FPI has also instructed all Muslims in Jakarta not to let their IDs to be used to support Ahok. It is far from clear if the use of race and religion will actually work.

TWO CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS

Apart from the abovementioned tactics being used against him, there are other issues surfacing all of a sudden. There are presently two allegations of corruption involving the Jakarta municipal government, and Ahok becomes the target in both cases.

The first concerns a land purchase from the Sumber Waras Hospital. In 2014 the Jakarta government had bought land from the hospital on which to build a municipal hospital.²⁰ It is now revealed that the price paid was too high, resulting in a loss for the Jakarta government. The Corruption Committee was asked to examine the case. However, Ahok argued that the price was in fact much lower than the market price at that time and he argued that the allegation was clearly politically motivated.

The second case involves a land reclamation project in the Jakarta Bay (Teluk Jakarta) and how it could damage the environment.²¹ The Jakarta government halted the project and wanted the developers to pay 15% of the project revenue as compensation for polluting the environment. The revenue would then be used for public facilities, including building villages for poor people. The developers wanted to pay only 5% but Ahok insisted on his demand. The developers then sought collaboration with the Jakarta Regional Parliament in order to pay less. The Jakarta government, including one of Ahok's trusted advisors, Sunny Tanuwidjaja, was accused of receiving kickback from these developers. Sunny denied it.²² Ahok also rejected the accusation and asked the Combat Corruption Committee to question his staff.

These two cases are still being processed. Ahok continues to deny any wrongdoing and he has also reported the cases to President Jokowi. Meanwhile, Teman Ahok continued to proceed with the collection of ID photocopies and refused to be deterred. Smaller parties such as the Nasional Democrat party (NasDem) of Surya Paloh and the Hati Nurani Party (Hanura) of Winarto soon came out to support Ahok. These two parties asked their members to support Ahok even though the man is not a party member.

In turn, Ahok, aware of the fear among leaders of political parties has repeatedly stated that he is not against political parties as such. His choice of Teman Ahok was due to the

²⁰ "Waswas Sumber Waras", *Majalah Tempo*, 3 April 2016, p. 29.

²¹ "Kejahatan Korporasi di Teluk Jakarta", *Majalah Tempo*, 17 April 2016, p. 23.

²² "Sunny Tanuwidjaja: Itu tuduhan ngarang", *Majalah Tempo*, 17 April 2016, p. 63.

circumstances that it is simply the vehicle that he found most suitable for this election. In late June, it was reported that the Golkar party would also support Ahok's candidacy.

It is as yet not known who Ahok's contenders will be. Nomination will only be finalized in October and the political parties have still to announce their candidates, except for the small Islamic party (PBB) who picked their chairman, Yusril Ihza Mahendra. In the past few months, however, twelve to twenty "possible" or "tentative" contenders for the Jakarta gubernatorial election have been suggested, such as Ridwan Kamil (the Mayor of Bandung), Tri Rismaharini (the mayor of Surabaya), Adhyaksa Dault (Sports Minister), Hidayat Nur Wahid (PKS, ex-Speaker of MPR), Tantowi Yahya (Gerindra), Lulung (PPP), Nachrowi Ramli (Partai Demokrat, retired general) Alex Nurdin (Golkar, ex-governor of South Sumatra) Djarot (PDI-P, deputy governor), Yusril Ihza Mahendra etc.

Their problem, really is the fact that Ahok is very popular among Jakartans. In January 2016, for instance, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) conducted a survey of the electability of Ahok in the Jakarta gubernatorial election. Among the twelve tentative contenders, Ahok obtained 43.25%, followed by Ridwan Kamil 17.25%, Tri Rismaharini 8% with the rest supported by less than 4% of voters. The Lembaga Survei KedaiKopi also conducted monthly surveys between January and April 2016, and they had Ahok winning between 43.25% and 51.80%. Even immediately after the two corruption allegations, Ahok still topped the list at 45.50%. In March 2016, the Charta Politika Indonesia conducted a similar survey and it showed that Ahok was the most popular candidate. He gained 51.8%, followed by Yusril Ihza Mahendra at 11% and Tri Rismaharini at 7.3%.²³

CONCLUDING REMARKS

It is still a few months yet before we know for sure if Ahok manages to be accepted as a independent candidate for the Jakartan gubernatorial election.

In the meantime, his opponents can be expected to do whatever they can to trip him. The most recent attempt was the failed national parliament proposal to restrict the verification of the independent candidate supporters ID from 14 days to 3 days. There is also a rumour that his opponents will plant a few hundred fake IDs among the genuine IDs to sabotage Ahok's nomination.²⁴

When Ahok was recently asked about his alternative plans if he were unable to contest the election, he calmly said that he would fully support his current deputy Djarot, assuming

²³ news.detik.com/.../survei-csis-elektabilitas-ahok-45-ridwan-kamil-1... (Accessed 24/5/2016); pilkada.liputan6.com (Accessed 24/5/2016); megapolitan.kompas.com/.../Ini.Hasil.Survei.Head.to.Head.Ahok.d (Accessed 24/5/2016); sp.beritasatu.com/home/survei-digoyang...isu...ahok.../114262 (Accessed 24/5/2016).

²⁴ A commentator in Jakarta mentioned this to me. 4 May 2016.

that Djarot were nominated by PDI-P.²⁵ After that, Ahok would look for a job as he has to live. When asked what he would do if Teman Ahok failed to push him through as an independent candidate, and would he accept Megawati's offer to be PDI-P candidate, he replied that it was unlikely that Megawati would give him a second chance.

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²⁵ News.metronews.com/.../jika-gagal-maju-ahok-siap-dukung-djarot... (Accessed 23 May 2016).