

# PERSPECTIVE

RESEARCHERS AT ISEAS – YUSOF ISHAK INSTITUTE ANALYSE CURRENT EVENTS

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## **An Empty Start to the 2019 Election Campaign**

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### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- A primary feature of Indonesia's transactional politics since 2014 has been the *shallowness* of policy and ideological discourse.
- The public process of the formation of coalitions in support of presidential candidates Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto were marked by transactionalism regarding electoral standing rather than ideological and policy differences, and this was most centred on the selection of vice-presidential candidates, Ma'ruf Amin and Sandiaga Uno.
- Since the finalisation of the presidential and vice-presidential nominations, there have been signs that the Democrat Party, headed by former President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, is uncomfortable being in the coalition that is supporting Prabowo.
- There are signs that the presence in the Prabowo coalition of two new parties directly connected to the Suharto family may encourage appealing to a return to Suharto era policies as part of that coalition's campaigning.

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## INTRODUCTION

While the official campaign period for the April 2019 presidential and parliamentary elections in Indonesia may have begun on September 23, it was nevertheless preceded by a process that needed to determine three things. These were (1) which parties fulfilled the requirements to stand candidates in the elections; (2) who would be presidential and vice-presidential candidates and, connected with this second point; (3) which parties would enter into coalitions in support of the respective presidential candidates. All this reflects two basic features of contemporary politics in Indonesia.

First, Indonesian politics is still characterised by what can be called *transactionalism*, or ‘politik transaksi in Indonesian’, namely a process of negotiations among a plethora of factions *within the Indonesian elite* driven by concerns about “elektabilitas”<sup>1</sup> – popularity among the voting public. The second feature is *an extreme shallowness of contestation* in the sense that all elements of the political and economic elite agree on most, if not all, aspects of cultural, social, political and economic strategy. This extreme shallowness of contestation means that the elections will primarily be characterised by an image war with little, if any, policy content. In this context also, the opportunity for deployment of deliberate misinformation through the social media is great.

## POLITIK TRANSAKSI

In 2014 a crucial part of the projection of Joko Widodo’s image was that he was a politician that would reject ‘politik transaksi’ – the politics of deal making with various political players, including political parties, whereby positions, such as those in Ministries, were distributed. The previous president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, whose government which was based on a broad party coalition was often portrayed as being “sarat transaksi” (“full of transactions”). During the 2014 campaign period, and immediately after the elections, there was discussion in the media as to whether President Widodo would have a cabinet based more on expertise than on party distribution.<sup>2</sup> Since 2014, while non-partisan people and professionals have been appointed to some ministries, other key positions have been distributed to non-expert political or party figures. Overall there are Ministers from all seven of the political parties, with all key political ministries in party hands. A majority of the more technocratic ministries, however, remained in non-party hands.

The idea that President Widodo could be a non-transactional president was always untenable. Since 2004, while the President has been directly elected, the Budget and other policies requiring legislation still need parliamentary approval. The coalition of parties that had supported Widodo in 2014 initially did not have a majority in the parliament. To run a stable government Widodo needed to both satisfy all the parties supporting him as well as win over parties that had not supported him. He was able to do this by bringing over the National Mandate Party, the United Development Party and Golkar, all of which had supported Widodo’s opponent, Prabowo Subianto, in 2014. All these parties were given Ministries to run.

This start to the Widodo Administration reflected both the underpinning transactional nature of Indonesian politics as well as the shallowness of contestation. There were no ideological or

policy issues which prevented those parties previously supporting Prabowo to cross over to Widodo.

Of the three parties in parliament but outside the government, only one is outside the government because of ideological differences, namely the Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). The other two, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's PD and Prabowo Subianto's Gerindra Party represent rivals for the Presidency, and so need to cultivate a separate profile from the ruling coalition.

## **PROCESSES PREPARING FOR 2019**

There are several processes that have needed to take place before things are ready for the 2019 elections. The first was the confirmation of which parties could stand candidates in the 2019 elections. This would determine which parties would be able to join coalitions nominating presidential candidates, although only those parties already represented in parliament would count towards reaching the necessary minimum level of support for a candidate to be nominated.

Six new parties were verified to participate. These include the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI) and the United Indonesia Party (Perindo). The three are the Karya Party, the Indonesian Movement for Change Party (Partai Garuda) and the Star and Crescent Party (PBB).<sup>3</sup>

This means that there are a total of 16 parties fielding candidates. If all these parties obtain seats – which is by no means certain – the pressures for transactional politics will increase. Even if none or only some of them win seats, the reality of a fragmented elite is still confirmed simply by their ability to run, which requires substantial funds and membership.

All the 16 parties, with the partial exception of the PDIP are thoroughly reflective of the socio-economic elite and middle class. Some are led or financed by big business figures, or by generals or individuals from organisations that flourished during the authoritarian period of 1965-1998. While some parties draw their leaders from the middle class, there are none whose leadership comes out of grassroots movements. The transactionalism is primarily a process of ongoing negotiation between myriad segments of the broad social and economic elite and middle class. Beyond the 16 parties, there are also segments represented by non-party vehicles, including business organisations, “volunteer” groups and so on.

In the short term, only a sudden, drastic change in voting patterns, which produces a parliamentary majority for one party or much smaller coalitions, would undermine this situation.

Under Indonesian electoral laws passed during the current parliament, only a party or a formal coalition of parties which has 20 per cent of parliamentary seats or 25% of the vote can nominate presidential and vice-presidential candidates.<sup>4</sup> As no existing party has this level of support, it means that coalitions will be necessary. Coalitions will further be needed to enhance the profile of and the resources available to the candidates. The need for coalitions

will only apply to the presidential election. Parties will campaign under their own name to elect their own candidates for the House of Representatives (DPR).

The need for coalitions immediately set in motion a process of transactions and negotiations. This process has however exposed the shallowness of the ideological and policy contestation and the centrality of “elektabilitas” in the coming elections.

The first possibility discussed publicly was that of a three-way contest. The question raised was whether the PD as well as Gerindra can form coalitions with enough seats to each nominate candidates. As the PD had no obvious candidate with significant standing in the polls, it soon became clear that they would not gain the support of other parties.

It also became clear that the two candidates would again be Joko Widodo, a member of the PDIP, and Prabowo Subianto, Chairperson of Gerindra. Nasdem, Golkar and Hanura are supporting again Joko Widodo. Among the parties politicking under the Islamic banner, the United Development Party (PPP) declared early for Widodo. So too did the National Awakening Party (PKB), which has connections to the traditionalist Islamic Nahdatul Ulama, whose base is strong in East and Central Java. However, PKB was reported to have indicated that their support was dependent on who was appointed as vice-presidential candidate.<sup>5</sup> The National Mandate Party (PAN) eventually decided to join the PKS in supporting Prabowo Subianto.

The most publicly reported aspects of the transactionalism so far have been those related within each camp to the selection of vice-presidential candidate.

#### *Widodo's Vice President*

Inside the Widodo camp, the tensions eventually centred on whether Widodo should choose the well-known legal and political figure, a former High Court judge, Mahfud MD. Mahfud's willingness to support Widodo and Widodo's willingness to accept Mahfud as vice-presidential candidate once again points to the shallowness of ideological and programmatic commitment. In 2014, Mahfud had been the central figure in Prabowo's Campaign Team.<sup>6</sup>

Mahfud, however, was not selected. The 75-year-old Ma'ruf Amin, the Chairperson of the Islamic Scholars Assembly (MUI) and of Nahdatul Ulama, was selected instead. Like Mahfud, his willingness to be Widodo's vice-presidential candidate stands in contrast to his previous positions. He himself had proclaimed that he was a central figure behind the 2016 212 Islamic mobilisations against Jakarta Governor Purnama; mobilisations which relied on forces hostile to Widodo. He had also been a close collaborator with Yudhoyono during the latter's presidency, and has not been close to Megawati, Chairperson of the PDIP, Widodo's party. He had been a public critic of liberalism and pluralism, which at least a significant segment of Widodo's supporters consider to be issues that the President supports.<sup>7</sup>

In this case, the sticking point in the transaction concerning whom Widodo would give the prize of vice-presidency to, seemed to be reservations on the part of Widodo's least committed coalition member, PKB. PKB has many links with the Nahdatul Ulama and had argued for somebody more integrated into the NU than Mahfud. It seemed that Widodo did want a running mate with some religious credentials, which Mahfud could claim to have.<sup>8</sup> He

had been a member of parliament for PKB in 2004-2009. In 2012 he was elected chairperson of the Islamic Students Alumni Association (KAHMI). He had spoken out against the proposal for state certification of Muslim preachers. However, he was not an active member of or integrated into NU, and had in fact become a relatively independent political player, and was even sometimes credited with having presidential prospects.<sup>9</sup>

The desire to shore up Widodo's Islamic credentials for *elektabilitas* purposes probably increased the PKB's bargaining power, as the NU was the only reliable source for an authoritative religious figure. Much, though not all, of the Muhammadiyah milieu was more closely connected to PAN and PKS, the parties in Prabowo's coalition. From an *elektabilitas* point-of-view, having Amin there meant both that Islamic credentials were relatively safe and access to the NU's support base in East and Central Java would be almost guaranteed. Amin's social and religious conservatism and his attachment to "Islamic economics" presented no major ideological or policy concerns for anybody. There was some public commentary that this may undermine support for Widodo from the liberal urban middle class, but there has been no sign of that, once the initial surprise had passed.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Prabowo's Vice President*

Transactional politics certainly featured prominently in the public reporting of the process of selection of Prabowo's vice-presidential candidate. The first phase of this focussed on the question of whether Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's party, PD, would join the coalition with Gerindra, PKS and PAN. Yudhoyono and the PD were caught in a bind. It was clear that there were ambitions for Yudhoyono's son, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (known as AHY), to be a presidential candidate in 2024. Under existing law, a party that does not nominate a presidential candidate in 2019, would not be allowed to do so in 2024. PD had to join either Prabowo or Widodo. In 2014, PD remained neutral and since 2014 had not joined any grouping in parliament. Now, however, PD was forced to join in. Most of the discussions carried out between Yudhoyono and Prabowo took place behind closed doors, so we cannot be sure of what exactly transpired. It seems clear from public reports that Prabowo was coming under pressure from PD to select Yudhoyono's son, AHY. Finally, Yudhoyono as Chairperson of PD announced, standing alongside Prabowo, that PD would support Prabowo for President and join that coalition. There was no explicit commitment by Prabowo to choose AHY. Indeed, the public position was that PD would support whomever Prabowo selected.<sup>11</sup>

Yudhoyono did outline a series of policy points that he said he shared with Prabowo. These were, however, all formulated in very general terms, and could have also been supported by Widodo. In fact, in the following days, Yudhoyono explained that he had three times since 2014 discussed with Jokowi about joining the government.<sup>12</sup> He claimed that the reservations came from Widodo's side and were expressed in terms of how other members of the coalition might react – a comment interpreted by most people to refer to the ongoing hostility between Yudhoyono and Megawati. There were no real ideological or policy differences of sufficient importance to be a hindrance to Yudhoyono joining either Widodo or Prabowo's coalition. Rather, implicit in Yudhoyono's comments, and given the legal situation regarding the right to nominate in 2024, he had no choice.

Prabowo was also coming under pressure to choose a candidate from or blessed by the PKS. An assembly of religious preachers, mostly connected to elements involved in the 212 demonstrations, also recommended the appointment of a *kyai* as his vice-president. The PKS was quite vocal in its pressure.<sup>13</sup> Prabowo, however, appointed neither AHY or a PKS person or a *kyai*. Instead he appointed the incumbent vice-governor of Jakarta, Sandiaga Uno, a glamorous young investment portfolio millionaire entrepreneur who is also a member of Prabowo's party, Gerindra.<sup>14</sup>

This selection provoked the sharpest accusations of crude money transactionalism, with one PD figure, Andie Arief, making the accusation that Uno was a “cardboard box” selection, that is, that money was involved.<sup>15</sup> Uno did not take the opportunity to espouse any ideological or policy direction. His selection by Prabowo is worth noting, however, as not being based on a transactional agreement among several coalition segments, but a decision ignoring such transactional needs. The decision has raised tension between Prabowo and PKS and between Prabowo and Yudhoyono. Yudhoyono has not been as regular an attendee at Coalition functions as PKS or PAN leaders. The PD has also given leave to some local PD leaders to support Widodo rather than Prabowo.

### **CAMPAIGN START: ARE THERE NO DIFFERENCES?**

At no time during these processes has ideological or policy contestation played any significant role. Will that remain the case? Are there no serious ideological or policy differences between the two blocs? Indeed, if the 2014 campaign and the record of 2014-2018 is considered, it appears likely that major differences will be limited or rhetorical.

In relation to economic policies, differences are mainly reflected in demagoguery by supporters regarding the personal capacities of the key leaders or are a matter of degree, such as in whether foreign business can be squeezed more for the country's benefit. In 2014, Prabowo frequently referred to massive leakages of money to foreign business. Widodo has tried to pre-empt this as an election issue by securing public signings of agreements for Indonesia to purchase a majority shareholding in the Freeport mining operations.

During the 2014 election campaign, one significant area of policy difference was on the question of the direct versus indirect election of the President and other executive positions, such as governors, bupati and mayors. However, Prabowo and Gerindra have changed their position and now support direct elections. There are some developments, however, that may mean that issues of democratic practice may emerge again.

First it should be noted that Prabowo's treatment of his coalition partners exhibits a disdain for transactionalism itself. Under current conditions, ‘democracy’ as a real practice mainly relates to the openness of transactional negotiations between the myriad segments of the broad elite, including the middle class. At this point of time, except in West Papua, there are no serious political threats to the status quo from outside of the elite. The argument Gerindra put in 2014 for indirect elections rather than direct elections was based on the desire to streamline the need for such negotiations, limiting negotiations to the electing of executives by parliament. At the moment, transactions must start long before candidates are selected and must continue up to and throughout the campaign. This perspective is one desirous of more

centralistic “leadership” over the elite. While the non-elite population remains mainly unorganised and passive, discussions on democracy remain primarily about openness for transactional activity among the elite.

One factor that may begin to operate during the campaign on this front is the presence in Prabowo’s coalition of two parties directly linked to Suharto, through family ties. These are Party Garuda and Partai Karya, linked to Tommy Suharto and Titiek Suharto respectively. Any escalation of calls for a return to Suharto-style policies, which may have already started,<sup>16</sup> may perhaps make centralistic versus democratic transactionalist politics a debate. This, however, is not clear yet. It also appears that the Prabowo campaign may wish to focus on economic policy questions rather than either issues of political culture or religion. The campaign orientation of the two candidates should become clearer by the end of 2018 or early 2019.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lane. “Indonesia’s 2014 Legislative Elections: The Dilemmas of “Elektabilitas” Politics”, ISEAS Perspective, 23 April, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> See for example

<https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/01/20/13125971/Banyak.Transaksi.Politik.Revolusi.Mental.Jokowi.Mulai.Dipertanyakan> During 2014 and 2015 there were scores of reports on this issue.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2018/02/17/four-new-parties-to-take-part-in-2019-elections.html>; <https://news.detik.com/berita/3902032/resmi-jadi-peserta-pemilu-2019-pbb-dapat-nomor-urut-19>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2017/07/21/election-bill-passed-presidential-threshold-intact.html> This provision was opposed by Gerindra, PKS and PD.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/9-partai-pendukung-siapkan-21000-caleg-dukung-jokowi-di-pilpres-2019.html>

<sup>6</sup> On the Ma’ruf appointment see Norshahril Saat, “Jokowi’s New Candidate for Vice-president and the Rise of Conservatism”, ISEAS Commentary, 2018/83; Eva Warburton, “Indonesia’s Presidential Nominees: a Quick Take”, ISEAS Commentary, 2018/82.

<sup>7</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/10/13380671/akhir-kompromi-bagi-jokowi-maruf-amin-dan-mahfud-md?page=all>

<sup>8</sup> The appointment of Ma’ruf was primarily transactional. He was not appointed because Widodo wants to run a campaign advocating Ma’ruf’s ideological outlook. Instead, Widodo hopes to buy some votes from Ma’ruf’s constituency. This constituency may perhaps be defined ideologically, but the transaction was a central one.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.viva.co.id/siapa/read/97-prof-dr-mohammad-mahfud-md-s-h>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/indonesia-45161027>; <https://tirto.id/jualan-paling-milenial-capres-cawapres-2019-cRDT>. There was extensive media discussion of these issues.

<sup>11</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/07/30/14320521/sby-prabowo-adalah-calon-presiden-kita>; <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/10/12083731/akhirnya-kantongi-dukungan-sby-ini-kata-prabowo>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.merdeka.com/politik/cerita-sby-tiga-kali-tolak-ajakan-jokowi-gabung-koalisi.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/01/16081311/jika-tak-jadi-cawapres-prabowo-pks-pertimbangkan-abstain-pada-pilpres>; <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/01/14542171/pks-ingatkan-prabowo-soal-kesepakatan-cawapres>; <https://news.detik.com/berita/4158883/pks-tetap-perjuangkan-ulama-jadi-cawapres-prabowo>

<sup>14</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/10/11252031/infografik-prabowo-subianto-pilih-sandiaga-uno>

<sup>15</sup> <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/09/07504361/andi-arief-kami-dengar-ada-politik-transaksional-yang-mengejutkan>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.suara.com/news/2018/09/28/064000/ahy-minta-lanjutkan-semangat-soeharto-dibanding-cari-kesalahan> ; <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2018/08/10/13385801/titiek-soeharto-ikut-dampingi-prabowo-sandiaga-daftar-ke-kpu>; <https://nasional.tempo.co/read/1130772/ahy-ajak-pendukung-soeharto-menangkan-prabowo-sandiaga>

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