

# Pressing the same hot buttons

## INDONESIAN POLLS:

Both presidential candidates are reaching out to all sections of society

**W**ITH less than two weeks to go before the presidential elections in Indonesia on July 9, the campaign narratives of both the Prabowo-Hatta and Jokowi-Kalla camps seem to be converging.

This was notably the case during the recent presidential debate when both presidential candidates discussed matters related to national security and international relations, and where it was clear that neither candidate could afford to appear less nationalistic than the other.

It was noted by local analysts that even the dress sense of both candidates have come to reflect their nationalist inclinations, with Prabowo Subianto decked out in a white uniform and songkok — reminiscent of the style of Sukarno — and Joko Widodo or Jokowi in a batik shirt that has become emblematic of Indonesia.

The two candidates are trying to reach out to all sections of Indonesian society at the same time, and in this sense, both have begun to press the same hot buttons that are supposed to elicit the appropriate response from viewers and supporters.

In a sense, Prabowo and Jokowi have touched on issues that concern Indonesians across the board, and this may explain why their campaign discourses seem surprisingly similar at times.

When analysts opine that Prabowo's popularity is due to his image as a strong and decisive leader, this is true as many Indonesians have grown tired of indecisiveness at the highest level of government. His promise to deliver immediate results and to act without hesitation is something that appeals to many ordinary Indonesians, who have grown wary and weary of red tape, institutional inertia and slow delivery of services on the part of the state.

But, on the other hand, Jokowi's appeal lies in his calls for transparency and accountability, and the fact that he has shown on more than one occasion that governance can be done openly and not behind

closed doors.

This, too, appeals to Indonesians today who are tired of corruption, abuse of state resources, backroom deals and the generally opaque and arcane manner Indonesian politics, business and everyday administration have been run for decades.

Among many members of the newly emerging middle class whom I have met, the same sentiment is often evidenced: the desire to do business in a corruption-free Indonesia, where commerce can proceed unhindered.

Thus, it could be said that while both candidates have foregrounded different concerns and ambitions to the electorate as a whole, their appeal lies in the fact that both parties have recognised the aspirations and wants of the ordinary folk of Indonesia.

If the campaign narratives of the two candidates seem oddly opposed to each other, the reason for that lies not in Jokowi or Prabowo themselves and their individual campaigns, but rather in the complex nature of Indonesian society that is driven by a plethora of (sometimes conflict-

ing) needs and wants: Indonesians want firm governance and decisive leadership but they are wary of a return to one-man authoritarian rule. Indonesians also want transparency and accountability, but at the same time see nothing wrong in accepting money for votes (as indicated by surveys conducted earlier this year).

As the gap between the two candidates narrows by the day, it could be said that voters in Indonesia are yearning for a leader who is strong yet open at the same time, decisive yet also transparent and accountable. As noted by a seasoned Indonesian journalist I met recently, "such a candidate does not exist!"

The final result will therefore be indicative of what Indonesians think is the most important for them today: decisiveness and forcefulness, or openness and accountability.

The presidential election campaign has thus become a barometer of sorts, of Indonesian political sensibilities; and they will tell us as much about the voters of Indonesia as they will about the candidates themselves.



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**Prabowo Subianto** (left) from the Great Indonesia Movement Party and **Joko Widodo** from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle during the **third presidential debate** in Jakarta. Both candidates' campaign discourses are surprisingly similar at times. AFP pic