

Indonesia's 2014 Legislative and Presidential Elections: An Overview

Farish A. Noor

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's legislative and presidential elections this year will mark a turning point in the nation's complex history. Yet as the legislative election campaign has shown, the Indonesian electorate seems to have grown jaded with political parties, partisan rhetoric and the political process in general. This article is based on fieldwork carried out during the election campaign, and notes that Indonesians today seem more focused on local provincial issues than on concerns about the future development and trajectory of the nation. Yet Indonesia's place in Asean remains pivotal, and the success or failure of Asean will also depend on how Indonesia responds to the challenges facing it. In the absence of both clear ideological lines and long-term vision, and with a populace that grows increasingly disillusioned, questions arise as to how Indonesia will move into the future and what shape the country will assume in the short-run.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Farish A. Noor is an Associate Professor at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, where he teaches Southeast Asian politics and history. Dr Farish has researched and written on Indonesia extensively, covering areas such as political history, religio-political movements and parties, as well as political security. His latest writings include *The Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party PAS: Islamism in a Mottled Nation* and *Islam on the Move: The Tablighi Jama'at Movement in Southeast Asia*. He is also a Visiting Fellow at ISIS Malaysia. He graduated from Sussex University, the University of London and Essex University.

INDONESIA is currently in the midst of its general elections, for both legislative seats (DPR) and the presidency. In the face of looming challenges to the country's future, the current campaign has delivered some startling results which prompt serious questions about where the country is heading and what sort of Indonesia is likely to emerge. A cursory overview of the political-economic-social landscape of Indonesia reveals a lot about where the country is at the moment, and how it has progressed since the days of *reformasi* in 1998.

A young, restless and cynical nation

For a start, Indonesia is a very young country with the median age at about 29 years. The youth vote bank is the biggest at this election, where around 67 million people will be first-time voters out of a total voter pool of 187 million. First-time voters will make up around 35% of all voters. Yet as we have seen in the case of the legislative elections of 9 April 2014, the number of non-voters, dubbed the *Golput* or "*golongan putih*" who chose not to vote or to spoil their votes has risen, from 28% at the last elections in 2009 to above 32% this time.

This is a worrying indicator of the level of apathy and disillusionment among Indonesian voters in general, and the youth in particular.¹ The fact that the number of non-voters has risen to an estimated 32-34% has made the *golput* the biggest constituency of all (when compared to the 19% of voters who gave the biggest block vote to the PDI-P, or even the 32% won by the five Islamist parties combined.)

That the level of apathy and non-participation has risen so high in Indonesia also reflects the extent to which the political process, as well as politicians and political parties, have been discredited by now. In the lead-up to the legislative elections, several polls indicated that most Indonesians no longer believe in politics or the political process. The Edelman Trust survey, for instance, noted that 82% of Indonesians place their trust in the private sector, 78% in the media and 73% in NGOs, while only 53% trust politicians and political parties. The conclusion is that levels of public trust in the political system have eroded to a critical level.

Compounding this deficit in public trust is the fact that most Indonesians have become bored with political rhetoric and accustomed to systematic abuses of the system. Surveys indicate that more than half of Indonesians believe that vote-buying is normal and acceptable. In terms of fulfilling their obligations as citizens, it ought to be noted that out of a population of 240-plus million where more than 120 million are working, only 20 million Indonesians pay taxes.

¹ There were also campaigns by Indonesian activists to encourage the younger generation of first-time voters to vote. One such effort was called the "*Ayo Vote!*" campaign organised by young activists at places such as shopping malls and cinemas, and which was widely supported by the mainstream media. Despite the media coverage given to such campaigns however, the voter turn-out proved disappointing for many.

With a general decline in public faith and participation in politics, the new domain of public activity is the Internet and other forms of social media. Indonesia's media remains powerful and the country's newspapers and TV channels enjoy wide coverage across the archipelago, but the acquisition of TV companies and newspapers by political parties and business tycoons from 1998 to the present has also meant that the media is largely partisan and thus divisive. In the course of the election campaign, many of the mass public campaigns were conducted via social media instead, including the "*Ayo vote!*" campaign to encourage young Indonesians to vote, as well as many *golput* campaigns encouraging voters to spoil their votes. Though Internet coverage is not as wide in Indonesia as compared to Malaysia and Singapore, it is growing and is becoming a major channel for communication and mass mobilisation.

While younger Indonesians are increasingly apathetic and sceptical about politics, the country's ground-level socio-economic realities are evident to all: Indonesia's wealth gap is growing, as seen in the rise of the new urban elite, shopping malls, clubs, etc. The recent release of government bonds led to a higher sell-out of 15 trillion rupiah (IR), more than the earlier estimate of 10 trillion – indicating the power of the domestic market and demand among the emerging middle class.

However 60% of Indonesia's liquid wealth (cash) remains in Jakarta, while 30% of the country's cash circulates in the larger commercial cities such as Surabaya, Medan and Bandung. Only 10% of Indonesia's cash is actually in the hands of the general public in the rest of the country.

With these realities in the background, Indonesia is faced with several daunting challenges that need to be addressed over the next few years:

- Indonesia's youth boom and the expansion of the higher education sector has basically created a glut of young students in their 20s with new middle-class sensibilities and rising socio-economic expectations. The next government of Indonesia will have to bring this mass-base of young Indonesians into the economy in a meaningful way, and embed them in national development so that they will have a stake in the economy and the nation.
- The autonomy experiment in Aceh is being watched closely by other provinces envious of the local Acehnese government's newly-granted right to administer its own land, and to reap a majority share of profits from developing and exploiting its resources. In other parts of Indonesia there are already growing calls for federalism, and the demands for relative autonomy (as with the special province of Jogjakarta). Should this become a trend, power will be diluted at the centre and increasingly dispersed to local centres of power instead, with the potential of creating local oligarchies and pockets of local resistance against Jakarta.

- There is an apparent absence of a vision for a united, centralised Indonesian republic in the future. In the course of the legislative elections, there was no discussion of the future of Indonesia as a united archipelago and no discussion of foreign affairs or defence policy. This compounds the general sense of apathy, alienation and anomie felt by many Indonesians today, particularly the younger generation.

These factors were clearly evident in the course of the field research conducted during the election campaign. They point to a curious development in contemporary Indonesian politics, where national elections are inward-looking and border on the parochial.

A national election without national issues

One of the most striking observations of the 2014 legislative elections was the near-absence of serious discussion about matters of national interest, or issues related to foreign policy. In the course of election-related research connected with this article, fieldwork was carried out in a number of different localities: from Banda Aceh and its environs in Northern Sumatra to Medan to the Minangkabau highlands of Central Sumatra, from Jakarta to Jogjakarta, Surakarta and Purwokerto, and from Bali to Makassar, Manado and Poso. In the course of the interviews and research, it was clear that in all these localities the main issues raised by the respective parties and their candidates were local ones.

Bali: One of the most widely discussed issues in Bali during the campaign was the land reclamation project opposed by a range of local NGOs. The project will extend land for commercial purposes and is intended to boost tourism facilities in Aceh. The project was approved in 2013 by the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) administration, but has met with local resistance from environmentalist groups and student organisations on local campuses. The SBY administration is accused of colluding with local land authorities besides accusations of corruption, kick-backs and local authorities not paying heed to environmental warnings.

The group behind the reclamation project wants to raise the level of land in the Teluk Benua area to five meters above sea level, but opposition groups like Conservation International note that raising land over an area of 838 hectares will affect not only Teluk Benua but also other parts of Bali such as Sewung, Pemogan, Sesetan and Sanur, as the rest of the land mass is only two metres above sea level. The primary concerns are two-fold: the economic impact on local communities, and the environmental impact of creating a zone where floods will be increasingly frequent. Local NGOs have noted that Jakarta's flooding problem is also a result of land reclamation at Indah Kapuk beach.

Surakarta (Java): The contest between the PDI-P and Partai Demokrat (PD) had intensified with several members of the ruling Surakarta royal family running for office at both parliamentary and local government levels. Princesses Gusti Mung,

Gusti In and Gusti Timoer were all running for parliamentary and local government seats under the PD banner. So was Kanjeng Edy Wirabumi, who contested against Jokowi for the Governorship of Surakarta (and lost).

In all, five members of the royal family had openly joined SBY's PD and hoped to capitalise on local issues, chief of which is their demand that special provincial status be given to Surakarta on par with the other royal city of Jogjakarta. The PDI-P remained in pole position in Surakarta and was unlikely to be defeated, but Megawati's popularity was low then due to her reluctance to nominate Jokowi (former governor of Surakarta, now governor of Jakarta, Joko Widodo) as candidate for president. Though Surakarta remains the PDI-P's main political base, the PD has made inroads with the election of Gusti Mung to Parliament.

Jogjakarta (Java): The Jogjakarta royal family is also now involved in politics, with the daughter of the Sultan of Jogjakarta joining the Gerindra party led by Prabowo Subianto. Other members of the royal family have also joined other parties including PD. The main local issue is perpetuating the special provincial status of Jogjakarta, an issue debated in Parliament last year. This has aroused much support from locally based students and activist groups, with wide support for the Sultan and for Jogjakarta's special status.

At present Jogjakarta seems to be witnessing a strong contest between Gerindra, PD, PDI-P and Golkar. It is interesting that despite the fact of Jogjakarta being the birthplace of the Muhammadiyah movement, its party-political branch – the Pan party led by Amien Rais – is not doing well. As late as February 2014 there were no visible signs of Pan candidates or party banners, and Pan had not even begun to campaign in the city.

Padang-Pekan Baru (Sumatra): In the Minangkabau area of Sumatra, currently the most widely debated issue is the clash between local *adat* (customary) laws and the laws embodied in the Indonesian republican Constitution. New revisions to the Constitution, coupled with the drive to streamline all non-constitutional *adat* laws across Indonesia, are seen by Minang conservative groups as a direct challenge to their cultural identity and belief system. The Minangkabau lands have no local parties, but local Minang activists are demanding that all mainstream national party candidates take up the cause of Minang *adat* law and the defence of the Minang *adat* legal system.

The Minangkabau community's local politics is very inward-looking, dominated as it is by these local *adat*-related concerns. Thus the national development plans forwarded by the 12 mainstream national parties have low traction among local political leaders. All the major national parties will be fielding local candidates in the Minang region, but due to the heated debate over the future of Minang *adat* law and customs, these local issues are expected to dominate local debates and become the factor to affect voting patterns.

Aceh: Aceh's political situation is more complex compared to other provinces, because of the decentralisation process that began during Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency and accelerated during Megawati's time. Apart from the 12 national mainstream parties running, there were also three local parties including the Partai Nasional Aceh (PNA), Partai Damai Aceh (PDA) and Partai Aceh (PA) that emerged from the Gerakan Aceh Merdeka (GAM) which accepted the 2004-05 peace accord following the devastating tsunami. Local political contestation was intense, with low-level violence, extortion and intimidation between rival local parties in areas outside major cities and towns.

Indonesian police note that during election campaigns Aceh and West Papua have always been hotspots, with the highest number of violent clashes between rival groups. Compounding matters further is the rivalry between PA which rules the province and PNA in particular. The PA establishment has been accused of corruption, abuse of power, environmental destruction and creeping Shariah ordinances that have impacted on the lives of locals.

Several reports by the International Crisis Group note that the PA government is using all means at its disposal to create what may become a one-party government/state. This is also impacting on local political dynamics, leading to more contention. The PA is also engaged in a protracted legal battle with Jakarta and the Constitutional Court of Indonesia to use the Gam flag as the flag for Aceh province.

Posturing by PA, PNA and PDA has made it increasingly difficult for national mainstream parties to contest in Aceh province as a whole, for all four local Acehese parties are united on the common goal of keeping mainstream parties out of Aceh. Compounding matters is the fact that the local leaders of PA, PNA and PDA are former Gam rebels who have not really experienced the complexities of governance and state management. Many of the former rebels have now become politicians with no technocratic expertise, and have little knowledge of management issues such as town planning and environmental protection.

No clear winners, only loose coalitions from legislative poll

In the wake of the legislative elections in April, Indonesia is now preparing for the presidential election campaign that will take off in earnest in June. If the legislative election campaign is anything to go by, we can expect a relatively muted campaign with less pyrotechnics and fewer instances of violence (as compared to the campaigns of 2004 and 2009 that were more eventful).

Among the observations that can be made thus far are:

There were no clear winners at the legislative elections of April, as none of the parties had managed to exceed the 20% votes mark expected of them.

² The biggest disappointment for many was the obvious failure of the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P) to get anywhere close to the 30% votes mark it had set for itself. The international media were hasty to conclude that the PDI-P had “won” the elections, for the fact remains that *no* party could get even 20% of the votes. This marks a downturn from the elections of 2009, when SBY’s PD passed the 20% threshold.

The most glaring aspect of the PDI-P’s failure was the absence of the much-touted “Jokowi effect” – attributed to the governor of Jakarta Joko Widodo, who was expected to bring about a massive vote swing among younger voters eager for change. It was expected that Jokowi would help the PDI-P raise its level of support to the 30% mark, and ensure a smooth victory for the PDI-P and an easy coalition-building process after that. The fact that no such vote swing took place indicates the deep level of distrust and apathy among voters in general.

Despite reducing the number of national parties to 12 (and three local parties in Aceh), no single party dominated the election results. Equally important to note are the comeback of Golkar and the rise of fortunes of the Gerindra party led by former general Prabowo Subianto, that managed to secure around 12% of the votes. This, in effect, means that three parties lead the polls: PDI-P, Golkar and Gerindra, while the rest are in a position to jockey for alliances and seats in attempts to form a working coalition that will assume power in the legislature (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, or DPR).

The other important development has been the swing back to the Islamist parties, including the PKS, PKB, PPP and Pan. Collectively the Islamist parties account for 32% of the vote, making them the second-biggest vote block after the 32-34% *golput* (non-voter) block. The Islamist parties have not, however, been able to unite under a single banner, and efforts by parties like Pan to bring them together as the Islamist middle ground (*poros tengah*) have failed. At present, the Islamist parties are divided in their loyalties and alliances, with the PKB – an offshoot of the Nahdatul Ulama – openly aligned to the PDI-P, while PPP, PKS and Pan have all been courted by Gerindra.³

² In terms of seats won by the respective parties, the present tally stands as follows: PDI-P 109; Golkar 91; Gerindra 73; Demokrat 61; Pan 49; PKB 47; PKS 40; PPP 39; Nasdem 35; Hanura 16. In such a situation where no party commands half of the house of representatives, instrumental and pragmatic coalitions are likely to be the only way that any coalition can come to power.

³ In the course of the legislative campaign and in the wake of the parliamentary (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, or DPR) elections, Islamist groups have already begun to wage a sustained campaign against PDI-P presidential nominee Joko Widodo on the grounds that he harbours “pro-Christian leanings.” The fact that Jakarta’s deputy governor (Ahok) who served with him is of ethnic Chinese origin has also become an issue for far-right groups in the country. Local analysts have expressed their concern that the presidential election campaign may witness the use of anti-Christian and anti-Chinese rhetoric by those who wish to tarnish Jokowi’s image further.

Indonesia's current political landscape is therefore fluid and ever-changing, making it exceedingly difficult to anticipate the sort of coalitions to emerge as the parties come together on a purely pragmatic basis. In the absence of a clear distinction between left-leaning and right-leaning parties, ideology is of no concern or relevance in the coalition-building process. Thus Islamist parties like PAN and PKS are engaged in dialogue with Gerindra, despite concerns about Islamist parties working with a nationalist party helmed by a former head of the Indonesian security forces that, in the 1980s-90s, led the depoliticising of Islam in the country. But a closer examination of the coalition-building process indicates that ideology is of secondary importance when compared to brokering for seats, cabinet posts and the position of vice-presidential candidate.

At the time of writing, there appear to be two candidates vying for the presidency: Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Prabowo Subianto. While both will fall upon the party-political machinery and manpower of their respective parties (PDI-P and Gerindra) for the campaign that will follow, patterns of convergence in their respective campaigns can already be seen:

In the context of present-day Indonesian society where political awareness and education seem to be low, ideological differences are not likely to be raised between the two candidates and/or any other third presidential candidate. Both Prabowo and Jokowi have spelled out their vision for Indonesia's future, but on terms that remain fluid, vague and local, focusing on bread-and-butter issues that impact on the livelihoods of ordinary Indonesians. Thus far there has been scant debate on matters of national policy, foreign policy or defence policy, and these issues are not expected to be the main issues in either candidate's campaign either.

One issue that has been raised by both candidates is the need for Indonesia to break free from dependency on foreign capital, occasioning the rise of an economic-nationalist agenda. This has been the campaign pledge of Prabowo and his Gerindra party (and was restated during Gerindra's negotiations with a potential campaign ally, the Islamist PKS party). Similar sentiments have been expressed in even more explicit terms by Jokowi, who addressed the Indonesian public at large via a published appeal entitled "*Revolusi Mental*" ("Mental Revolution"), where he spoke of Indonesia's need to liberate itself from over-dependency on foreign capital and called for Indonesia's natural wealth and resources to be developed by the nation's industry and capital instead.

In both cases, the discourse of economic nationalism articulated by Prabowo/ Gerindra and Jokowi/PDI-P seems populist and nationalist, in keeping with the tenor of the legislative campaign earlier. This may pave the way for the rise of more nationalist discourse, leading to a sustained campaign against "foreign predatory capital" as was the case in the recent past. Gerindra and PKS have even talked about nationalising foreign capital assets in the country, a move that

was populist in appeal but greeted with some degree of alarm by foreign investors and the expatriate business community.⁴

The short-to-medium-term prognosis for Indonesia is that after a largely inconclusive election process, there will be no clear mandate for any party or faction that wishes to govern the country and take Indonesia into the future. Whichever coalition comes to dominate the assembly (DPR) will be a coalition put together on a pragmatic basis, and will be loose and functional in character. The same can be said of the future president of Indonesia, who will be backed by his respective coalition in parliament.

The absence of a clear majority in the DPR means that policymaking, long-term planning and governance may well be hindered by incessant debate and resistance at the legislative level, complicating Indonesia's legal-political landscape further. At present, what Indonesia needs most is a unifying leader figure and a united government coalition that can bring together the disparate interest groups, provincial representatives and classes within a national narrative that foregrounds the value and objectives of a centralised Indonesian republic. But as public faith in politicians and political praxis wanes, there are concerns that large sections of Indonesian society may remain disaffected and uninterested in developing a common, unifying vision for the country over the longer term.

⁴ Economic nationalism has long and deep roots in Indonesia, going back to the 1950s and 1960s when President Sukarno shocked the international business community by nationalising Dutch and other Western capital assets to much popular support but at the expense of bilateral relations with Western powers. Such moves have also been supported by leftist elements in the country, such as the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) that was active in the forceful appropriation of foreign property and capital during that period, until its own violent demise in 1965. In recent times some Indonesian leaders – including those from the PDI-P, among others – have called for nationalising foreign capital, and have articulated an anti-FDI discourse that views foreign investment as exploitative and predatory. In 2009-2010 this was accompanied by instances of low-level attacks and demonstrations against foreign companies and banks operating in different parts of the country.