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## SURVEYING THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN POLITICAL TERRAIN

*Indonesia's 2014 Elections: Practical Innovations and Optimistic Outcomes*

by

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# Indonesia's 2014 Elections: Practical Innovations and Optimistic Outcomes

Philips Vermonte

## Introduction by Praxis Editor Aries Arugay

*The 2014 Indonesian elections was a critical watershed for several reasons. Since its transition from authoritarian rule in 1998, democratization's steady pace held a lot of promise for the world's largest Muslim-majority country. Within Southeast Asia, the further strengthening of Indonesian democracy was a bright spot (together with Myanmar's partial liberalization) in the region's spotty democracy record. The stakes were also high this time around as political actors with shady democratic credentials from the Soeharto era attempted to gain power through the ballot box. A preliminary indication of their flimsy commitment to democracy was their push for a parliamentary law that restored the indirect elections of governors and mayors, a vestige of Indonesia's dark authoritarian past. This setback did not prevent the overall optimism of Indonesians when former Jakarta governor Joko Widodo won the presidency. A man of humble beginnings supported by the country's largest political party, "Jokowi" (as he is fondly called) promised to improve Indonesia's economy, governance, and international standing.*

*For this issue of Praxis, we asked political scientist Philips Vermonte who heads the Department of Politics and International Relations of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Jakarta for his observations on the recently concluded elections and their consequences for Indonesia's fledgling democracy. His views both reflect a scholarly analysis of the conduct of the elections as well as an examination of the recent practical innovations such as the use of opinion surveys, exit polling, and information crowdsourcing from youth voters. Vermonte's think tank was active in gauging the public pulse during the election campaign period as well as in embarking on an election "quick count," the first in the country's political history.*

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2014 was certainly a politically eventful year for Indonesia. Living in one of the largest democracies in the world, Indonesians participated in two national elections that year. The first was the April 9th legislative elections in which voters directly elected members of the national as well as local parliament

(DPR and DPRD), while the second was the July 9th presidential elections. The results showed that the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI Perjuangan [PDI-P]), an opposition party that had been out of power for two consecutive electoral cycles, won the legislative elections, while its presidential candidate, Joko Widodo, won against a formidable opponent Prabowo Subianto of the Gerindra Party. Prabowo is a retired Army General who in the past was a very close aide of Soeharto and a known stalwart of the New Order government.

Nevertheless, the ensuing political dynamics were not as straightforward as the election results may suggest. Despite winning the legislative elections, PDI-P failed to form a majority coalition in the national parliament (DPR), something that Prabowo's Gerindra Party was able to accomplish. With a coalition of opposition parties leading parliament, governance may prove difficult for the Widodo presidency. The country's presidential system coupled with the adoption of a multiparty system seemingly displayed what some scholars thought to be a dangerously unpredictable institutional design. Minority governments are produced when different parties capture the executive and legislative branches of government, something experts argued to be unstable for democracy (Linz & Valenzuela, 1994; Mainwaring & Shugart, 1997).

This article seeks to achieve two objectives. First, it discusses the results of Indonesia's 2014 elections and tries to explain why some expectations regarding the high popularity of Joko Widodo prior to the elections failed to materialize. Second, it describes an interesting new phenomenon in people's active participation, especially by the youth, not only in casting their votes but also in ensuring transparency in the conduct of the 2014 elections. The first part of the article analyzes the April 9 legislative elections. This is followed by the issues that surfaced during the July 9 presidential polls and the role of nongovernmental organizations in ensuring transparency in the conduct of the elections. The third and final part draws some preliminary conclusions.

### **The Legislative Election Results: The Incumbent, the Opposition, and the Rest**

In terms of democratic consolidation, the 2014 presidential and legislative elections gave little indication that the oligarchic practices of Indonesia's political parties would cease to exist. This is despite the gains brought by democratization processes and various reform initiatives since 1999. The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) had more or less returned to their barracks, and a series of reforms had taken away their political prerogatives. In addition, the Indonesian press has become among the freest in the world, impressive given its long history of repression under dictatorial rule. *Reformasi* also brought in a number of new economic players into the country's market, which had heretofore been tightly controlled by a small number of business elites and conglomerates. This is not to say that the country's economy is no longer controlled by certain powerful economic interests, but—at the very least—the barriers to entry have been reduced and weakened.

Yet the biggest irony of Indonesia's democratization is that it has not touched upon the critical aspect of its representative institutions, as these largely remained the same. Political parties have not democratized internally in Indonesia, and decision-making processes are still controlled by a small influential clique. The vital power of candidate recruitment and nomination also continues to rest on this exclusive circle.

Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that developments prior to the 2014 presidential election produced several cracks in the seemingly durable glass ceiling of oligarchic party practices. The first was the nomination of Joko Widodo as PDI-P's presidential candidate. It was a sign of remarkable progress for a party known to be strongly guarded by the family of Soekarno, the first president of the country. Even until a few days prior to the start of the campaigns for the legislative elections, party Chair, and presidential aspirant Megawati Sukarnoputri dismissed the suggestion that the party would nominate Mr. Widodo, although she eventually conceded after the legislative election was over.

Apart from PDI-P, the diminishing scope of influence wielded by party oligarchs was also seen in the other parties. The Democrat Party, the party of then President Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono, held a year-long process to find a presidential candidate of its own. The party even flexibly sought outsiders, an indication of an inclusively democratic opening that might be seen in future elections.<sup>1</sup>

The PDI-P certainly benefited from the unprecedented popularity of Mr. Widodo, popularly known as Jokowi, prior to the election. As early as January 2014, a poll predicted that if the presidential election were to be held that day, Jokowi would win by 43%, four times higher than the percentage obtained by the runner up Prabowo Subianto. For a time, it seemed that Jokowi would unquestionably be the country's next president.

Given his soaring popularity, PDI-P hoped that the "Jokowi" effect would help them reach the necessary threshold to nominate a presidential candidate. Therefore, the PDI-P felt it then did not have to form a coalition with other political parties.<sup>2</sup> Five days before the April 9 legislative elections, *Indikator*, a respectable pollster, predicted that the PDI-P would gain approximately 25% of the vote, way above the required 20% to nominate a presidential candidate. It turned out that the PDI-P only won about 19% of the votes (see Table 1 below).

Why did the so-called "Jokowi Effect" seem to have evaporated? Two explanations can be offered. First, the expectation that Jokowi's popularity would substantially increase PDI-P's vote gain was premature. As a comparison, one may look at President Soesilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) chances<sup>3</sup> at around the same period of election in 2009 when he ran for his second-term. SBY's electability scores garnered between 50 and 60%, yet his Democrat Party only got 20.9% of the votes in the 2009 legislative elections. Meanwhile, Jokowi's predicted electability hovered between 30 and 40% during the same period in 2014. Even with an electoral strength twice as high as that of Jokowi, SBY could only help his party win 20.9% of the parliamentary vote. Therefore, it was too optimistic to predict that a "Jokowi Effect," or the

**Table 1. Result of the 2014 Legislative Election (2014 and 2009, Vote Share %)**

	2014	2009
PDI-P	18.9	14
Golkar	14.7	14.4
Gerindra	11.8	4.5
Democrat	10.2	20.9
PKB	9.0	4.9
PAN	7.6	6.0
PKS	6.8	7.9
Nasdem	6.7	–
PPP	6.5	5.3
Hanura	5.3	3.8
PBB	1.5	1.8
PKPI	0.9	0.9

coattail effect for that matter, would deliver substantial votes for the party he supported.

Second, there were approximately 200,000 candidates during the legislative elections vying for seats at the national,<sup>4</sup> provincial and district/city levels.<sup>5</sup> These candidates campaigned for themselves and their respective parties in order to get elected, not for Jokowi or the PDI-P. In effect, these campaigns were offsetting the Jokowi effect at every level of contestation. In addition, Jokowi's name was certainly not on the ballot paper for the legislative elections, which made him understandably absent from the minds of voters who cast their ballots. However, the Jokowi effect may have occurred in Jakarta province during that time when he was still the incumbent governor. The PDI-P saw a 5% increase of the votes for the DPR-Provincial level, from 14% in 2009 to 19% in 2014.

Nevertheless, the results of the April 9 elections triggered interesting political dynamics. From Table 1 it can be seen that the Democrat Party—the incumbent—suffered a serious defeat, losing 50% of the support that it had from the 2009 election. Conversely, two parties seemed to enjoy a significant vote increase, namely the nationalist/secular Gerindra and the Islamic National Awakening Party (PKB), the first is a nationalist/secular party and the later is an Islamic party.

### **The Overall Seat Distribution and Its Political Consequences**

Table 1 indicates the distribution of votes resulting from the legislative election. It is immediately clear that none of the political parties reach the threshold of winning 25% of the popular votes. The PDI-P fell short as did the other political parties. When the Indonesian Election Commission (KPU) announced the final counting that translates popular votes gained by the legislative candidates/political parties into seats taken, it was also clear that no parties achieved the 20% threshold required to nominate a presidential candidate (Table 2).

**Table 2. Seat Distributions 2009–2014**

	2014–2019		2009–2014	
	Seats	% Seat	Seat	% Seat
PDI-P	109	19.5	94	16.8
Golkar	91	16.3	106	18.9
Gerindra	73	13	26	4.6
Democrat	61	10.1	148	26.4
PAN	49	8.8	46	8.2
PKB	47	8.4	28	5.0
PKS	40	7.1	57	10.2
PPP	39	7.0	38	6.8
Nasdem	35	6.3	–	–
Hanura	16	2.9	17	3.0

*Note:* Nasdem is a new party formed prior to the 2014 election.

As a consequence, the political parties had to form a coalition with other parties to be able to nominate a presidential and vice-presidential candidate.

### **The Presidential Election Results and Its Political Consequences**

Two pairs of candidates were competing during the presidential elections. Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla (Jokowi-JK) were nominated by the Great Indonesia Coalition (KIH) that controls 207 seats (37.1%) in the parliament. Conversely, Prabowo Subianto (the former commander of the Indonesian army special force and founder of the Gerindra Party) and Hatta Rajasa (the chairman of the National Mandate Party [PAN]) were nominated by the Red-and-White Coalition (KMP) that commands 52.2% of the seats (292 seats) in the parliament.

On July 9th, Indonesians cast their vote in the presidential election, where the names of two pairs of candidates appeared on the ballot paper: Jokowi-JK and Prabowo-Hatta. Later on that day, quick counts and exit polls from credible pollsters established Jokowi-JK as the winner. According to several quick counts, the votes were divided rather thinly, Jokowi-JK got around 52% and Prabowo-Hatta won approximately 48%.

These early estimates provoked an intense debate on the role of quick counting in particular and opinion polling in general. Public opinion surveys have become very popular in Indonesia since the conduct of direct presidential election for the first time in 2004. It became even more popular after Indonesia started the practice of directly electing local executive leaders at the provincial and district/city level (i.e., governors, heads of district/regent, and mayors). Some people perceived public opinion surveys and quick counts merely as potent tools for candidates to subtly influence voting behavior by manipulating the data and eventually releasing misleading survey results. However, the data showed that pollsters in



**Table 3. Public Opinion Surveys Prior to the Presidential Elections<sup>a</sup>**

Pollster	Prabowo-Hatta	Jokowi-JK	Release Date
Vox Populi Survey	52.8	37.7	15 June 2014
Forima	45.7	41.4	17 June 2014
IRC	47.5	43.0	20 June 2014
FEM IPB	47.0	42.0	23 June 2014
LSN	46.6	39.9	26 June 2014
Median	46.2	44.3	26 June 2014
Polcomm	46.8	45.3	27 June 2014
LSJ	47.5	41.3	27 June 2014
Puskaptis	43.7	40.8	27 June 2014
IDM	48.8	34.7	30 June 2014
PDB	40.6	32.2	1 July 2014
INES	54.3	37.6	2 July 2014
ISI	52.6	47.5	6 July 2014
Populi Center	36.9	47.5	4 June 2014
Poltracking Inst.	41.1	48.5	15 June 2014
Balitbang Kompas	35.3	42.3	21 June 2014
Indobarometer	42.0	46.0	29 June 2014
Lingkar Survey	44.2	47.8	7 July 2014
Charta Politika	45.0	49.0	8 July 2014
SMRC	44.9	47.6	8 July 2014

Source: <sup>a</sup>The table appears in Arya Fernandes, “*Tinjauan Perkembangan Politik- Pemilu Presiden 2014: Perananan Lembaga Penelitian dan Tantangan Pemerintah Baru* (Review of Political Development- The 2014 Presidential Election: The Role of Research Institutes and the Challenge for the New Government),” *Jurnal Analisis CSIS*, vol. 43/3, September 2014. p. 234.

Note: The numbers do not add up to 100 percent because undecided voters (as well as those who did not respond to the particular question on their preference) were not included in the table.

Indonesia are sufficiently credible in predicting election outcomes. Just prior to the July 9th election, various pollsters released surveys with conflicting results (Table 3).

The conflicting results then became a potential pretext for either candidate to accuse the other of rigging the election outcomes. As a matter of fact, the 2014 presidential election would be remembered as the most competitive presidential election so far in the country since the fall of Soeharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998. In a normal situation, quick counts<sup>6</sup> would be an effective means to predict the winner. Yet, the public was presented with the same problems. Pollsters that did the quick counts on July 9th revealed conflicting results. Some declared that Jokowi-JK was the winner, while others declared that Prabowo-Hatta was the actual winner (Table 4).

This differing results created a huge political controversy and even further polarized the electorate. Eventually, PERSEPI, an association of pollsters in Indonesia demanded what it called “methodology audit” to all agencies that did the quick counts. When the audit eventually took place, the process and the result were widely reported in the Indonesian media. PERSEPI declared that CSIS-Cyrus, Indikator, Lingkaran, Populi Center, and SMRC did their

**Table 4. Quick Count Results<sup>a</sup>**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Prabowo-Hatta (%)</b>	<b>Jokowi-JK (%)</b>	<b>N (Sampled Polling Stations)</b>
KPU (official manual counting)	46.85	53.15	all
Litbang Kompas	47.66	52.34	2,000
RRI	47.29	52.71	2,000
SMRC	47.09	52.91	4,000
CSIS-Cyrus	47.9	52.10	2,000
Lingkaran Survey	46.43	53.37	2,000
Indikator	47.20	52.47	2,000
Populi Center	49.05	50.95	2,000
Puskaptis	52.05	47.95	2,000
JSI	50.14	49.86	2,000
LSN	50.56	49.44	Not known
IRC	51.11	48.89	Not known

Source: <sup>a</sup>Arya Fernandes (2014, p. 233).

quick counts with a correct methodology and in a clean and transparent manner. PERSEPI expelled JSI and Puskaptis from their membership in the association as a result of their refusal to be audited.

Regardless, Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Rajasa refused to concede on July 9th, urging the Indonesian voters to wait until the Indonesia Election Commission announced the result of its official count that would come no later than July 22nd.<sup>7</sup> Indonesia then entered a period of heightened political tensions. Given the high stakes, Indonesians became worried that either side might infiltrate the KPU's manual count to manipulate the results in their favor.

At this point, Indonesia witnessed a very interesting and unprecedented development in people's participation to ensure a transparent counting process. Several young citizens trained in information technology (IT) initiated a crowd-sourced election count using a digital platform that in no time became massively popular. Using Facebook, smart phones, and Twitter, young people took pictures of the so-called "C-1 form" from polling stations where they had cast their vote. The C-1 form is a document that records official counting in a polling station, signed by the official of that polling station. C-1 form results were then posted on social media platforms such as Facebook and/or Twitter.

Coincidentally, the KPU also uploaded the scanned image of all C-1 forms from each of the 478,828 polling stations across Indonesia. Suddenly, the presidential election results were readily available for everyone to see. Several online initiatives emerged to aggregate the numbers, either from the snapshots taken using smart phones or the official scanned images. Indonesians voluntarily contributed to the websites that had already been equipped with an algorithm able to count the votes using the online C-1 forms.

The crowd-sourced vote counting matched the manual count of the KPU. Kawal Pemilu, the most trusted online platform of this crowd-sourcing



initiative concluded that Jokowi-JK won the election by obtaining 53.15% of the total votes, while Prabowo-Hatta got 46.85%. Later, on July 22nd, the KPU officially declared Jokowi-JK the winner with 53.15% of the votes, against Prabowo-Hatta's 46.85%.

The crowd-sourced election monitoring through an online platform is certainly a new phenomenon in Indonesia's democracy. It introduces a new way of political participation and organization especially among the country's technology-savvy youth. This is uncharted territory for Indonesia's democracy and will likely expand in scope in the foreseeable future given the fact that Indonesia's Internet penetration has been growing substantially in the past few years.

Nevertheless, Prabowo Subianto challenged the decision and filed a lawsuit with Indonesia's Constitutional Court. The pair demanded that the Court annul the KPU's decision on the ground that their team found "structural, systematic, and massive violations" in the presidential election processes' and claimed that they had won by 50.25% of the votes against 49.74% of Jokowi-JK.<sup>8</sup> The judges of the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled in their final verdict that the demands from Prabowo-Hatta's side had no bases. Indonesia now has a new president after a long and hard-fought campaign within the bounds of its democratic framework.

### **Conclusions**

This article has highlighted the important fact that Indonesia continues to struggle in strengthening its fledgling democracy. As a matter of fact, the 2014 elections was the fourth time for the Indonesian voters after the fall of Suharto in 1998. Since the first democratic election in 1999, Indonesia had been conducting peaceful elections in 2004 and 2009. Yet, the 2014 elections probably were thus far the most politically critical in the post-Soeharto Indonesia due to several reasons.

First, with regard to the presidential elections, it is the first election in Indonesian history in which no incumbent president participated. With no incumbent candidate running, the political field became widely open as no politician could benefit from the government apparatus and resources, including the bureaucracy, at the national and/or local level.

Second, the year 2014 saw an interesting development in Indonesia with regard to the presidential elections, as there were only two competing pairs of candidates. The result was the by-product of intense and somewhat bitter competition between the two candidates. It spilled over beyond the elections and will likely shape the relations between the newly elected president and the House of Representative (DPR). With executive and legislative branches held by opposing parties, there will be challenges to governance and policymaking.

Third, for the first time in the history of this country, an opposition party regained power through electoral means. The PDI-P, the winner of the legislative election, has taught the country one important lesson in electoral politics. PDI-P's performance showed that being outside of the power for two electoral cycles, losing in the 2004 and 2009 elections, does not mean eventual

political demise. It also sent a message to all political players in Indonesia that the only pathway to legitimate power is through the ballot box.

Fourth and more importantly, the 2014 elections in Indonesia saw a very interesting development in people's very active participation, not only in exercising their right to vote, but also in ensuring that elections are conducted in a clean and transparent manner. The use of digital/IT platforms certainly helped the public in doing so. Credit is also due to the Indonesian Election Commission (KPU) who decided to upload the forms that documented counting results from each of 478,828 polling stations to their website. Without the online availability of these documents, the crowd-sourced counting would never be possible. This commitment for transparency is a good practice that should be encouraged and maintained. It simply shows the fact that transparency in election governance requires active commitment and participation from all stakeholders: voters, election bodies, politicians, scholars, practitioners, and the political players.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The Democrat Party struggled to regain confidence from the public after a series of corruption scandals involving its top cadres, including the party's chairman Anas Surbaningrum, surfaced.

<sup>2</sup>The Indonesian election law stipulates that two types of threshold are in place, a party must win 25% of the 560 seats within the DPR or 20% of the popular votes in the legislative election in order to nominate a presidential candidate. In a situation where none of the parties reach either threshold, they may form a coalition with other parties to fulfill the threshold. The issue is that none of the political parties have an adequate internal mechanism in the democratic selection process of a candidate to be nominated, resulting in the powerful role of party elites. This is true in the nomination processes of both presidential and legislative candidates.

<sup>3</sup>In the Indonesian context, electability refers to the level of support a presidential candidate gets in public opinion surveys measured through a question such as the following: "If a presidential election were held today, which candidate are you going to vote for?"

<sup>4</sup>For the national legislative body (National level DPR), there were 6,608 candidates competing to win the 560 available seats.

<sup>5</sup>The number of seats available at the Provincial DPR level is 2,112 seats, and at the DPR-District/City level, it is 16,895 seats.

<sup>6</sup>The quick count's methodology is different from public opinion surveys that sampled the population of voters. Instead, quick counts sampled the polling stations across Indonesia that recorded the actual manual counting at those stations. As such, quick counts usually are far more accurate than public opinion surveys with a margin of error less than 1%.

<sup>7</sup>"A People's Victory," *The Jakarta Post*, July 10, 2014.

<sup>8</sup>"Lawsuit errors vex MK Justices," *The Jakarta Post*, August 7, 2014.

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