

Fragile Victory: Prospects for the Jokowi Presidency

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Summary

This week saw Joko Widodo officially confirmed as Indonesia's next president. With his humble background and demeanour, popular appeal and reputation for probity, the coming to power of this political superstar has been hailed as a new dawn for the world's third largest democracy. Yet when he is inaugurated in October, for a range of political and structural reasons Jokowi will be assuming the weakest presidency Indonesia has seen since independence. The consequences for politics and policy in Indonesia over the next 5 years are potentially far-reaching.

After two weeks of processing, the Indonesian Electoral Commission (KPU) this week announced Joko Widodo ('Jokowi') and his running mate Jusuf Kalla as the winners of the 9 July Indonesian presidential election, with 53% of the vote. The background is a tense six month period during which Jokowi, the current Governor of Jakarta and an Indonesian political superstar, saw his previous lead of 38 percentage points in March narrowed to 6 points in the days before the election.

The stalling in momentum was the signal achievement of his rival, Prabowo Subianto, a former general and close ally and one time son-in-law of the former President Suharto. Prabowo had been seen as an outside challenger, a nationalist and representative of the old guard and Indonesia's vested interests. One of the legacies from Prabowo's time in the military is an allegedly chequered record on human rights that has made some western stakeholders wary: his

involvement in putting down the Papuan rebellion produced a ban on travel to the US and the UK that is still in place.

Prabowo had what many believed to be a better financed campaign and the support of a number of the major media outlets. Most prominent among these were Aburizal Bakrie, the Chairman of the Golkar political party, who controls the tvOne channel, and Surya Paloh, who owns the Media Indonesia daily newspaper and the TV Metro television network. The former general conducted a disciplined campaign that made a significant dent in Jokowi's support, so much so that on polling day, the results were close enough for both sides to claim victory. His campaign is now preparing to challenge the KPU's decision before Indonesia's constitutional court.

Prabowo also built a powerful political coalition in the months following the April parliamentary elections, which

meant that going into polling day on 9 July his coalition controlled 63% of the seats in parliament. Whether Prabowo's legal challenge is successful or not, the grouping of parties which currently support him - which he has promised to take into the next parliament as a "permanent coalition" - and the continued backing of Golkar Chairman, Aburizal Bakrie, whose party will play a critical role in the next parliament, mean that he can expect to wield significant influence - and cause major problems - for a Joko presidency.

All (too few of) the President's Men

When Jokowi takes office in October, as things stand he will become the weakest president Indonesia has seen since independence (in structural terms). His vulnerability arises both from the marginal nature of his mandate (no presidential election in Indonesia has ever yielded such a close result) and from his lack of a working majority in Parliament.

Despite a lacklustre tenure as president and an often uncomfortable relationship with Indonesia's parliament, President Yudhoyono managed to secure more than 60% of the popular vote in the 2004 and 2009 presidential elections, whilst his coalition won 64% of parliamentary seats in his first term and 75% in his second. Unless there is a shift in the current political landscape, Jokowi's coalition will command the support of only 37% of MPs. This is a stark contrast to SBY's government and even more so to the 95% support commanded by President Wahid at the end of the 1990s, and

is an accentuation of the balkanisation of the legislature over the last two decades.

In terms of space to govern, the popular mandate in Indonesia is less significant than the lack of a parliamentary majority. This stems from a number of changes instituted after democratisation in 1998, all of which had the intended purpose of preventing the rise of another autocrat in the Suharto mould. The cumulative effect of these changes means that the power of the president vis-à-vis the legislature is actually relatively modest. The most fundamental is the proportional representation system which makes it virtually impossible for a ruling party to command a majority of seats as a stand-alone government.

In addition, the Indonesian constitution cedes only limited power to the executive. The president has the power to propose bills and to veto the deliberation of a bill, but ultimately the power to pass laws rests with Parliament, which also controls the budget. The president has the option of using 'emergency regulations' (a Perppu) which can be implemented immediately but which must still be retroactively approved by Parliament. With only 37% of MPs committed to giving him their support, passing legislation for a Jokowi presidency promises to be a constant and constraining battle. In practice, Jokowi will either need an effective cohabitation with Prabowo (difficult, given how the election has ended), or to secure the support of one of the other two large parties who control over 10% of seats: Golkar or the Democratic Party (PD).

Jokowi cannot count on defections: a quirk of the Indonesian political system, designed to maintain party discipline, means that power is overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of party leaders. A law passed in 2002 stipulates that MPs who violate party rules or switch to other parties automatically lose their seat. This concentrates the power-broking with Jokowi in the hands of Prabowo, SBY and Bakrie. There are, however, reasons why both Bakrie and SBY may find it hard to consider moving.

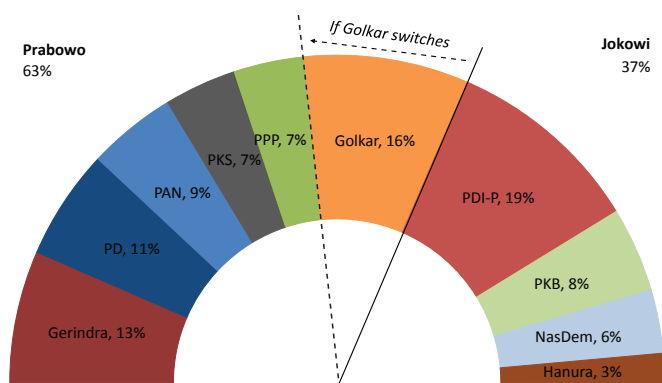


Fig 1: Indonesian Parliament, by candidate allegiance
Source: Indonesian Election Commission (KPU)

% of Parliamentary seats under the control of...	Wahid 1999-2001	Sukarnoputri 2001-2004	Yudhoyono 2004-2009	Yudhoyono 2009-2014	Widodo 2014 - ?
The ruling party	10%	31%	10%	27%	19%
The ruling coalition	95%	83%	64%	76%	37% (?)
Parties outside coalition	5%	17%	36%	24%	63% (?)

Fig 2: Support within Parliament, by Indonesian President since democratisation
Source: Institute of Developing Economies

Some of these are personal and political. Both have strong ties to the Prabowo camp: Hatta Rajasa, Prabowo's running mate, is SBY's son in law, whilst Bakrie was promised an unprecedented 'first minister' role in Prabowo's cabinet. SBY also has a poor relationship with Megawati Sukarnoputri, the power behind the throne of the PDI-P. But rumours have also circulated in Jakarta that whereas Prabowo was happy to offer Golkar and PD leaders immunity from post-election anti-corruption drives, Jokowi was less forthcoming.

The key question that may determine whether Golkar shifts its allegiances to Jokowi is whether Bakrie, a staunch supporter of Prabowo who accompanied him to file his complaint against the KPU, can prevent an internal coup. As a party, Golkar has always gravitated towards power: it was the party of Suharto and has been a party of every ruling coalition since independence. There is a local saying that in the event of a nuclear holocaust, the two things that would survive in Indonesia are cockroaches and Golkar. Since the July 9 elections there have been rumblings inside the party about Bakrie's apparent willingness to move into opposition. Should he be ousted, Golkar may well take its place in the ruling coalition under Jokowi.

President and Parliament

If Bakrie ties Golkar into Prabowo's "permanent coalition" the outlook for President Jokowi is complicated. With neither the overwhelming popular mandate nor majority control of Parliament, Joko may struggle to exercise the same kind of leadership he has shown in Jakarta. Rather than a Modi-style parliamentary juggernaut, Joko looks more of an Obama. Moreover, Jokowi's great asset as a campaigner may be his chief liability as president. Despite his exceptional popularity, Jokowi remains a political outsider without a robust support base of his own. Even his own party, the PDI-P, owes its loyalty not to Jokowi but to the party's leader, former President Megawati who relinquished her own ambitions for a third presidential run in order to accommodate Jokowi's bid.

To be sure, Jokowi may stand to benefit from the non-ideological character of Indonesian politics. Joko's policy platform is a mix of the socialist heritage of the PDI-P with economic nationalism, and wide-ranging ambitions on reform, from tax collection, the fuel subsidy, agriculture, to education and the police. Along with a burst of road and port building he will want to maintain

the current ban on raw mineral exports, reduce dependence on energy imports, and restrict foreign ownership of Indonesian banks. Much of this has a large element of cross-party support in Indonesia and would have been part of a Prabowo platform also. Fiscal reform is a cross-party agenda, although the devil will be in the detail.

Nevertheless, the opportunities to drive home the president's weakness will be hard to resist. Most vulnerable may be anything that involves taking on Indonesian vested interests or popular resistance to change. A significant proportion of parties and parliamentarians will have a vested interest in undermining any serious economic reforms. Anti-corruption was one of the key planks on which Joko built his campaign. However, for a president with a fragile popular mandate controlling only 37% of parliamentary seats, the majority of which belong to a party which does not owe its loyalty chiefly to him, a wide-ranging anti-corruption campaign looks difficult. We are unlikely to see a Xi Jinping-style purge in Indonesia under a Joko presidency.

The numbers and experience suggest that a key feature of a Jokowi presidency may be political paralysis, with a weak executive with a slim mandate, at the head of an unruly and fragile coalition that is incapable of passing any substantial or controversial legislation. They will face a resentful and united opposition with a disciplined leader who despite defeat at the polls has built and fought his campaign on the basis of a promise to protect the interests of his supporters. We may also see a splintering of power, with influence more diffusely spread amongst prominent parliamentarians and ministers who find themselves able to exercise more power relative to the presidency than under the SBY administration. Jokowi is clearly a motivated and in many respects transformational political leader. But those expecting radical change in Indonesia - at least in the short term - are likely to be disappointed. Pragmatists may want to wait a while before heralding a new dawn for Indonesia.

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