

THE PULSE



The Pulse is a biweekly update on current issues, which also include how Indonesia sees the phenomenon. The Pulse, produced by Synergy Policies, wishes to engage the public, particularly policymakers, advisors, lecturers and students. As of now we have three themes: foreign affairs, social protection, and democracy.

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WHO IS THE NEXT OPPOSITION IN INDONESIAN POLITICS?

by:

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The Constitutional Court dismissed the lawsuit filed by non-front-running presidential candidates accusing fraud in the February 14th, 2024, election. This rejection is inevitably certifying Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the Indonesian President and Vice President for 2024-2029. Prabowo's next move is to build a regime that can win the support of the legislature.



Source: Kompas.com

What are the challenges for Prabowo Subianto in forming such a regime? Who is the next opposition in Indonesian politics?

Indonesian politics is based on a presidential system. The note here, however, is that Indonesia never fully cut ties with the habits that have incarcerated it for thirty-two years under the authoritarian regime. When the authoritarian President Suharto fell, in his first few days in office, the new President Habibie loosened the government's tight reins on the press and allowed for new political parties to emerge (Liddle 1999, 94) but the pattern of engagements among political parties remained intact. Political parties rely on extra-institutional or informal negotiations and clientelism to settle budget appropriations, to pass legislations, and to approve projects. Indonesia's Corruption Perception Index 2022 placed Indonesia down 4 points from the year 2021 suggesting that corruption loomed and that the government faces challenges in controlling corruption.



Politicians, cabinet ministers, parliamentary members, the law enforcement officials, the election supervisory agency officials, also district and provincial level officials were caught red-handed receiving bribes. Capitalist groups align with political parties, even form political parties, and wish for partnership with the officials to win contracts and concessions. There was a military reform that is expected to end the military and police presence in politics, but Law No. 20/2023 on State Apparatus (article 19) and its implementing government regulations allow for certain government positions to be given to military and police. The Ombudsman spoke about the maladministration process in appointing ad-interim officials such as governors, mayors, and regents in 2022 because there are those who are active military and police officials.[1]

Indeed, practicing democracy is tougher than theorizing it. There is no one size fits all practice of democracy. Indonesia adheres to Pancasila ideology, which is the five principle that encourages political groups to work together towards national unity that is based on deliberation and consensus in the government. President after President in the Reform era strived to maintain national unity, and to interpret Pancasila within the minefield of habit in different ways. If there is any line that can connect the dots on the Indonesian Presidents' interpretations of Pancasila in politics, it will be a hybrid regime (Gagle 2015), which is a regime that combines democratic traits with autocratic ones. While elections were organized on a regular five-year cycle, the President searches for "a formula" to control the legislature using his prerogative right as a president to appoint cabinet ministers from any political parties. Indeed, in Indonesian presidential system, a president is not bound to appoint ministers from just his party or the parties that support his nomination.

The followings are the precedence on how a President pushed the implementation of a hybrid regime using his authority in the executive branch. President Yudhoyono won a landslide in 2004 election although his own political party, The Democrat, only win the fifth position in the parliament. Yudhoyono wanted to pull in all political parties within his cabinet, calling it the "Indonesian Unity" cabinet. And indeed, all parties agreed to join the cabinet, except the party of former President Megawati Sukarnoputri, the PDI-P. PDI-P chose to be an opposition. When Yudhoyono was re-elected in 2009, again with a landslide, PDI-P continued being an opposition and two parties joined it as the opposition: Gerindra (the party of Prabowo Subianto) and Hanura. Indeed, this was a bold move from the PDI-P knowing that PDI-P won less seats in the parliament than the 1999 election, only gaining the second place after the Golkar party that joined the Yudhoyono's coalition. And again in 2009, PDI-P lost more seats in the parliament, only in the third place after the Democrat and Golkar party. As an opposition, the PDI-P successfully pressured the President to investigate corruption in the Century Bank, to pass on the implementing law on social security in 2011 (called the BPJS law).

In 2014, PDI-P presidential candidate won: President Joko Widodo. Joko Widodo was supported by the PDI-P, Nasdem, PKB, and Hanura parties. The race was against candidate Prabowo Subianto from Gerindra party. The cabinet was called the Working Cabinet (Kabinet Kerja). Joko Widodo highlighted the meritocracy requirement to be in his cabinet.

Joko Widodo embraced not only the party that supported his candidacy, but also other major parties in the parliament. The Democrats, Gerindra, and PKS didn't join the cabinet and chose to be the opposition. But compared to the previous experience, this round of opposition was not effective. One of the reasons was the immense influence of Joko Widodo's populism approach. Joko Widodo reached out and embraced civil society and human rights figures into his cabinet and office of President. Such strategy neutralized critics and opposition in the parliament.

In 2019, President Joko Widodo secured a second term, winning against, once again, Prabowo Subianto. In this term, Joko Widodo took a different approach. Widodo appointed political party leaders as his cabinet members. The highlight was his appointment of Prabowo Subianto as the defense minister in 2019. The parties which didn't get any chance in the cabinet was the Democrats and PKS, but because they are a minority in the parliament, the two parties cannot play the role of an opposition effectively. PDIP and the parties that supported Joko Widodo are the majority in the parliament.

What to expect from Prabowo?

Prabowo Subianto run as a President along with Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of incumbent President Joko Widodo, as the Vice President. The pair run with the nomination from the following political parties: Gerindra (a centrist and secular party where Prabowo is the Chair), Golkar (the centrist and secular party that was the strongest and always winning party under the President Suharto regime), Democrat (a centrist and secular party led by Former President Yudhoyono's son Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono), and PAN (a relatively small and center-right religious party). Also supporting the pair three small political parties: the PSI (chaired by President Joko Widodo's youngest son Kaesang Pangarep), PBB (a small religious party), and Gelora (a splinter of PKS party that claimed to be both nationalist and religious). But the three small parties didn't win enough votes for seats in the 2024-2029 parliament. Furthermore, in the parliament, Gerindra is not a majority (only winning the third position, 86 seats). The larger party in the parliament is PDI-P (a nationalist and center-left party chaired by Former President Megawati Sukarnoputri) winning 110 seats, and then Golkar winning 102 seats.

With such a composition in the parliament, the signals have been stronger that Prabowo seek to make peace with as many parties as possible. All eyes are on Megawati Sukarnoputri, the chair of PDI-P, because it is her decision on whether PDI-P would be an opposition in this presidential term. There are parts of the public, mostly democracy activists and academics, who chose not to acknowledge Prabowo's winning as legitimate. They questioned the ethics of Gibran's vice-presidential candidacy, the electoral fraud, and the unfinished handling of human rights abuses.

Highlights:

- PDI-P Chair and former President Megawati Sukarnoputri has yet to congratulate Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka.
- Prabowo Subianto announced his idea to form a “Presidential Club” to embrace suggestions and ideas from all former presidents. The informal gathering is expected “to show that the Indonesian leaders are one voice (kompak), getting along (rukun) and friendly to each other (guyub).” [2]
- Gibran’s expression to involve “the seniors” including the Chair of PDIP in forming the cabinet members was responded cynically by the PDIP senior officials: “let’s not use this to boost (Gibran’s) public image.” [3]

Reference

- [1] Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, 20 July 2022, “Ombudsman Minta Kemendagri Evaluasi Pengangkatan Pj Kepala Daerah dari TNI-Polri Aktif. See <https://ombudsman.go.id/news/r/ombudsman-minta-kemendagri-evaluasi-pengangkatan-pj-kepala-daerah-dari-tni-polri-aktif>
- [2] Detiknews. 4 May 2024. “Ide Prabowo Bentuk Presidential Club Dijawab Demokrat dan PDIP”. See <https://news.detik.com/pemilu/d-7323986/ide-prabowo-bentuk-presidential-club-dijawab-demokrat-dan-pdip>
- [3] Detiknews. 3 May 2024. “Gibran Mau Konsultasi Kabinet ke Mega, PDIP: Sikap Hormat Tak Perlu Publikasi.” See <https://news.detik.com/pemilu/d-7323147/gibran-mau-konsultasi-kabinet-ke-mega-pdip-sikap-hormat-tak-perlu-publikasi>

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