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## Jakarta Governor's Election: Implications for 2014

By Leonard C. Sebastian and Yoes C. Kenawas

### Synopsis

*The outsider pair of Joko Widodo-Basuki Tjahaja Purnama garnered an unexpected margin of almost eight percent in defeating the incumbent Fauzi Bowo-Nachrowi Ramli in the Jakarta gubernatorial election on 20 September 2012. There are several observable implications for the 2014 presidential elections in Indonesia.*

### Commentary

AGAINST THE odds, outsider candidate Joko Widodo emerged as the winner of the recent Jakarta gubernatorial election. "Jokowi", as he is popularly known, with Basuki Tjahaja Purnama ("Ahok") from Sumatra as his running mate, beat the incumbent Fauzi Bowo ("Foke") and Nachrowi Ramli ("Nara"), to emerge as the governor-elect of Indonesia's capital city.

Despite the relatively good performance of incumbent governor Fauzi and support from major political parties, a majority of voters chose Mr Joko, the mayor of a small Central Java city, Surakarta, to handle the problems of the massive, smog-choked and overcrowded metropolis of Jakarta. Why was Jokowi able to win the Jakarta election for governor? What are the implications for Indonesia, particularly in the general and presidential elections in 2014? There are a few observable trends evident from the recent election.

### Lesson #1: Weak party, more personal appeal

Firstly, the political parties' machinery, affiliations or endorsements are not enough to mobilise voters. Although the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDIP) and the Indonesia Greater Movement Party (Gerindra) claimed that their cadres worked hard to mobilise voters, it was Mr. Joko's personal appeal, enhanced by extensive media coverage, that were the key factors in his success. Polls conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) and Tempo weekly magazine indicate that only two percent of Mr. Joko's and 0.6 percent of Mr. Fauzi's supporters voted for them based on party affiliation.

Some 29 percent voted for Mr. Joko because they perceived him as caring for the people, while 18 percent saw him as an honest person and 17 percent because they believed he could deliver on his campaign promises. As for Mr. Fauzi, 22 percent of his voters supported him for religious reasons, 13 percent because the incumbent was able to provide social aid, 13 percent because he cared for the people, and 11 percent believed that the incumbent could deliver his promises.

The electorate is now inclined to vote based on the personal characteristics and image of the candidates rather than their political party affiliations. Declining party identity, weak party machinery, and popular pragmatism have contributed to such trends. This means the next Indonesian president in 2014 could come from a smaller party but having good personal characteristics and image. While support from political parties is a necessity to fulfill constitutional requirements, political parties are now merely stepping-stones for a presidential candidate. This serves to confirm a trend that began in 2004 when Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected as president on the back of his personal popularity despite lacking an extensive party machinery.

## **Lesson #2: Good performance not good enough**

During his first term, Mr. Fauzi was able to increase the regional minimum wage from IDR 900,560 to IDR 1,529,000, provide free public schooling for the poor, maintain a higher economic growth compared to national average, and promote environmentally-friendly development. However public policy successes alone will not win majority support. Voters appreciate a leader whom they regard as being a part of them, willing to listen to the public's aspirations, and has empathy for their grievances.

Despite Mr. Fauzi's many achievements, voters saw him as elitist, unable to connect with them, and possessing a governing style that excluded the public from his plans. When Mr. Fauzi visited the fire victims in Karet Tengsin in Central Jakarta, he stated that those who did not vote for him in the first round had better move to Solo (Surakarta). Though he was just speaking in jest, the media castigated him for being uncaring.

The election result goes against a common consensus that an incumbent's good performance is usually rewarded with reelection. The winner of the 2014 election will be an individual best able to inspire the electorate, embrace the people in his plans, and display flexible yet effective leadership as compared to Mr. Fauzi's distant, rigid, bureaucratic style.

## **Lesson #3: political communication strategy**

Potential candidates must have a better understanding of how the media works and adopt breakthrough communication strategies that not only engage voters but invite their participation.

The Alliance of Independent Journalist (AJI) reported that the Foke-Nara pair received more negative media coverage compared to Jokowi-Ahok. Interestingly, the former's mistakes during the campaign were more newsworthy compared to their achievements or campaign messages. However Mr. Joko had enjoyed a productive working relationship with the media long before he announced his candidacy.

In Surakarta, he embarked on initiatives that were not only newsworthy for the local media but also captured the imagination of the national and international media. When facing media interviews, the likeable Mr. Joko was flexible and engaging. This was in stark contrast to Mr. Fauzi's perceived arrogant and rigid style.

## **The new politician?**

Although the impact of social media on voting behaviour is still debatable, it played a prominent role in the Jakarta governorate election. Jakarta leads the way as the liveliest Twitter city in the world; with more than 43 million Facebook users, the campaign featured two-way communications with the candidates, their supporters, and their opponents.

In the first round, Mr. Joko's change-focused campaign included townhall-style public forums on Skype, snazzy YouTube videos, and even campaign-themed computer games. It was not surprising therefore that Mr. Joko attracted a huge number of unpaid volunteers for the second round. Mastering the use of social media will be vital to win the hearts and minds of the voters.

Mr. Joko represents a new type of politician. Without Jakarta elite connections, he portrayed himself as an agent of change. By connecting directly with voters rather than the political parties, he opted for an unconventional strategy, unlike Mr. Fauzi who placed greater emphasis on traditional patronage networks. Mr. Joko's election presages a new style of politics in Indonesia's evolving democracy.

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