



Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Elections Campaigning for Continuity

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► Key Takeaways

- Indonesia's general election, scheduled on February 14, will determine the nation's next president and vice-president. A turnout of 204 million voters, over a total population of 277 million, is expected to show up at the polls.
- The election features a three-way race between prominent political figures Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo, and Anies Baswedan. All three candidates have affiliations with the current administration of President Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, with Ganjar Pranowo and Prabowo Subianto even competing for his legacy.
- As of early February, Prabowo, Jokowi's defense minister, and his vice-presidential pick Gibran Rakabuming Raka, Jokowi's eldest son, are leading the polls. Experts nonetheless foresee a probable runoff, which is set in late June 2024.
- Concerns have surfaced regarding Jokowi's interventions in the campaign, which seem to support the Prabowo Gibran ticket. While such interference is not inherently unlawful, certain actions undertaken by the administration to support Prabowo and Gibran raise more serious concerns about election integrity.

Introduction

Indonesia is gearing up for its next general election on February 14, with a potential runoff scheduled in late June. This major electoral process will determine the nation's next president and vice-president since incumbent President Joko Widodo, also known as Jokowi, will step down after ten years in office in compliance with the constitutional limit of two terms.

Voters will also decide on nearly 20,000 representatives at the national, provincial, and district levels. Another provincial election is set for November this year, although discussions are currently unfolding in the Parliament to advance it to September. This proposed timeline has triggered concerns about possible interference from the current administration, given that the new one will only be appointed in October.

While Indonesia's democratic transition has been hailed as one of Southeast Asia's success stories due to a commitment to free and fair elections and robust electoral participation, observers regret a regression in recent years. This decline could be attributed to the confiscation of democratic institutions by political and economic elites, the executive branch's escalating use of illiberal measures, and the more frequent appeal to identity politics.

Since the early 2010s, Indonesia's political landscape has seen the emergence of populist movements, including some Islamist populist groups. This development has contributed to heightened tensions within society, particularly concerning issues of race and religion. Nevertheless, after ten years of Jokowi's leadership, the Indonesian political arena is essentially divided into two camps: a sizable governmental coalition rallying behind the presidential figure and a minor, fragmented opposition.

Against this complex backdrop, this *Memo* provides insights into the ongoing campaign for the presidential and vice-presidential offices. It sheds light on the backgrounds and platforms of the candidates, emphasizing how politicking takes precedence over ideologies.

Two "heirs" and one candidate for "change"

Remarkably, all three candidates have connections with the current administration, with Ganjar Pranowo and Prabowo Subianto even competing for Jokowi's legacy. Anies Baswedan stands out as he centered his campaign around the theme of "change".

Prabowo and Gibran: Jokowi's former rival associates with his son to claim his legacy and support base

Prabowo Subianto, born in 1951 in Jakarta, is backed by a coalition comprising, among others, his own party, Gerindra, and political heavyweights Golkar, the Democratic Party, and the National Mandate Party.

Prabowo hails from one of Indonesia's most influential families, with his father holding key ministerial positions under both Presidents Sukarno (1945-1967) and Suharto (1967-1998). Having served 28 years in the armed forces, Prabowo faced a dishonorable discharge following the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998 due to alleged association with human rights violations in Timor Leste and the kidnapping of democratic activists in 1998. Returning to Indonesia in 2001 after a period of self-exile in Jordan, Prabowo started his political career with an unsuccessful attempt at becoming the Golkar party's presidential nominee in the 2004 elections. He then founded his own party, Gerindra. He became Megawati Sukarnoputri's running mate in 2009 but was defeated.

Prabowo made two subsequent unsuccessful bids for the presidency in 2014 and 2019, which he lost to Jokowi. Following his 2019 electoral setback, Prabowo's supporters staged protests in the capital city, alleging widespread vote rigging. In a surprising turn of events, Jokowi extended an olive branch by offering Prabowo the position of defense minister, aiming to incorporate the Gerindra party into the cabinet.

In a move whose consequences have yet to be determined, Prabowo chose Jokowi's eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as a candidate for vice-president. Originating from an entrepreneurial background, Gibran pivoted to a political career in 2020, aligning himself with the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle or PDI-P. The same year, Gibran won 86.53% of the vote and became the new mayor of his Central Java hometown of Surakarta, a position once held by his father.

Ganjar and Mahfud: the presidential party's official pick for the 2024 election

Born in 1968 in Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo is the designated candidate of the PDI-P, the political party that Jokowi has been associated with since 2004. With 22.26% of the seats in Parliament, the PDI-P has been the strongest force within the governmental coalition since the 2019 elections.

A loyalist of former Indonesian president and PDI-P chairwoman Megawati Sukarnoputri, Ganjar currently serves as the governor of his home province, a position he has held since 2013. Over the course of his decade-long tenure, Ganjar has made significant strides in reducing Central Java's poverty rate, decreasing it from 14.4% to 10.9%.

The PDI-P picked seasoned politician Mahfud MD to run alongside Ganjar. Aged 66, he held the pivotal position of Coordinating Minister for Politics, Legal, and Security

Affairs in Jokowi's cabinet. He resigned on February 1, arguing that this decision reflects his desire to support a fair and honest electoral process. Mahfud was the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court from 2008 to 2013. Prior to that, he held several ministerial roles under President Abdurrahman "Gus Dur" Wahid. In 2019, Mahfud already emerged as a possible running mate for Jokowi, but the position eventually went to senior Muslim cleric Ma'ruf Amin.

Anies and Muhaimin: Jokowi's former minister combines with political heavyweight to propose a modestly new path

Anies Baswedan runs as an independent candidate, with backing from the Coalition of Change for Unity (KPP), an electoral alliance led by the NasDem Party.

Anies was born in 1969 in West Java into a family of academics. His grandfather, Abdurrahman Baswedan, was a prominent activist, journalist, and diplomat who served as a deputy minister during the Revolution. Anies himself pursued an academic career, becoming one of Indonesia's youngest university rectors in 2007.

In 2014, Anies assumed the role of spokesman for the campaign team of Jokowi and running mate Jusuf Kalla. Upon Jokowi's victory, Anies was appointed as education minister, a position he held until 2016. After his office removal, Anies entered the Jakarta gubernatorial race in 2017. His candidacy gained traction amid the blasphemy controversy surrounding then-governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, also known as Ahok, who previously served as Jokowi's deputy during his tenure as Jakarta governor. The Jakarta election, characterized by acrimony and polarization, strained relations between Anies and Jokowi.

His running mate, Muhaimin "Cak Imin" Iskandar, has been chairman of the National Awakening Party (PKB) since 2005. In 2009, he served as the Manpower and Transmigration Minister under President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Cak Imin's stronghold in traditional and rural East Java is seen as an ideal complement to Anies' urban base.

Prabowo-Gibran are leading the polls, but a second round remains the most probable scenario

As of early February, the Prabowo-Gibran ticket maintains a lead in electability, ranging from 42.2% to over 52% in opinion surveys, while Ganjar-Mahfud and Anies-Muhaimin follow with 18.1% to 28% and 18.7% to 26.9%, respectively.

Prabowo's popularity has steadily increased since Gibran registered as his running mate in October, although their dominance seems to have plateaued in January. Meanwhile, there are indications of an upward trend for the Anies-Muhaimin ticket, which could be attributed to their ability to appeal to young voters online and Anies' performance during

the televised debates organized by the Electoral Commission (KPU). The Ganjar-Mahfud pair still maintains high eligibility, although their electability has declined in the polls, reportedly due to a shift in support from PDI-P backers toward Prabowo.

Despite Prabowo-Gibran inching closer to the 50% mark and voicing confidence in their ability to secure a victory in the first round, experts foresee a probable runoff. This could create opportunities for electoral alliances between Anies' coalition and the PDI-P to contend against Prabowo, although specific strategies have not been disclosed at this time.

Decoding the candidates' platforms

Indonesian elections often center around personalities rather than platforms, as the competing pairs frequently agree on various policy positions. However, candidates in this election are expected to go beyond traditional agendas of promoting growth and reducing poverty to address issues that resonate with Gen Z voters (born between 1997 and 2010), such as the lack of job opportunities. Official statistics reveal that Millennials (born between 1986 and 1994) and Gen Zers now make up around 54% of Indonesia's population and constitute over 50% of eligible voters.

The three teams acknowledge the significance of advancing industrial development, mainly through Jokowi's emblematic downstreaming strategy and enhancing physical infrastructure. Prabowo-Gibran, however, advocate for a more hands-on role for the state in directing economic policy under what they call "Pancasila Economy." At the same time, Ganjar-Mahfud see the government primarily as a regulator and facilitator and Anies-Muhaimin favor limited government involvement. Additionally, Anies-Muhaimin emphasized during the second televised debate the importance of strengthening social assistance, and Prabowo-Gibran underscored the challenges of the digital economy, calling for training in emerging technologies.

Foreign policy, meanwhile, remains largely an elite concern and has been mostly absent from the discussion

The fight against corruption remains a priority in Indonesia, with all three candidates pledging to strengthen the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK). However, they have not provided detailed plans on how to achieve this goal besides acknowledging a need for better collaboration between the KPK, the Attorney General's Office, and the police. It is noteworthy that a reform implemented by the current administration in 2019 drew significant criticism for allegedly undermining the independence of the Commission.

Foreign policy and defense: minor electoral issues for a nevertheless important regional player

Foreign policy, meanwhile, remains largely an elite concern and has been mostly absent from the discussion, except during the third televised debate.

Prabowo, who has some international experience as defense minister, promotes a vision centered around affirming Indonesia's status as a great nation. Unsurprisingly, his approach is founded on a conception of the state whose primary role is to protect its population. He thus appears to lean more toward military modernization and has disclosed limited details on pursuing regional diplomacy, particularly within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Traditionally, regional multilateralism has been central to Indonesia's foreign policy, allowing Jakarta to engage in various cooperation while maintaining a non-aligned status and thus avoiding exclusive partnerships. Indonesia, moreover, harbors deep-seated mistrust against great powers—although it enjoys relatively good relations with both China and the United States—and the pursuit of hegemony, particularly in its immediate neighborhood.

While Prabowo emphasized Indonesia's possible partnerships with countries of the Global South, particularly in Africa, he adopted a firm stance against the European Union (EU), which he accused of

adopting double standards on trade and environmental issues, citing the EU's anti-deforestation regulation. Despite this, Prabowo maintains close relations with some European countries, including France, from which Indonesia recently procured *Rafale* fighter jets.

Ganjar primarily views foreign policy as a means to promote domestic interests during international negotiations. He aims to uphold Indonesia's traditional "free and active" foreign policy principle while also adjusting it to the contemporary global landscape. This approach is intended to ensure that Indonesia can prioritize its strengths and interests on the international stage.

Anies' manifesto outlines a vision to elevate Indonesia's global role and leadership, focusing on promoting values in foreign engagements. He advocates economic diplomacy as a primary focus and envisions forging non-traditional partnerships with countries in Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America while maintaining a balanced participation in economic initiatives such as the BRICS or China's Belt and Road Initiative. If all three candidates view China as a trusted economic and development partner, Anies and Ganjar have recently expressed their desire to diversify Indonesia's partnerships to avoid dependency.

Prabowo adopted a firm stance against the EU, which he accused of adopting double standards on trade and environmental issues

On defense issues, all candidates aim to build a modern military and improve national defense industries. Anies and Muhaimin adopt a threat-based approach, while Ganjar and Mahfud focus on enhancing technological capabilities. Prabowo and Gibran prioritize continuity, extending current policies, including the Minimum Essential Force, a modernization program first laid out in 2010.

Jokowi's shadow over the campaign

Alleged threats against election integrity

The ongoing campaign is marred by allegations of interference by the incumbent president, which observers attribute to his efforts to support his defense minister and his son. Notably, Jokowi has hosted high-profile private dinners with Prabowo and senior ministers Airlangga Hartarto and Zulkifli Hasan, who chair Golkar and the National Mandate Party, respectively—both members of the coalition supporting Prabowo's candidacy. Jokowi also gave his blessing to the leaders of various volunteer groups associated with his former campaigns to support the Prabowo-Gibran ticket. Volunteer groups are traditionally influential in mobilizing voters.

While Jokowi's interference in the campaign is not inherently unlawful, specific actions undertaken by the administration to support Prabowo and Gibran raise more serious concerns about this election's integrity and have drawn criticism from civil society and academia. Instances of intimidation by prosecutors and security forces have been reported in different parts of Indonesia, suggesting a wider pattern or, at least, extra-zealousness on the part of bureaucrats toward the president, who will retain leadership over the military, police, civil service, as well as some provinces and regencies until October 2024.

In defense of his interventions, or “cawe-cawe” in Javanese, Jokowi has justified them as serving the nation's greater good. Nevertheless, the motive behind these maneuvers could be better explained by Jokowi's desire to secure a legacy beyond his presidential term. He has consistently expressed his wish for his successor to continue his programs, seemingly revealing a proactive effort to shape the trajectory of Indonesian leadership beyond his time in office.

Establishing a political dynasty for the Widodos

An alternative interpretation, albeit not exclusive, could be that Jokowi is trying to establish a political dynasty for his family—when, quite ironically, his popularity over the past decade has been associated with his status as an outsider to the political

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establishment and existing dynasties. This is exemplified by the recent rise of his second son, Kaesang Pangarep, to the summit of Partai Solidarity Indonesia (PSI), a youth movement previously aligned with the PDI-P. Despite not being a major party, the PSI could now serve as a political vehicle for the Widodos, especially in the event of disciplinary sanctions from the PDI-P following Gibran's alignment with Prabowo, which the party's leadership has perceived as a betrayal from both Gibran and his father, who are still PDI-P members.

The intention to create a political dynasty also became apparent with the Constitutional Court's decision that paved the way for Gibran's candidacy. Initially ineligible due to the minimal age requirement of 40—he will be 36 at the time of the election—a mid-October Constitutional Court ruling created an exception for candidates who have served in elected regional offices, a category fitting Gibran, who is the current mayor of Surakarta. Critics argue that this decision amounts to a blatant manipulation of Indonesia's legal system by or on behalf of Jokowi. This claim takes on a particular nuance, considering that Gibran's uncle, Anwar Usman, was the chief justice of the Constitutional Court at the time and chose not to recuse himself from the case. He has since been dismissed after an investigation found him guilty of violating the Court's ethics. The decision nevertheless remains conclusive and binding.

Making sense of Prabowo's electoral strategy

Gibran's candidacy was supported by Prabowo, who sought Jokowi's backing by presenting himself as a reliable ally and successor. However, securing the Jokowi seal of approval could prove to be a double-edged sword: as the presidential election is expected to be determined in a late June 2024 runoff, attacks on Prabowo's involvement in dynasty-building might gain traction during the campaign.

Moreover, Prabowo faces the challenge of maintaining support from the coalition that previously backed Jokowi, considering that some may remain loyal to Ganjar, still the PDI-P's official candidate. Securing votes in Central and Eastern Java, where Ganjar traditionally holds strength, and competing with Anies Baswedan in West Java, Banten, and the Jakarta area will also be significant hurdles.

Unlike in the previous election, when he recruited hardline Islamist organizations to support his campaign, Prabowo seems less inclined to appeal to a religious identity narrative to gain votes. One explanation could be that the groups that backed Prabowo in 2019 are now deprived of much of their strength after the Jokowi government, alarmed by the scale of the anti-Ahok rallies, moved to take legal action against organizations and individuals.

Prabowo also departed from his previous tough-talking image and shifted his rhetoric to a more inclusive tone, emphasizing loyalty to the president. Some attribute this change to Prabowo's efforts to win the youth vote, especially by building a "gemoy"

(adorable) image of himself on social media—a strategy also adopted by the other candidates. Others suggest that it reflects an adaptation to Jokowi's style of politics, which aims at building the largest possible coalition.

However, behind this more approachable version of Prabowo, his support base appears almost unchanged, comprising a balanced mix of economic and political elites, traditional Islamic organizations, and former military officers.

As the prospect of a second round looms, the composition and nature of the future administration remain uncertain. However, the emphasis on continuity by at least two candidates and the prominence given to political alliances over platforms and ideologies suggest that major policy changes appear unlikely, whether Prabowo or another candidate wins the elections.

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