

[ADRN Issue Briefing]

Indonesia's Democracy and the 2024 Elections: Navigating a Crucial Moment

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With voting day now concluded, preliminary results and quick counts indicate a convergence in the outcomes of both the presidential and legislative elections. The Prabowo-Gibran ticket secured victory in the presidential race, prevailing over contenders Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar and Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD. Projections suggest that Prabowo-Gibran garnered a vote share of 56-59%, surpassing Anies-Muhaimin's anticipated vote share of approximately 24-26% and Ganjar-Mahfud's expected vote share of around 15-17% (Ira 2024). Meanwhile, quick count findings for the legislative elections suggest that eight political parties will secure seats in the national parliament: PDI-P (16.4%), Golkar Party (14.6%), Gerindra Party (13.5%), PKB (10.7%), Nasdem Party (9.9%), PKS (8.4%), Demokrat Party (7.6%), and PAN (7.1%). Notably, despite losing the presidential race, PDI-P emerged as the top vote-getter in the legislative elections, signaling an intriguing divergence in electoral outcomes (Farisa 2024).

While awaiting the official election results from the General Elections Commission (KPU), preliminary projections suggest that incumbent President Joko Widodo (Jokowi)'s successor will emerge victorious in the 2024 election. Prabowo-Gibran, positioned as Jokowi's successor not only due to Gibran's familial relationship as Jokowi's son but also because of their campaign emphasis on Jokowi's continuity, has secured a resounding victory. Additionally, the combined party support for Prabowo-Gibran exceeds 40% in national parliament electoral results, surpassing both the Anies-Muhaimin's party coalition, including Nasdem Party, PKB, and PKS, at 29% and the Ganjar-Mahfud's party support at 16.4%. These outcomes raise concerns regarding the potential perpetuation of democratic regression under the political stewardship of Jokowi's successor, a trend that several research findings suggest began during the Jokowi administration (Power and Warburton 2020).

Indonesia's Democratic Regression and the 2024 Election

In recent years, numerous scholars have asserted that democracy in Indonesia is undergoing regression (Aspinall and Warburton 2017; Power and Warburton 2020; Wijayanto, Budiatri and Wiratraman 2022). What is the state of this democratic regression amidst the 2024 elections, and what are the potential ramifications thereafter? This briefing elucidates that this democratic decline is perceived to be exacerbating due to the politicized misuse of legal mechanism, the amplification of dynastic politics, and the massive election violations and frauds. The trajectory of this regression hangs precariously after the election between getting further deterioration towards authoritarianism

or serving as a pivotal moment for bolstering civil society and achieving political balance to enhance democracy. Currently, Indonesia is at a crucial juncture that will significantly influence the trajectory of its democratic future.

Up until the 2019 electoral cycle, Indonesian elections have consistently garnered acclaim from diverse scholars and observers (Aspinall and Mietzner 2019; Bland 2019). Despite being among the most intricate electoral processes globally, the previous Indonesian elections were deemed successful. Moreover, amidst widespread critiques of democratic practices in Indonesia, the execution of the elections, up until 2019, garnered commendation for its perceived adherence to principles of competitiveness, fairness, and freedom.

A distinct perspective has seemingly arisen concerning the 2024 elections. The conduct of this electoral event has been underscored by considerable criticism emanating from segments of civil society, encompassing academics and pro-democracy advocates. It is contended that this election has engendered adverse ramifications for democracy in Indonesia, thereby exacerbating its democratic regression. In the 2024 elections, a triad of phenomena emerges as significant threats to democratic integrity: the politicization of legal mechanism, the strengthening of dynastic politics, and the massive election violations and frauds.

The Constitutional Court's revision of the age threshold for presidential and vice-presidential candidates, previously set at 40 years old in alignment with prior regulations, has catalyzed notable political turbulence, exacerbating democratic regression amidst the 2024 election cycle. This ruling facilitated Gibran Rakabuming Raka, the eldest son of Jokowi, who previously did not meet the eligibility criteria, to emerge as a vice-presidential candidate alongside Prabowo Subianto. Following the Constitutional Court's ruling after the judicial review, Gibran is eligible for nomination due to his two-year tenure as the mayor of Solo, notwithstanding his age being below 40 years.

This Constitutional Court's ruling has elicited concerns due to perceived deficiencies in the decision-making process, particularly stemming from its adjudication by the Chief Justice at that time, Anwar Usman, who maintains a familial relationship with Jokowi. The decision-making process was hasty and inconsistent. Initially, this matter fell within the purview of parliament and the government rather than the Constitutional Court. Later, an accord was reached to amend this regulation despite Usman, who harbors a conflict of interest, participating in the decision hearing. These factors primarily contribute to the pervasive entanglement of political interests in this matter (Ulya, Mantalean and Yahya 2023; Ulya and Prabowo 2023). This confluence of legal and political interests is precedented, as evidenced by previous instances such as the enactment of the Job Creation Law and the revision of the Corruption Eradication Committee Law. However, this particular case has garnered considerable attention due to the stature of the Constitutional Court as Indonesia's highest legal institution, thus accentuating its significance in exacerbating democratic regression.

Furthermore, Gibran's candidacy, as facilitated by the Constitutional Court's decision, signifies the entry of President Jokowi's progeny into the arena of the 2024 presidential election. Despite Gibran's nascent political career, his emergence sidelined other potential candidates, including Airlangga Hartarto, Chairman of the Golkar Party, and Erick Tohir, Minister of State-Owned Enterprises, who were long speculated to be potential running mates for Prabowo. Additionally, Gibran's younger brother, Kaesang Pangarep, initiated his political journey by assuming the role of general chairman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) amidst the 2024 elections. Both individuals, despite their limited political experience, ascended to prominent political positions,

undoubtedly influenced by their lineage as sons of President Jokowi. This perpetuates the prevalent trend of dynastic politics, which has increasingly plagued Indonesian politics in recent years, as exemplified by figures such as former presidents Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (2004-2014) and Megawati Soekarnoputri (2001-2004). Such dynastic practices exacerbate democratic regression by undermining the recruitment function of political parties and disregarding the meritocratic principles governing political careers.

While elections five years ago were generally commended for their perceived fairness and integrity, the current electoral process, as discovered by investigations conducted by various civil society groups, has been beset by numerous instances of violations and fraud. The voting conducted on February 14 came under criticism due to a multitude of issues, some of which may have also arisen in previous elections, such as vote buying, voter mobilization, problematical vote counting process, among others. However, what distinguishes the 2024 election as particularly problematic compared to previous elections is the compromised impartiality of state instruments. Impartiality emerges as a concern because numerous state officials with conflicts of interest to win elections, due to their positions as electoral candidates, party elites, or relatives of electoral candidates, did not resign. Moreover, the Jokowi government made a new regulation released in 2023 stating that ministers do not need to resign even if they are candidates for the presidential election. Consequently, they possess the potential to exploit state resources for personal political gain during the election. According to investigations conducted by a coalition of civil society comprising 35 organizations and 5 individuals, spanning from November 13, 2023, to January 31, 2024, a total of 121 instances of electoral fraud, mostly related to state's impartiality, have been documented. The coalition mentions that President Jokowi, in his capacity as head of state, has leveraged his authority to favor his son's candidacy, thus contravening the principle of conducting democratic elections in an equitable manner (Kontras 2024).

The 2024 election is a pivotal moment in the further regression of democracy in Indonesia. The three issues outlined, without discounting the possibility of additional issues, underscores that elections serve not only as a platform for political leadership succession but also as a potential gateway for the establishment of an authoritarian political regime. These three facets also evoke parallels with the historical implementation of the New Order under Suharto's authoritarian regime in Indonesia. This historical perspective encompasses the establishment of dynastic politics within the Suharto family, the erosion of legal foundations, and the instrumentalization of state apparatuses to further the political interests of the ruling family and their associates. Since the onset of its regression, Indonesian democracy is currently finding its nadir.

Some Positive Signs for Future Democracy in Indonesia

The political dynamics of the 2024 election also offer promising prospects for the future of democracy. The burgeoning unity among civil society entities, united in their commitment to oversee the electoral process and strengthen democratic institutions in Indonesia, can serve as a pivotal asset in fostering a more robust civil society oversight mechanism for democracy in the years ahead. Moreover, the presence of political parties within the Anies-Muhaimin coalition, advocating for reforms to the Jokowi administration, and PDI-P, which was abandoned by the Jokowi family in the 2024 after previously staunch political allies of Jokowi and his son, could provide a foundation for the establishment of an opposition coalition in parliament aimed at upholding the principles of checks

and balances. If civil society maintains and develops its cohesion and an effective political opposition is formed, there remains hope for the advancement of democracy in the future.

The 2024 election, particularly following the Constitutional Court's ruling on the age requirements for presidential candidates, has catalyzed a pattern of civil society relations to be more cohesive. Pro-democracy entities, which traditionally focused on disparate issues, have coalesced into civil society alliances and coalitions. For instance, the coalition of civil society organizations that filed a lawsuit against Jokowi for electoral fraud and impartiality comprised 35 organizations and 5 individual activists. These entities are not those who only addressed election-related concerns but also issues pertaining to the environment, anti-corruption measures, labor rights, and other pertinent matters (Kontras 2024). Similarly, the documentary "Dirty Vote," which garnered widespread attention for its discourse on election malpractice, was a collaborative effort involving 23 civil society organizations working across a spectrum of domains, including elections, environmental conservation, anti-corruption endeavors, and journalism (Dirty Vote 2024).

Not only civil society organizations, but the academic movement is also experiencing cohesion. From the end of January until the election day, it has been documented that thousands of academics from over 70 universities have issued public statements critiquing the conduct of the elections and the state of Indonesian democracy (Wijayanto 2024). These academic initiatives align with and synergize with the efforts of activists and civil society organizations. The solidarity and widespread mobilization of civil society are crucial not only for amplifying their influence on public discourse but also for fostering an understanding that the challenges facing democracy are national in scope and necessitate collective action. Hopefully, this pattern of civil society cohesion will persist beyond the election period, resonating more broadly and permeating grassroots levels of society.

In addition to the influence of civil society, the role of political actors in upholding democracy must also be emphasized. Therefore, the presence of a viable political opposition is imperative. Assessing the potential strength of the opposition based on quick count results, it is feasible to form an opposition coalition comprising at least 45% of the parliamentary seats if PDI-P aligns with Nasdem, PKS, and PKB. Should these parties unite in opposition, their collective strength would serve as a potent asset in ensuring effective checks and balances. If realized, this opposition bloc could emerge as the most formidable in the past two decades. Additionally, it is noteworthy that PDI-P, one of potential opposition parties, is the party securing the highest number of seats in the parliament.

The formation of a robust opposition, however, may face challenges due to ongoing political negotiations between Jokowi, the Prabowo-Gibran camp, and these parties. Surya Paloh, the General Chair of Nasdem, reportedly met with Jokowi following election day that possibly explore potential coalition opportunities, while PKB has a track record of consistently supporting the government (Abdurrahman 2024). The configuration of coalitions and oppositions is subject to the political dynamics and lobbies. Therefore, the present juncture is pivotal, and it is hoped that political parties will uphold their commitment to democracy and recognize the significance of having a viable opposition in parliament to mitigate the escalating regression of Indonesian democracy.

Conclusion

The conduct of the 2024 elections has become a critical momentum in shaping the trajectory of Indonesian democracy. Several concerning phenomena during the election, including the misuse of legal frameworks, the strengthening of dynastic politics, and electoral malpractices, pose significant threats to Indonesian democracy. Moreover, the prediction of election outcomes, which saw the victory of Jokowi's successor, has heightened concerns regarding the potential for further democratic regression. Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, hope remains for the future of Indonesian democracy. The concerted efforts of a unified and solid civil society in the lead-up to the 2024 elections provide a strong foundation for safeguarding democracy in the years ahead. Additionally, the prospect of a formidable political opposition in parliament offers further promise. Looking ahead, it is hoped that both civil society and political actors will demonstrate a steadfast commitment to democracy, ensuring the effective functioning of checks and balances and fostering a deeper understanding of democratic principles at all levels of society. ■

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The East Asia Institute takes no institutional position on policy issues and has no affiliation with the Korean government. All statements of fact and expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

This program was funded in part by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

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979-11-6617-717-0 95340

Date of Issue: 28 February 2024

Typeset by Hansu Park

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