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## **THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONVENTION AND YUDHOYONO'S POSSIBLE GAME PLAN**

### **Executive Summary**

The Democratic Party (PD) – the incumbent party that won a majority sweep in the 2009 general elections, conferring Yudhoyono his second presidency – is now experiencing a dramatic reversal of fortunes. The party's electability rate has dipped significantly from its heyday peak of 21 per cent in 2009 to a meagre 7 per cent in 2013. A convention based on democratic proceedings has been hatched as part of a last-ditched effort by PD with the express purpose of generating the requisite publicity before legislative elections commence in order to restore confidence among its voters. While the convention has been proceeding apace, its impact on the electorate and on the image of the party as a whole has been disappointing. This report analyses the reasons why PD's novel attempt at a democratic convention failed to rejuvenate the party like its predecessor the Golkar party did a decade ago. Included in the analysis are scenario analyses of the various outcomes of the convention, given the plausible choices that party Chairman Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono may take in consideration of the current dire status of PD.

## THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONVENTION AND YUDHOYONO'S POSSIBLE GAME PLAN

Following a whirlwind of corruption scandals that had threatened to irretrievably tarnish its reputation in the eyes of its electorate, Indonesia's incumbent party the Democratic Party (PD), had been desperate to regain its former stature and galvanise support for a swift comeback as the 2014 General Elections beckons. Based on recent survey findings, PD's electability rate has dropped precipitously from 21 per cent in 2009 to a mere 7 per cent by the end of 2013. As patron and public face of PD, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono took over party leadership abruptly from Anas Urbaningrum at a crucial juncture when Anas became a suspect in a mega corruption case involving the financing of the Hambalang Sports Complex in Bogor District, West Java. However, such a move did not restore confidence in the party – already plagued by multiple cases of corruption scandals implicating several party insiders. On top of that, Yudhoyono had to navigate his way through a wave of political backlash that further undermined himself and his party.

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With the restoration of party confidence of paramount importance, Yudhoyono made a bold and unprecedented decision requesting for the inauguration of a party convention that will adopt democratic proceedings to elect a presidential nominee from among a list of hopefuls. The convention is allegedly made open to the public, allowing even non-cadres of PD to participate. Following a series of fit and proper tests prepared by the convention's committee, eleven names were selected as eligible contenders for the party's ticket. Such a move by PD may have succeeded as a publicity stunt initially. However, as recent surveys had shown, it did not have the intended effect of restoring confidence among Indonesia's voters of PD's viability. When push comes to shove, Yudhoyono and company may have to come up with an alternative strategy – one that would likely see PD having a place in the coming administration despite its low popularity ratings.

This report attempts to shed light on the plausible reasons why the PD convention had failed to rejuvenate support from the Indonesian electorate and what can be done about it. It also seeks to provide the reader with some insights regarding permutations of potential outcomes of the convention by way of a series of possible scenario-depictions.

### **The PD Convention: Too Little Too Late?**

For the last three years, PD has been at the mercy of an avalanche of political attacks and legal allegations directed at its senior-most members and the party. Most of these allegations were linked to a number of corruption scandals involving the party's elites, such as Anas Urbaningrum (former PD chairman), Muhammad Nazaruddin (former PD treasurer), Andi Mallarangeng (former Minister of Youth and Sports) and Angelina Sondakh (former PD legislator). Based on a study by Pol-Tracking Institute, PD received 20.53 per cent of "negative-tones" coverage on related media outlets (Pol-Tracking, 2014). As a result, the electability of PD dipped significantly. According to a survey carried out by *Kompas*, one of the nation's leading newspapers, PD's electability rate had sunk from 21 per cent in 2009 to 11.1 per cent in December 2012. This was followed by a decline to 10.1 per cent in the

second semester of 2013 and finally to a new low of 7.2 per cent by the end of 2013 (*Kompas*, 2013). By extrapolation, there is a possibility of PD reverting to its 2004 electability rate when it first contested as a political outfit. Even then, the party had secured 7.45 per cent of total national votes. Such a result may ultimately relegate PD to “minor party” status, forcing it into an unenviable but inevitable coalition with other larger political parties in order to meet presidential nomination requirements. The political fortune of PD then would likely reside in political coalitions with bigger parties such as the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), the Golkar Party (Golkar) and the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). Nonetheless, it is believed that the possibility of forming a coalition with PDI-P is slim due to the historical antagonisms between Megawati Sukarnoputri (PDI-P’s Chairwoman) and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (PD’s Chairman).

Internal factionalism within an already weakened PD added a greater complexity to the tenuous state of affairs. Despite concerted efforts by Yudhoyono in unifying the party, Urbaningrum’s supporters have been dogged in their pursuit to discredit Yudhoyono and his faction. The fiasco involving Gede Pasek, well known for his loyalty towards Urbaningrum, is a case in point. Factions loyal to Yudhoyono had tried to eliminate him from the party but their efforts were thwarted. Adding insult to injury, there appeared numerous criticisms castigating Yudhoyono’s policies – including the unpopular rise in fuel prices as well as Yudhoyono’s “nonchalant” approach to the crisis situation that ensued during the eruption of Mount Sinabung. In their criticisms, Yudhoyono was also constantly compared with the popular and personable Joko Widodo (Jakarta Governor and potential presidential candidate under PDI-P) for their vastly different management styles.

Bearing these in mind, an effective and strategic formulation by PD is required to regain some foothold in its own electability ratings. In mid-2013 PD hatched upon an idea of launching a nationwide democratic convention to fulfil two criteria: generate positive publicity and nominate a suitable presidential candidate that will help to turn the tide. While the convention sought to present a “democratic face” to the public, the party also hoped that adequate media coverage placing emphasis on such an aspect would perhaps produce a positive spin on PD’s damaged reputation.

Such precedence of apparent openness by the PD in its maiden democratic convention allowed for the participation of prominent non-partisan public figures and non-PD cadres such as: Anies Baswedan (Rector of Paramadina University); Dino Patti Djalal (former Indonesian Ambassador to the U.S.); Ali Masykur Musa (Member of the Supreme Audit Agency [BPK]); Dahlan Iskan (Minister of State-Owned Enterprises); Irman Gusman (Chairman of Regional Representative Board); Endriartono Sutarto (a former TNI Commander); and Gita Wirjawan (former Minister of Trade). Apart from these non-affiliated public figures, four other PD elites had also joined in the race, including: Marzuki Alie (Chairman of the House of Representatives [DPR]); Sinyo Harry Sarundajang (Governor of North Sulawesi); Hayono Isman (member of the PD Board of Patrons); and Pramono Edhie Wibowo (Yudhoyono’s brother-in-law).

These eleven names will be allowed, in the course of their campaign during the convention, to promote themselves directly while indirectly providing PD with affiliation and endorsement from the widespread publicity generated. The inauguration of the convention had been praised by observers as a shrewd move that skimmed the lines of early campaign

prohibition.<sup>1</sup> Technically, an individual is free to campaign for a ticket with PD within grounds of the convention although candidates are not allowed to advocate or campaign on the platform of the party vis-à-vis espousing its programmes, vision and mission.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the PD convention also reaped the added benefit of budgetary savings when funding is borne by each candidate-aspirant.

Holding conventions within political parties is not something novel in Indonesia. In 2003 and 2004, the Golkar Party (Golkar) became the first political party to hold a convention with the expressed purpose of nominating a presidential candidate. This perceived democratic election within Golkar gave the party much positive spin in the media. As a result, Golkar was able to restore voters' confidence in the party. With an unprecedented defeat after the 1999 elections following the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime, Golkar turned its fortunes around to emerge as the party with the most national votes in the 2004 legislative elections.

Notwithstanding the previous success of Golkar in 2004, PD's emulation of this strategy has produced a different result due to a very different set of circumstances. Currently, PD is being stigmatised as one of the most corrupt parties in Indonesia. Based on a survey by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) in December 2012, 44.8 per cent of total respondents viewed PD as a party notorious for its blatant involvement in various corruption cases (SMRC, 2013). With reference to another similar survey prepared by the National Survey Institute (LSN) in March 2013, 70.4 per cent of total respondents viewed PD as the most corrupt party in Indonesia, followed by Golkar and PKS (Tempo, 2013a).

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Apart from PD's newfound notoriety, the party had probably been most disadvantaged by negative projections in the mainstream media. While a number of television stations were owned by political rivals of PD,<sup>3</sup> these media outlets serve the interests of their political masters to the detriment of PD. For a start, PD had borne the brunt of "negative tones" coverage in these media channels. Among all "negative-tones" coverage of political parties in the various media, PD received a whopping 20.53 per cent of total "negative-tones" coverage (Pol-Tracking, 2014). On the other hand, a majority of the Indonesian public also did not have any knowledge with regards to proceedings of the convention. A survey by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in November 2013 showed that up to 83.1 per cent of total respondents were unaware of the Party Convention held by PD (CSIS, 2013).

Internally, some candidates campaigning in the convention are also quite taciturn when it comes to associating themselves with PD. Some may view PD as a sinking ship. Others view

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<sup>1</sup>Electoral regulations for legislative elections stipulate that political parties (and its legislative candidates) are prohibited from holding mass rallies or conduct campaign-related activities in the printed media, television or radio advertisements before campaign period officially commences from 16 March to 5 April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Electoral regulations define the substance of elections campaign as the promotion of vision, mission and programmes on the platform of a party. It also contains the element of persuasion in galvanizing votes for a particular party.

<sup>3</sup> Media Indonesia and Metro TV are owned by Surya Paloh (Chairman of the National Democrat Party [Nasdem]) while TV One, ANTV and Vivanews are linked to Aburizal Bakrie (Chairman of Golkar). The MNC Group that comprised of RCTI, MNC TV, Global TV and many others are owned by Hary Tanoesudibjo (Vice Presidential candidate of the National Conscience Party [Hanura]).

it as a platform to promote themselves instead. There have been cases of a less than enthusiastic attitude expressed by candidates loath to be associated as core supporters of PD. It looked like most of them were only interested in advocating themselves and not the party. For instance, during one of the “meet-the-press” sessions, a prominent convention candidate and Minister for State-owned Enterprises Dahlan Iskan admitted off-the-cuff that he regarded himself as a staunch supporter of PD. However mere words were not backed up with actions. Dahlan Iskan did not openly declare that he had joined the party. A similar sentiment had also been expressed by another candidate, Anies Baswedan, during a debate session in Palembang. When the host asked him what he would do to improve PD’s image if PD were to nominate him as its representative in the next presidential election, he deflected his answer by indicating that he would like to improve the overall party system in Indonesia. One can infer that he does not intend to be closely associated with PD despite running on its platform.

The Indonesian electoral system states that for a party to be eligible for presidential nomination, parties will have to acquire 20 per cent of the total seats in parliament or 25 per cent of total national votes. Judging by survey results on electability, candidates in the convention recognise that it would be very difficult for PD as a party to reach the 25 per cent target without some form of coalition, considering the disastrous decline in voters’ support towards PD. Hence, it is not a surprise if both party and individual candidate are using each other for their own benefit. PD is currently not in a viable position to nominate its own presidential candidate.

### **A Potential Winner of the Convention?**

Among the eleven names contending in the convention, perhaps the one with the highest likelihood of winning is Dahlan Iskan. Based on analysis, he currently enjoys the highest electability rate among other candidates. According to a survey from the United Data Centre (PDB) in January 2014, Dahlan Iskan holds the highest electability rate at 3.7 per cent. Anies Baswedan stands as his closest runner-up at 3.1 per cent (*Kompas*, 2014). The rest received only a very marginal electability rate, ranging from 0 to 1 per cent: Gita Wirjawan (1.1 per cent); Pramono Edhie Wibowo (0.3 per cent); Marzuki Alie (0.2 per cent); Ali Masykur Musa (0.2 per cent); Hayono Isman (0.1 per cent); and Endriartono Sutarto (0.1 per cent), (*Kompas*, 2014).

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With this in mind, a conclusion can be reached that Dahlan Iskan or Anies Baswedan would emerge as overall winner of the convention. The victor will be decided democratically by survey results from three various survey agencies. However, possessing a nominated candidate will not solve the problem of emerging victorious in the legislative elections for PD. PD’s representatives will still have to contend with candidates more popular and electable than them. In light of the dire situation in PD, it is instructive to turn to the options that might be taken by Yudhoyono to bring the party up to speed.

## **Yudhoyono's Possible Game Plan**

It is now certain that PD, as an incumbent party, no longer possesses the prerogative when it comes to the upcoming general elections. There is a high likelihood of PD accommodating to the interests of bigger parties like the PDI-P, Golkar or perhaps even Gerindra in the form of a coalition. It would be fortunate if PD was able to put forward its own nominee as vice presidential candidate – with the assumption that other parties will have their own presidential nominees. However, the question still remains: who is the favoured candidate of choice for Yudhoyono as presidential or vice-presidential candidate of PD? What possible scenarios exist for him when it comes to securing his own interests in the next administration? A few plausible scenarios of the outcomes of the convention will be examined:

### ***Scenario I***

PD follows through the nomination of a candidate from the convention by means of a democratic process of elimination. The winning candidate then runs as presidential hopeful under the PD ticket. However, such a process may not be in line with the key objective of improving the overall electability of the party.

### ***Scenario II***

Based on its current electability rate, PD will most likely form a coalition with bigger parties. As a result, PD can at most nominate a vice presidential candidate. This may present the convention with a problem because it initially held promise of a ticket for the presidency. The winning candidate of the convention may decline the offer of the vice-presidency, considering that all aim for the ultimate prize of the presidency. Yudhoyono will then be forced to nominate or select a suitable representative as presidential nominee of PD. Such a representative can be seen promoting the interests of Yudhoyono and his faction within the party. Outsiders such as Dahlan Iskan and Anies Baswedan do not fall into this categorisation.

However, three names may turn out to be Yudhoyono's preferred pick for the position. They are: (i) Pramono Edhie Wibowo, brother of First Lady Ani Yudhoyono; (ii) Dino Patti Djalal, presidential spokesperson as well as Indonesia's ambassador to the U.S.; and (iii) Gita Wirjawan, a trade minister that is well-known for his close relationship with the president.

### ***Scenario III***

Yudhoyono may also be pushed, for the sake of the party, to elect an outsider as a presidential candidate. The selection of such a candidate however will come with several caveats, one of them being that he/she will promote Yudhoyono's interest even after he steps down from the presidency. So far, Yudhoyono had met with Prabowo Subianto, Joko Widodo and Yusril Ihza Mahendra (presidential candidate from the Moon and Star Party [PBB]) (*Tempo*, 2013b).

Some political analysts have also suggested that PD may resort to "poaching" candidates from the other parties. This is based upon the assumption that most politicians do not possess strong loyalties to a particular political party. Following this logic, any popular figure can change his/her party affiliations without incurring significant political costs. However, such an assumption may be potentially misleading as any signs of jumping ship may in fact come at a great political cost to his/her reputation.

With Joko Widodo now firmly in place as presidential candidate of the PDI-P, scenario III may not be applicable for him. Nonetheless, there are still other candidates that PD can select from. In any case, one can draw a few insights from the above-mentioned scenarios: the convention, in essence, has failed to generate adequate publicity for the restoration of confidence in PD among the voters. A winner at the convention will add little to change the already negative perception the electorate has on the incumbent party. In a worst case scenario, Yudhoyono may have to acquiesce with large concessions to potential political allies if he intends to secure his own interests in the next administration. How will Yudhoyono make his move? One can only wait and see.

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