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Indonesia's 2024 Elections: President Jokowi Brokers a National Unity Coalition

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SYNOPSIS

*With an eye on the post-2024 political landscape, President Jokowi is putting together a national unity coalition to influence the 2024 elections and ensure policy continuity under a new administration. **JEFFERSON NG** and **ARYA FERNANDES** assess Jokowi's political calculus, explore possible presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs, and the dominant narratives that candidates are likely to put forward.*

COMMENTARY

On 2 April 2023, President Jokowi and party chairmen from five government parties – The Party of Functional Groups (Golkar), The Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), The National Awakening Party (PKB), The United Development Party (PPP), and The National Mandate Party (PAN) – attended an Iftar event at the PAN Central Leadership Board office. During the event, party leaders announced that the United Indonesia Coalition (Golkar, PAN, PPP) and the Great Indonesia Awakening Coalition (Gerindra and PKB) are in discussions to form a national unity coalition to contest the 2024 presidential elections.

The national unity coalition reflects the president's efforts to inject new momentum into the 2024 elections that has been beset by uncertainty. Although both coalitions have announced early on their intentions to contest in the elections, neither have clearly identified a presidential and vice-presidential pair, a sign that intra-elite negotiations remain deadlocked.

The Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) – the only party capable of nominating a presidential candidate without needing to form a political alliance – has thus far sent mixed signals. PDI-P's heir apparent, Puan Maharani, has held four-eye meetings with various party chairmen on multiple occasions, signalling that the PDI-P does not want to go it alone. However, the party has thus far refrained from joining either coalition or putting forward its preferred candidate.



President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's decision to broker a national unity coalition is an attempt to inject new momentum into the 2024 elections that has been beset by uncertainty. *Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

Jokowi as a Dealmaker

Jokowi's efforts to broker a national unity coalition is informed by four considerations. First, he remains tremendously popular; the latest poll from the Indonesia Survey Institute (LSI) highlighted that public [satisfaction with his performance](#) stands at 76.8%, the highest since 2015. His endorsement and support for a presidential hopeful would likely influence the vote choices of his supporters.

Second, as the initial years of Jokowi's first term (2014-2019) had been frustrated by a large opposition coalition in parliament, Jokowi is looking to build a large electoral coalition from the onset. The five political parties in the national unity coalition already holds about 49% of the seats in parliament. If the current coalition performs respectably in 2024, his anointed successor should have at least a simple majority in parliament.

Third, Jokowi is keen to consolidate the pro-government parties under one banner. The national unity coalition amalgamates various interests keen to continue the current configuration of political and economic power. For instance, media tycoon Hary Tanoesoedibjo, whose Perindo party switched to support the Jokowi-Maruf campaign in 2019, recently expressed interest to join the [national unity coalition](#).

Fourth, Jokowi is keen to preserve his political influence post-2024. After Jokowi took office, multiple business/political figures associated with the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono administration got into legal and regulatory trouble. Jokowi is keen to find a friendly figure in the presidential office post-2024 who can carry on the new capital project and protect the political careers of his family. Most recently, Jokowi's youngest

son, Kaesang Pangarep, was nominated by the local PDI-P branch to run in the [2024 Depok mayoral elections](#). Additionally, his oldest son, Gibran, has announced his readiness to [run as a gubernatorial candidate for either Central Java or Jakarta](#).

Potential Scenarios for Presidential Candidates

The official registration period for the presidential and vice-presidential pair is expected to occur from 19 October to 25 November this year, with the campaign season starting from 28 November 2023 till voting day on 14 February 2024. Although it is still about six months away, it is likely that the parties will announce their nominations well in advance to mobilise support leading up to the election.

Currently, the most likely scenario is a three-horse race between the top three presidential hopefuls, Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo, and Anies Baswedan. The latest [election simulation scenario](#) from LSI shows that if the three men were to run today, Prabowo Subianto, the current defence minister, will lead the pack with 30.3% of the votes. He is followed by Ganjar Pranowo, the popular Governor of Central Java with 26.9% of the votes, and Anies Baswedan, the former Governor of Jakarta, with 25.3% of the votes. As no candidate would have managed to secure over 50% of the national vote, the two candidates with the higher vote share would face off against each other in a second round in June 2024.

There has been a significant decline in Ganjar's electability (about 8%) because of a recent controversy over the U-20 World Cup, in which Ganjar and other PDI-P politicians voiced out against Israeli participation in the tournament, leading FIFA to cancel Indonesia's hosting duties. Nevertheless, this decline is expected to be a temporary setback and could in fact boost his chances of being nominated as a presidential candidate by PDI-P Chairman Megawati.

The second less likely scenario is one in which the PDI-P decides to join the national unity coalition. This narrows the number of potential presidential and vice-presidential tickets from three to two, likely leading to a Prabowo-Ganjar or Ganjar-Prabowo ticket. If this occurs, PDI-P and Gerindra will need to strike a grand bargain as both parties have insisted on fielding a presidential candidate. The pair would enjoy formidable name recognition and electability, but this is a less likely scenario unless there is a strong rationale for both parties to work together.

2024 Elections – A Choice Between Continuity and Change

The upcoming presidential election campaign centres on a clash between the incumbent candidates and the coalition for change. Ganjar and Prabowo are positioning themselves as [potential successors to Jokowi](#) and have declared that they will continue the incumbent's national strategic programs, including infrastructure, economic policies, and the new capital project. On the other hand, opposition candidate [Anies Baswedan](#) seeks to run on a platform of change to reduce inequality, promote social justice, and generate "quality economic growth" for all Indonesians.

The youth vote is likely to have a significant influence on the outcome of the 2024 elections. Nearly 60% of the population is expected to comprise youth voters between the ages of 17-39. According to a [recent CSIS study on youth voters](#), these voters are

looking for candidates who are able to address concrete concerns related to employment access, preventing and eradicating corruption, mainstreaming environmental issues and climate change, reducing poverty, and ensuring macroeconomic stability.

On the impact of political Islam in the 2024 elections, the national vote share for all religious based parties is noted to have been relatively stable between 30-35% from 1999 to 2019 and this is unlikely to change dramatically in 2024. The political influence of the Islamists has also declined since Islamic Defender's Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) were banned. As opposition candidate Anies Baswedan is seeking to broaden his electoral appeal, religious based appeals are likely to play a smaller role in 2024 compared to 2019.

Thus, the 2024 election is likely to be characterised by significant uncertainty as the top three presidential candidates are currently neck and neck. Although a national unity coalition will seek to ensure a smooth transition and policy continuity, discussions for such a coalition remain in flux. The crux for presidential hopefuls will thus rely on their ability to both navigate intra-elite negotiations and appeal to the diverse Indonesian electorate.

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