

Indonesia : Joko Widodo wins presidency, but can he bring real reform ?

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July 25, 2014 - *Green Left Weekly/Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal* — Data Brainanta is one of quite a few Indonesian socialists who have been supporting the successful presidential bid of Joko Widodo, or “Jokowi” as he is popularly known. He was very happy when Indonesia’s electoral commission (KPU) finally confirmed on the night of July 22 that Jokowi had defeated his sole opponent, the sacked former Suharto-era general Prabowo Subianto, by 57% to 43% of the nearly 130 million direct votes cast on July 9.

“The official result had been anticipated a week before, that is when Jokowi’s lead was confirmed by data taken from the majority of polling station recaps [official count reports] by volunteers. Even earlier, several pollsters’ ‘quick counts’ has predicted his victory”, Brainanta told *Green Left Weekly/Links International Journal of Socialist Renewal*.

“Back on July 9, things got a little tense when Prabowo also claimed victory based on his own quick count. We were worried that the actual votes would be manipulated as it was transferred from the polling stations up to the higher administration level.

“This was seen as a real possibility since the current president [Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, SBY for short] and his party threw their last minute support for Prabowo before the election day. This opened up more avenues for possible state apparatus manipulation of the result, which actually did happen in quite an organised, although very localised, way.

“However pro-Jokowi volunteers, of which there were tens of thousands if not more, managed to minimise the cheating by blowing it up in the media, particularly through social media.

“The level of public participation in monitoring this election is unprecedented and this has, I believe, neutralised the state apparatus’ ability to significantly manipulate the election result.”

Prabowo 'withdrawal' stunt

Then, on July 22, just hours before the official result was to be announced, Prabowo made another dramatic, probably desperate, move. He announced that he was “withdrawing from the election process” and his scrutineers/observers staged a walk-out of the electoral commission’s counting room where the final tally was being made.

“There was a question mark as to what he meant by withdrawing from the process and what implications this might have on the KPU process”, Vanessa Hearman, a lecturer in Indonesian studies at the University of Sydney, explained to *GLW/Links*. It turned out Prabowo wasn’t withdrawing from the presidential contest.

“To their credit, the KPU pressed on, not intimidated by this strange turn of events. A day earlier, President SBY had dismissed the army chief of staff, General Budiman, allegedly for political involvement in the recent elections. It seems that the armed forces chief General Moeldoko and General Budiman had differences of opinion regarding the role of the military in the recent elections and General Budiman was accused of being pro-Jokowi. Combine these two events and there was the possibility of some kind of political instability in the capital, Jakarta.”

Another Australian academic following the Indonesian politics closely is Ian Wilson, a lecturer at the School of Management and Governance and a research fellow at the Asia Research Centre, Murdoch University.

One of the things that Wilson has researched and written about [1] are the links between Prabowo and a number of criminal gangs and anti-communist militias. Some of the leaders of these groups, including the notorious preman (gangster) Hercules Rosario Marcal, had indicated before the election that they would not accept a Prabowo defeat.

“It is at the point when Jokowi is officially declared the winner of the presidential elections that these gangs may be used to create disturbances,” Wilson told *GLW/Links* in an interview before the official result was announced.

“Prabowo is not a play-by-the-rules guy. He’s put everything on the line for the presidency. He’s spent millions and millions of dollars over the last decade so it is possible that they might be mobilised.

“One thing that I found doing these interviews with Hercules in prison, and his deputies, is that they were spreading rumours that the PDIP was run by Christians and communists and that if Jokowi became president then he would bring in a doomsday scenario straight out of some of the anti-communist hysteria that justified the 1965 massacres. These preman deputies seemed to believe this, so it is possible that they might cause disturbances.

“At the same time I don’t think this will work. They couldn’t pull it off.”

Partly to defuse potential disturbances, Jokowi urged his supporters to hold off celebrating his win – even on the day of the official announcement. He even asked his supporters to refrain from wearing the checked shirts that were a trade mark of his election campaign.

There was a relatively modest celebration on July 23 by Jokowi and supporters at Jakarta’s iconic Proclamation Monument, on the site of the 1945 proclamation of independence.

More celebrations might take place once the Constitutional Court pronounces on Prabowo’s appeal but this process could take up to a month.

Constitutional Court appeal

Informed observers say it is very unlikely that Prabowo’s legal appeal will succeed. His campaign team is demanding a re-vote in over 50,000 booths, mainly in the populous Jakarta area, at which they say serious irregularities occurred on election day.

According to an article in New Mandala by another Liam Gammon, a Phd research student at the department of political and social change at the Australian National University's College of Asia and the Pacific, the Prabowo team claimed in a media conference on July 22 that :

- Total number of those using their voting rights not the same as the number of ballots used and number of valid and invalid votes, in as many as 28,283 booths.
 - Total ballots which were used were not the same as the total number of valid and invalid votes, in as many as 9617 booths.
 - Number of those using their voting rights based on the Additional Permanent Voter Roll/absentee voters greater than total number of those on said lists, in as many as 11,090 booths.
 - Number of voters using their voting rights from the Special Additional Voter Roll/those voting with only ID cards, other ID or passports greater than those said list, in as many as 20,158 booths.
 - Ticket number 1. [i.e. Prabowo-Hatta] did not get any votes, despite the presence of [their own] scrutineers, at as many as 282 booths.
- However, he added that little evidence was presented to back these assertions.

"It looks like the election results will be delayed by Prabowo's allegations of electoral fraud, which will need to be heard by the Constitutional Court within a month", Hearman said.

In the meantime, Jokowi's progressive supporters and volunteers are focusing on defending what they see as a chance for significantly more democratic reform.

Jokowi's promises

"On the administration itself, many activists have vowed that this is just the beginning", added Hearman. "Jokowi's victory is good news, but the hard work of ensuring that there is enough pressure on Jokowi and his team to deliver on their promises is only beginning. Activists' support during the election does not mean a *carte blanche* in government. Jokowi's promises include free public health care, education, clean and efficient government, tackling human rights abuses and so on.

"He has promised the revitalisation of the agricultural sector by stopping certain imports such as rice and onions. He has promised to ease the course of investment projects in order to create jobs, cutting red tape, but this will cause conflict if the interests of the poor are just ignored and they are affected by these investment projects.

"But managing Indonesia is a huge task and there is a lot to be repaired (public confidence, tackling corruption, basic infrastructure, industrial development), as well as to be created anew. In only five years, that's a major task in anyone's book. This is a government that wants to be many things to many constituents, so I think it will be subjected to a lot of pressure from all sides. Indonesian activists need to get organised in their respective sectors to press their demands."

Brainanta takes Jokowi's announcement through social media that he is taking public suggestions for who should be in his cabinet [2], an posting these up on a publicly accessible Googledoc, as a sign of a new more democratic and transparent style of politics that Indonesia desperately needs.

Moves like these were made by Jokowi as governor of Jakarta, a position he won in 2012 with the support of an unprecedented electoral mobilisation of Jakarta's poor communities as well as parts of

the middle class. That support built on his record as a “clean” mayor of Solo, another major city on the island of Jawa.

Jokowi adopted a new style of governorship in Jakarta, including publishing YouTube videos of meetings that were previously kept from the public eye, and going out into communities to speak to ordinary people.

“My expectation is that Jokowi will keep doing what he has been doing in local government, which is to open up the administration, remain incorruptible and listen to and work for the public. My even higher expectation is that he will open up the way to institutionalise the government’s transparency and participatory democratic practice into a habit and written legislation.

“I know that changes like these cannot rely on him alone, but need a strong public participation and a people’s movement to enforce them. But based on what Jokowi has done in local government, he will be able to provide this space for popular movement.

“It depends on how the movement plays this out. When the dialectic between a democratic government and active public participation is created, I believe that progressive programs, be it education, health, environment, economic, human rights should be championed and implemented.

“There are some aspects of his programs that must be criticised and the political map ahead will be dynamic and might involve some compromises with the elites. The movement just needs to respond with the correct perspective and priority.

“It needs to put the struggle within the frame of the human versus profit logic. In a way, a stress on a human-oriented mindset or ethic, can be said to be in line with Jokowi’s program for a ‘mental revolution’ that aims to create productive, hard-working and morally incorruptible citizens.”

Jokowi’s record as governor of Jakarta

Wilson has written critically of Jokowi’s record as governor of Jakarta which he described as “mixed”.

“Jokowi has made a big impact on many people because of his open style. He is personable and he talks to people. You can’t underestimate what a change this was in Indonesian politics where governors are always aloof and hostile to poor and working-class people. So there remains a lot of goodwill towards him.

“In the campaign for governorship, Jokowi made a lot of campaign promises that he should have realised he could not easily deliver. One of these was to grant tenure security to long-standing informal urban communities. Jakarta is full of neighbourhoods that have no formal tenure.

“So many people expected that he wouldn’t be evicting people from these non-tenured informal communities and this made them participate in the vote, which they usually don’t participate in. After all, from their point of view why would they want to vote for asshole A over asshole B ?

“What happened when he became governor of Jakarta was that he came up against the reality of very deeply entrenched interests totally hostile to any such reforms. So politically he just wasn’t able to deliver this reform.

“He had a little support from within his party for this reform but generally he did not have the organised popular base with the power to push through such a reform.

"So the concession he offered was to try and continue evictions but while providing alternative accommodation in the form of low-cost, state-subsidised apartments for the people being evicted from these informal communities.

"I think Jokowi already knew he was going to run for the presidency, and a lot of his urban policy was a form of extended campaigning. So he had some pet projects where he put people in new apartments and he got a lot of media attention, but if you look at the statistics most of the people who got evicted did not get any accommodation. A lot of the promised alternative accommodation hasn't been built yet. So he's been evicting people without having the places for them to move to."

Wilson added that the urban poor settlements were often blamed for making Jakarta's chronic floods worse, but in fact they were the greatest victims and what was contributing to flooding was the inadequately regulated building of large-scale developments like malls, luxury apartments, etc.

"Jakarta's poor also get blamed for traffic congestion but traffic congestion comes from too many cars, which the poor don't have, and also the lack of an effective public transport system."

But powerful and entrenched interests want the latter to continue so they are happy to encourage the media and the middle classes to blame the urban poor for flooding.

"I was disappointed particularly by Jokowi's hard man in the Jakarta governorship, deputy governor Basuki 'Ahok' Tjahaja Purnama, who is from Prabowo's party Gerindra, playing the same game of blaming the poor for these problems.

"The middle classes are an important constituency for Jokowi and they are always happy to blame the poor for problems that are the result of chronic corruption and poor planning over decades. So this was a bit of a political cop out on Jokowi's part."

Governorship of Jakarta after Jokowi becomes president

"Ahok is now acting governor and if or when Jokowi becomes president, Ahok will take over as governor. Because of this, some poor communities in Jakarta were planning to vote for Prabowo in the presidential elections because they didn't want Ahok to become governor of Jakarta ! These people see Jokowi as being essentially on their side but being constrained by entrenched interests. But in Ahok they see a more aggressive form of the old-type of governor.

"Ahok puts a lot of emphasis on legality when he deals with housing, but this is ridiculous because in Indonesia 80% of housing is informal or self-help based. In a system dominated by the rich and corrupt, the poor's 'illegality' is structurally underprivileged.

"So there are serious concerns about Ahok becoming governor of Jakarta, though I heard a rumour that if Jokowi becomes president he may offer Ahok a post in his administration and this would open the Jakarta governorship to a new election."

While many people see Jokowi as a democratic reformer, *GLW/Links* asked Wilson if there a possibility that his kind of reform may eventually result in a more efficient and more thorough neoliberal political regime ?

"In many respects, Jokowi's pitch is : 'I am not a political, I am just a manager', which is classic neoliberal, technocratic doublespeak. But this is not an argument to support Prabowo. It could be a reason to reject both of them as different faces of the same coin, it is not an argument in favour of

Prabowo.”

Peter Boyd

P.-S.

* <http://links.org.au/node/3972>

Notes

[1] [http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2014/07/04/the-perils-of-loyalty/-](http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2014/07/04/the-perils-of-loyalty/)

[2] <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/07/24/jokowi-launches-survey-select-cabinet-ministers.html>