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## **A Jokowi Party? Reflections on the State of Elite Politics in Indonesia**

*By Max Lane\**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- President Widodo's handling of the tensions between the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and the National Police (Polri) was initially explained in terms of his lack of independence from the parties that nominated him for the Presidency, in particular, the Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle (PDIP).
- One response to this has been the re-affirmation of support for him by the bloc of non-party *relawan* organisations, which served as encouragement for him to be more independent.
- This response also briefly provoked public comment on the prospect of Widodo eventually forming a party of his own, which Puan Maharani, a PDIP leader and daughter of Megawati Sukarnoputri, noted both that it was his right but that as a PDIP cadre he would not do.
- Tactical *realpolitik* issues make the formation of a Jokowi party in the near term unlikely. However, such a development closer to the next election, while by no means certain, cannot be ruled out.

- The election campaigns and Widodo's first few months did reveal ideological and policy differences between Widodo and Prabowo, and their respective supporters, which could provide a basis for consolidating different political blocs, although the level of pragmatism in taking positions often makes these differences appear marginal.

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## INTRODUCTION

On January 10, 2015, President Joko Widodo nominated Police General Budi Gunawan to be appointed as the new Chief of the National Police (Polri). President Widodo stated that he had made the appointment on the recommendation of the National Police Commission. A few days later, on January 16, a committee of the Indonesian parliament also passed the nomination. The day before that, however, the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) declared the nominee a suspect in corruption cases. It was also confirmed that the president had been informed earlier by KPK of their suspicions concerning Gunawan dating back to 2010.

There was then a wave of criticism of President Widodo for nominating as police chief someone that the KPK had already suspected of corruption. There was immediate pressure on Widodo to withdraw the nomination from the civil society sector, including the “relawan” (volunteer) milieu that had supported him in the presidential elections. As expected, Widodo has since re-assessed the nomination, appointing a team of 9 prominent personalities to advise him. Eventually, they advised him not to appoint Gunawan, and he announced on February 18 that Gunawan would not be installed. Instead, Widodo sent in another name – Commissioner-General Badrodin Haiti – to be considered by parliament. As a concession to the pro-Gunawan sentiment, mostly in the PDIP (as well as in Polri) Widodo made a point, however, of stating that Gunawan would retain a significant position in the police hierarchy.

In the month leading up to February 18, Widodo was perceived by some as moving too slowly, allowing the KPK to be – as it has become called – “criminalised”. Since the KPK named Gunawan as a suspect, the police had laid charges against the KPK head, Abraham Samad, and one of the deputy heads, Bambang Widjojanto, in what was seen by some as retaliation. Widodo then replaced the two KPK officials, a move which was criticised as conceding to the police.<sup>1</sup> The appointment of a retired senior Polri officer, Taufiqurrahman Ruki, as the new acting head of the KPK, has already attracted criticism.<sup>2</sup> The material used to support charges against the two KPK officials, for criminal offences related to breaching the Act that set up the KPK, was provided to the police by obscure members of Widodo’s own party, the PDIP. In addition, the police had also laid charges against 21 KPK investigators because as former policemen, they had not surrendered their weapons when they left the police force.

Widodo’s initial reaction to the war between KPK and the Police was to call both to the palace at the same time and to tell them to work together. However, this cautious approach of buying time through lengthy legal processes was complicated when on February 16 a Jakarta court ruled that the KPK’s decision to make Gunawan a suspect in one of their corruption cases was illegal.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, Widodo still announced that he would not appoint Gunawan.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bijaks.net/news/article/9-96439/bambang-widjojanto-kritik-solusi-jokowi-untuk-kpk>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2015/02/22/078644326/5-Hal-yang-Tak-Boleh-Dilakukan-Ruki-dan-Indriyanto-di-KPK?utm\\_medium=twitter&utm\\_source=twitterfeed](http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2015/02/22/078644326/5-Hal-yang-Tak-Boleh-Dilakukan-Ruki-dan-Indriyanto-di-KPK?utm_medium=twitter&utm_source=twitterfeed)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150216144801-20-32496/budi-gunawan-menang-polisi-berjoget-riang/>

During the five weeks between Gunawan's nomination and Widodo's announcement that he had withdrawn the nomination, Widodo was often depicted in the press and social media as vacillating and weak. The criticism arose that he was not independent, but beholden to the PDIP and its Chairperson, Megawati Sukarnoputri. It was widely held that Megawati supported the nomination of Gunawan, who was her Adjutant during her tenure as President of Indonesia. This criticism also echoed opinions raised during the election campaign that Widodo would be Megawati's puppet. As a result, there have been calls for Widodo to act more independently from Megawati and the PDIP and even to establish his own party.

Before discussing the issue of a "Jokowi party", it is necessary to make some comments about these particular criticisms of Widodo, namely, that he is not independent of the PDIP and the other parties that nominated him for the Presidency.

Widodo's election campaign in 2014 ambiguously straddled two support bases. Formally and also in a very material and substantial way, Widodo's primary support base was the alliance of the PDIP, National Democratic Party (Nasdem) and the National Awakening Party (PKB), which nominated him for the Presidency. While there are rumours – widely accepted as accurate – that the PDIP was not fully forthcoming with financial support for his campaign, the voter's base of these three parties – around 30% of his winning tally of 53% – was crucial. Widodo has been a member of the PDIP for ten years, having joined it when the PDIP nominated him as their candidate for Mayor of Solo in 2004. At the PDIP press conference announcing Widodo's candidature, Megawati emphasised that he was being nominated as a "petugas partai" – officer of the party. Before he was nominated for the presidency, he always answered questions about his nomination with statements such as "It is up to Ibu Mega."<sup>4</sup> Widodo and the PDIP never concealed this reality. The institution of the presidency is also dependent on supporting parties in Parliament as the Executive branch's budget and proposals for bills must be passed by it. Wherein many policy initiatives actually come from political parties in party-based parliamentary democracies, this is even more the case when the presidential candidate is not an actual leader of his party, but rather the PDIP member with the greatest "elektabilitas" (electability).

The idea that Widodo was some kind of "independent" or non-party candidate was, however, promoted to a significant extent during Widodo's election campaign. This was done through two primary tactics. First, there was an emphasis on the claim that he would not be a *transaksional* president, that is a president who formed his cabinet and government based on deals made in exchange for support among the parties. This claim was also connected to vague "promises" of appointing more professional technocrats than party politicians to the cabinet. However, the emphasis on being non-*transaksional* was essentially a way of distancing himself from parties in general, including the PDIP. This was obviously in contradiction to the reality referred to above.

The second tactic he used was connecting up with and using the support that he received from the "relawan" or volunteer supporters of his candidature who were – mostly at least – not

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<sup>4</sup> For analysis of the lead up to and course of the election campaigns, see, *inter alia*, Max Lane, "Who will be Indonesian President in 2014?", *ISEAS Perspective*, 18 July, 2013; Max Lane, "Indonesia's 2014 Legislative Elections: The Dilemmas of "Elektabilitas" Politics", *ISEAS Perspective*, April 23, 2014; Max Lane.

members of political parties.<sup>5</sup> There is not yet any in-depth research on the social composition of these *relawan* but it appears that they are mostly drawn from the white collar work-force and professionals, including some academics and NGO officials, although there did seem to be also some grass-roots components. The *relawan* were very active in the social media as well as in helping with the distribution of printed electoral material. This included door-to-door campaigning, although it is not clear to what extent.

More important than the actual activity of the *relawan* was Widodo's ability to be perceived as having a substantial *non-party* support base, helping him present himself as a non-party candidate. Very crucial in this image creation were his two iconic photo opportunities, at the massive regular monthly Health Walk gathering in Merdeka Square at the beginning of his campaign and his appearance at the special concert organised by the popular music group Slank. Pictures of him standing in front of tens of thousands of people, none of whom carried party paraphernalia, was a statement proclaiming his "non-party" status. There were also, of course, plenty of photos of him with Megawati, but they did not receive the same front page coverage in the pro-Widodo newspapers, including *Kompas*, Indonesia's main establishment newspaper, or the same circulation in the social media.

So one could argue that there were two 'Jokowis' campaigning for the Presidency: Jokowi, the man who had hitched himself to the PDIP for the previous ten years and whose candidacy, as he often admitted earlier was "up to Bu Mega", but also Jokowi, the favourite of the middle class, non-party, or actually anti-party, *relawan* milieu. However, the *relawan* have neither parliamentary representation nor any effective national organisation, which in turn limits their influence in the formal political processes of Indonesia.

## A JOKOWI PARTY?

Criticism and scepticism about Widodo's cautious approach to the KPK-Polri controversy were strong during the month following January 16. On January 24, even the previously very enthusiastic pop music group Slank, which had organised the massive pro-Widodo concert during the last days of the election campaign, while saying they did not regret choosing Widodo, were showing disappointment. "Let's wait and see," Bimbim Slank told the media.<sup>6</sup> As this disappointment became more evident, most of the major *relawan* groups rallied to express their ongoing support for Widodo. What started to fuel further social media and informal discussion that Widodo's supporters and perhaps even Widodo himself might be thinking of forming a separate party was the formation of the Joint Secretariat for a Participation Indonesia (SBPI, *Sekretariat Bersama Partisipasi Indonesia*) by the *relawan* groups.<sup>7</sup> The groups involved were Projo (Pro Jokowi), Seknas Jokowi (Jokowi National

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<sup>5</sup> There were key figures of some *relawan* groups, such as SEKNAS Jokowi, who were from the PDIP.

<sup>6</sup> <http://m.liputan6.com/showbiz/read/2165845/kpk-vs-polri-bimbim-slank-kecewa-dengan-presiden-jokowi>

<sup>7</sup> <http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2015/01/29/08490381/Para.Relawan.Bentuk.Sekber.Kami.Tidak.Akan.Biarkan.Jokowi.Sendirian> and <https://au.search.yahoo.com/search?fr=mcafee&type=B110AU0D20131111&p=Sekretariat+Bersama+Partisipasi+Indonesia+>

Secretariat), Duta Jokowi (Jokowi Ambassadors), Relawan Penggerak Jakarta Baru (RPJB) (Volunteers for a New Jakarta), Pusat Informasi Relawan (PIR) (Volunteers Information Centre), Jaringan Nasional Indonesia Baru (JNIB) (New Indonesia National Network), and Jokowi Mania. Projo and Seknas Jokowi both had achieved significant national recognition, at least among the more politicised middle class circles. Such an alliance could be seen as a precursor to the formation of a political party.

The statement by the SBPI expressed their support for Widodo's policies to date including his actions in relation to the KPK-Polri tension, stating that the members of the team of nine that Widodo had appointed were credible figures. Central to the statement, entitled "We Will Not Let Jokowi Stand Alone", were the following two final points (in translation):

*We fully support the independent stance of Jokowi who politely and humbly rejects all pressures and interventions from whomsoever. We believe that Jokowi will always be decisive and independent, in his refined and polite way, which are his special characteristics.*

*We know that being decisive does not mean showing off you have power or conducting shows of force. We are ready to stand behind the president if there is any force at all that tries in any way to pressure the president to depart from the Nawacita.<sup>8</sup>*

There can be little doubt that coming in the midst of perceptions that Widodo was appeasing Megawati, this manifesto can be read as an encouragement to Widodo to "stand up" to the PDIP party elite.<sup>9</sup> The coming together of these groups also encouraged speculation that Widodo would be forming his own party. However, this is qualified by a final point that emphasised the participation of civil society in government processes rather than entering the realm of party politics and electoral competition.

However, on February 7, Budi Arie Setiadi, Chairman of the *relawan* group Pro Jokowi, made a statement that "We await the peoples' expression of their aspiration [for a relawan party] and for instructions from the President [to form one]. We are always ready to move."<sup>10</sup> In fact, informal talk and social media chatter around the issue of a Jokowi party had already been circulating for some time, probably started by a similar statement from the Solo chapter of Projo. On February 3, Puan Maharani, Megawati's daughter, a high ranking official in PDIP and Widodo's Coordinating Minister for Human Development and Culture, had

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<sup>8</sup> The Nawacita was a manifesto of nine principles, formulated in very general terms, that Widodo and Kalla declared that they would follow in government, see

<http://nasional.kompas.com/read/2014/05/21/0754454/Nawa.Cita.9.Agenda.Prioritas.Jokowi-JK>

<sup>9</sup> On the question of Widodo's appeasements see Ulla Fionna, "Jokowi's First Months: Compromise Cabinet, Subsidy Cuts, and Corrupt Coalition", *ISEAS Perspective*, February 5, 2014,

[http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS\\_perspective\\_2015\\_06.pdf](http://www.iseas.edu.sg/documents/publication/ISEAS_perspective_2015_06.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> <http://politik.news.viva.co.id/news/read/587007-ormas-projo-tunggu-perintah-jokowi-bentuk-partai-politik>

responded publicly that while Widodo had the right to form his own party, he remained a PDIP cadre and official as of then.<sup>11</sup>

## PROSPECTS

At a formal and tactical level, it should be noted that any unamicable break with the PDIP by Widodo – which surely his desertion of the PDIP would be – would leave him with no definite support base in parliament. He did invite the leader of the majority opposition in parliament, Prabowo Subianto, his challenger at the presidential election last year, for a friendly meeting in the presidential palace, perhaps to help shore up support. This tactic is, in any case, an ongoing necessity given that the PDIP-Nasdem-PKB coalition in parliament is a minority. Breaking with the PDIP would leave him an isolated president facing an almost totally hostile parliament – *at least while present alignments hold*.

The immediate prospects of a new party are thus very slight. But one may not be able to rule that out further down the road, closer to the next elections in 2019 (assuming he makes it that far).

There are successful precedents for the founding of new parties as political vehicles for presidential aspirants. The Partai Demokrat, for example, was founded as a vehicle to launch the presidential campaign of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Gerindra was the vehicle that undergirded the presidential bid of Prabowo Subianto, and eventually made him the de facto leader of the opposition. Similarly, Nasdem essentially served as a vehicle for Surya Paloh's political aspirations.

Widodo is known to approach problems in a pragmatic way, depending on political needs. His appointment of Badrodin Haiti as Polri chief while at the same time keeping Gunawan on as a senior police official will be typical of the kind of pragmatic balancing he will implement. This kind of pragmatic balancing will also be a feature of his government in policy terms. Widodo's political practice and rhetoric wed elements of social safety net populism, liberalism and pragmatically driven conservative statism (inherited from the New Order). His cabinet, which includes prominent academics such as Professors Pratikno and Andrinof Chaniago, among others, as well as business operators who have emerged out of the national business elite, such as Rini Soemarno, Luhut Panjaitan, Gobel, and others, reflects this fusion. It should be added though that he appointed no activist liberals to the cabinet.

One question for the future will be whether this kind of pragmatic balancing approach, both towards political problems and policy issues, can form the basis of a new party, should Joko Widodo contemplate such a move closer to the next election in 2019.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tempo.co/read/news/2015/02/03/078639659/Puan-Maharani-Silakan-Jokowi-Bikin-Partai-Baru>

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