

Jokowi's Pyrrhic Victory: Indonesia's 2024 Elections and the Political Reinvention of Prabowo Subianto

MARCUS MIETZNER

Prabowo Subianto's victory in Indonesia's 2024 presidential elections was decisive, and it is widely accepted that incumbent President Joko Widodo's de facto endorsement of him played a significant role in this outcome. But the motivations of Widodo (commonly known as "Jokowi") for picking his former adversary as his heir, and the reasons for his determination to get Prabowo elected in a landslide, remain poorly understood. This article demonstrates that Jokowi selected Prabowo after other options had fallen through, and that he made his choice with full awareness of the risks and uncertainties involved. By implication, he also tolerated the danger a Prabowo presidency could pose to Indonesian democracy. Tempted by Prabowo's offer to make Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, his vice-presidential candidate, Jokowi went all-in and mobilized state resources to secure their triumph. Based on interviews with key actors, this article delivers a detailed picture of the factors that made Prabowo president—and that gave Jokowi few guarantees of continued influence.

Keywords: Indonesia, elections, democracy, autocracy, presidentialism.

On 10 February 2024, the state of Indonesia's democracy, the world's third largest, was on full display. It was the last day of campaigning

MARCUS MIETZNER is Associate Professor at the Department of Political and Social Change, Coral Bell School of Asia Pacific Affairs, Australian National University, Canberra. Postal address: Hedley Bull Building, Australian National University, Canberra 2601 ACT, Australia; email: Marcus.Mietzner@anu.edu.au.

in the country's presidential elections, and more than 100,000 people filled the Gelora Bung Karno stadium in Jakarta, the capital, to watch Prabowo Subianto speak.¹ Prabowo, Indonesia's minister of defence and a fixture in its politics for decades, delivered a medley of his biggest hits. His show included the condemnation of foreign interests that tried to manipulate Indonesia, the promise to lift citizens out of poverty, and the singing of nationalist songs. But intermixed with these traditional Prabowo themes were newer, softer tones. For instance, the screen in the stadium switched between real-time images of the profusely sweating Prabowo and video clips of his cartoon avatar—a cute, overweight and smiling uncle figure. The real Prabowo shed tears, raising his hands in prayer to display his new emphatic vulnerability. Most importantly, he promised to continue the policies of outgoing President Joko Widodo (commonly known as “Jokowi”). Everybody in the stadium understood that Prabowo was the president's favourite candidate for his succession, despite Jokowi's repeated protestations of neutrality. Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, was Prabowo's running mate. The president had toyed with the idea of campaigning openly for the pair, including in the stadium, but then decided otherwise.² Instead, he visited the hotel in which the Prabowo camp resided shortly after the stadium event had concluded.

The Gelora Bung Karno stadium was a curious site for Prabowo to celebrate his new alliance with Jokowi. In both the 2014 and 2019 elections, Jokowi had rallied in the exact same location against Prabowo. On both occasions, he had used a highly effective line against his electoral opponent, a former general. “I carry no historical burden”, Jokowi had shouted into the stadium in April 2019 as his supporters erupted in thunderous applause.³ Without spelling out the details, Jokowi's message was clear: Prabowo was a figure associated with the old autocratic regime, accused of kidnapping human rights activists in 1998 and various other transgressions. Jokowi, by contrast, was a post-authoritarian leader without a chequered record. Prabowo had also conducted rallies in the Gelora Bung Karno stadium against Jokowi in the past. In 2014, he had belittled Jokowi as an incompetent newcomer. Five years later, he had assembled his Islamist allies in the same spot, depicting the then-incumbent Jokowi as a president who was hostile to Muslims. “I will end the criminalization of Islamic leaders under this government”, Prabowo had promised in 2014 to the delight of his fans, many of whom wore traditional Muslim dress.⁴ After both the 2014 and 2019 elections, which Prabowo lost, some of his

hardcore supporters protested violently. In 2019, a police crackdown on the protests killed nine people.

What, then, explains the remarkable shift in the relationship between Jokowi and Prabowo? What, on the one hand, convinced Jokowi to not only reconcile with his two-time opponent but to pick him as his heir? And once he had made this choice, what motivated him to mobilize all available state resources to secure a first-round victory for him? What, on the other hand, led Prabowo to drop his populist demand for a complete revamp of the political system and instead heap praise on Jokowi's presidency? The answers to these questions are complex and require contextualization beyond a short-term analysis of the 2024 campaign. Therefore, this article systematically unpacks the structural conditions and the actions of key players that, in combination, shaped the outcome of the 2024 presidential elections. It demonstrates that Jokowi's extraordinarily high popularity allowed him to become the first president in Indonesian history to determine his successor. As well as cashing in on this popularity, he also launched the most intense campaign of state intervention in any national election since the demise of Suharto's New Order regime in 1998. In this, Jokowi displayed his trademark Machiavellian understanding of politics and his pragmatic understanding of democracy. But while he made his son vice president, he received no iron-clad guarantees of post-presidential influence for himself. Indeed, he jeopardized Indonesian democracy's reputation (and his own) in a high-risk game of political poker that could end with his marginalization.

To understand why Jokowi favoured Prabowo, and why he found it easy to get his former adversary elected, this article offers a step-by-step analysis of the process that made Prabowo president. It starts with a discussion of the sources of Jokowi's popularity. It proceeds to describe his initial plans to extend his own stay in power; his subsequent but aborted attempt to promote Ganjar Pranowo, the governor of Central Java, as his heir; and the factors that drove Jokowi to ultimately settle on Prabowo as his preferred successor instead. It then presents a detailed mapping of the migration of Jokowi's 2019 voters to the Prabowo camp and documents Jokowi's interventions to secure a one-round victory for his favourite. The article concludes by discussing the implications of all of this for Indonesian democracy.

Conceptually, the article posits Prabowo's rise as an insightful case of how some of today's largest democracies both formally persist and substantially erode.⁵ Jokowi's autocratic techniques—

which Prabowo is likely to continue—are representative of a pattern in which twenty-first-century democracies do not decline through coups or regime breakdowns, but slowly deteriorate without a dramatic rupture.⁶ This article draws from interviews and background discussions with the leading actors of the 2024 elections, including President Jokowi, Prabowo Subianto, Ganjar Pranowo, Anies Baswedan, cabinet ministers, pollsters, legislative candidates and activists. Some sources are not mentioned in the article, but their input helped shape the author’s analysis. Naturally, the responsibility for any factual or analytical errors rests with the author.

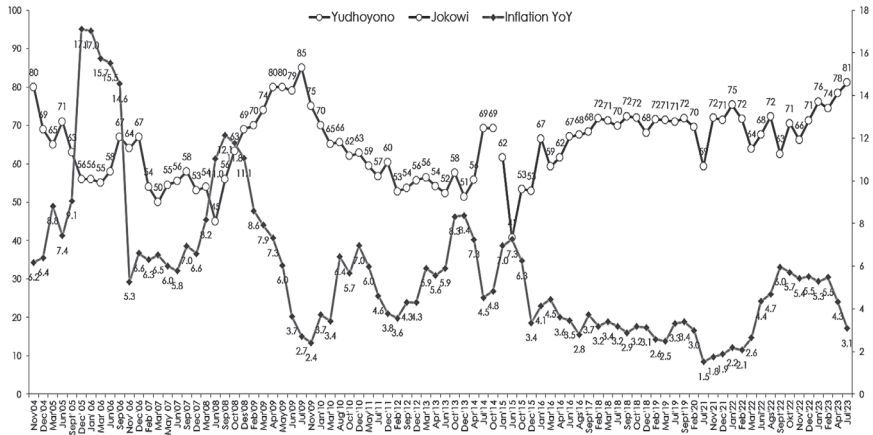
Jokowi’s Popularity

To understand the dynamics of Indonesia’s 2024 presidential elections, one must appreciate Jokowi’s remarkable popularity. Without this factor, he would not have been able to be the dominant player in determining the outcome of the ballot. Moreover, Jokowi fully understood that his approval rating gave him political weight. Throughout his two terms as president (2014–24), he interpreted it as his main competitive advantage over the leaders of political parties and other actors: “The level of trust in legislatures and parties is low. So if we are clean, if we work hard, if we deliver, we get the support of the people when facing them.”⁷ In other words, popularity was his primary political capital; it was something he possessed, and others did not. It could be used to sustain his centrality in Indonesia’s elite landscape, and to dish out rewards and punishments to his allies and foes who lacked his mass appeal. In January 2024, just before the presidential elections, Jokowi’s satisfaction rating among the electorate was 80 per cent. His predecessor, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, only reached 51 per cent at the same stage of his presidency. This difference goes a long way towards explaining why Yudhoyono would have found it hard to successfully engineer his succession, even if he had wanted to. Jokowi, by contrast, sat on a huge reserve of public backing that he could mobilize to move his hand-picked replacement into the electoral pole position.

What were the sources of Jokowi’s popularity? Chief among them was his ability to constrain inflation. Studies of presidential popularity—in Indonesia and elsewhere—have long established a strong link between inflation levels and a president’s approval ratings.⁸ Much more so than longer-term economic indicators such as

GDP growth rates, the impact of inflation is hard and immediate; it creates dissatisfaction among the poor *and* the more affluent. Jokowi grasped this early in his political career: “Even when I was mayor of Solo, I got rewards for keeping inflation low – at the time, it was 1.3 per cent in my city, while it was much higher nationally.”⁹ Back then, he learned that intervening in the market was essential to controlling prices. Releasing major food items from the state’s storehouses, providing additional aid when supplies ran low, and developing an early warning system for price increases became part of Jokowi’s repertoire of managing inflation. As president, he re-strengthened the role of the State Logistics Board, increased food assistance to the poor, and frequently visited markets to inquire about prices.¹⁰ “You always have to go to the market yourself to understand prices; you can’t believe what subordinates tell you”, he proclaimed during a market visit in Samarinda in 2023.¹¹ His special concern for inflation was also the result of an experience early on in his presidency. When he drastically cut fuel subsidies a few weeks after his inauguration, inflation skyrocketed and his approval rating dropped to 41 per cent (see Figure 1). Determined to never go through such a low again, inflation control became his top agenda.

Figure 1
Presidential Approval and Inflation in Indonesia, 2004–23



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia.¹²

Jokowi's effective inflation control—he kept it at an average of 3.6 per cent during his presidency, compared with 7.1 per cent during the two terms of his predecessor¹³—also offered him an additional instrument to boost his standing. As it turned out, distributing food, cash and other items to the poor not only cushioned the impact of inflation, it created an independent source of societal gratitude. Realizing this, Jokowi increased the social assistance budget substantially and handed out aid personally whenever he could. Between 2015 and 2024, Jokowi doubled the annual social support budget to about 500 trillion Rupiah (US\$31 billion), which came in handy especially ahead of elections. As later sections will show, Jokowi went on a tour to hand out goods in the middle of the 2024 presidential campaign. Asked in a January 2024 survey about why they approved of Jokowi's job performance, 39 per cent of respondents said it was because he "gave aid to ordinary people". His record in building infrastructure was a distant second (at 24 per cent), and his overall record and humble appearance followed at 8 and 7 per cent, respectively.¹⁴ Jokowi's aides tried to blend all these features into one overarching image of a man close to the people. Senior minister Luhut Pandjaitan explained in an interview during the 2024 campaign that Jokowi distributed aid to the people in person because he was from an ordinary background himself.¹⁵ Of course, Luhut argued, Jokowi gave them better infrastructure for the same reason.¹⁶

But Jokowi's efforts to build and maintain high popularity levels did not only rely on inflation control and the distribution of patronage. Much more so than Yudhoyono, he had no scruples in using his presidential powers to coercively manufacture a positive image of himself. Part of this campaign was the co-optation of major media conglomerates.¹⁷ During the 2014 elections, numerous television stations opposed Jokowi. However, by the 2019 elections, they had switched sides to support him. Some had not done so voluntarily. For example, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, whose television stations controlled about 40 per cent of the market share in 2017,¹⁸ pledged allegiance to Jokowi after being threatened with legal investigations.¹⁹ Aburizal Bakrie, owner of TV One, moved his station into the Jokowi camp for similar reasons.²⁰ As a result, Jokowi enjoyed mostly generous coverage in the mainstream media, with only a few niche outlets offering critical scrutiny. In the social media space, Jokowi also tightened controls. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when Jokowi's popularity was initially under pressure, the police set up a unit that

handled online criticism of the president. Perpetrators were “advised” that any further transgression would be prosecuted.²¹ Consequently, in a September 2020 opinion survey, 69.6 per cent of respondents agreed that citizens were “increasingly” afraid of stating their opinion freely.²² At the same time, most political parties and legislators were incorporated into the government, further narrowing the space for the expression of alternative views of Jokowi.²³ In his second term, 82 per cent of parliamentarians supported his government. With critical voices muted in society and state institutions, it was easy for Jokowi to consolidate his popularity as the foundation of his political power.

The Term Limit Evasion Campaign

Initially, Jokowi did not intend to use his hard-won popularity to handpick a successor. Instead, he wanted to mobilize it for himself. Not long after his second-term inauguration in late 2019, notions began to circulate that Jokowi wanted a third term in office.²⁴ Under amendments to the Constitution after the fall of Suharto’s authoritarian regime in 1998, presidents are limited to two terms. Changing this required another constitutional amendment. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government’s attempt to push the issue picked up pace. Internally, Jokowi hinted that the pandemic had robbed him of valuable time to complete his agenda. He was most concerned about the fate of the planned new capital, Nusantara, which is being built in East Kalimantan. Convinced that only he could finish it and that his second term was insufficient to achieve this goal, he encouraged his aides to look for ways to let him stay in office beyond 2024. In a familiar pattern—later replicated to conceal his intervention in the 2024 presidential elections—he publicly denied having anything to do with the term limit evasion initiative. He answered questions on the matter by insisting that he was loyal to the Constitution, implying that if the Constitution was changed to allow for a third term, he would still be sticking to the rules. Despite the denials and gaslighting, his aides confirmed that Jokowi was interested in a third term and that his operators interpreted this as an order from him to make it happen.²⁵ Any lingering doubts about Jokowi’s involvement in the scheme dissipated when Luhut, the president’s main political fixer, took the lead and publicly advocated for a third Jokowi term in early 2022. Luhut claimed that “big data” showed around 110 million Indonesians were in favour of this.²⁶

But the third term campaign showed that Jokowi's popularity and his influence among elites, while formidable, had limits. Although citizens appreciated his presidency and most elites were loyal to him because he wielded presidential authority, neither the broader population nor political leaders wanted him to overstay his term. Indeed, voters wanted to uphold the existing constitutional rules, and elites supported leadership regeneration out of pure self-interest: they did not want Jokowi to block their own opportunities for advancement. Consequently, key leaders came out in opposition to the third-term extension. Most importantly, Megawati Sukarnoputri, the chairperson of Jokowi's party, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), refused to endorse the idea. She was unhappy with Jokowi's presidency, complaining that he had not listened to her and the party when governing. Her goal was to make a more loyal party cadre president through the 2024 elections. Meanwhile, Prabowo wanted to run for the presidency himself and, therefore, had no reason to back a third Jokowi term. Other party leaders also had presidential ambitions and hence withheld their endorsement. Even those politicians that Jokowi's office directly asked to make public statements of support only did so half-heartedly, and they quickly informed other elites that they had acted under pressure. In the end, Jokowi had to accept that his supermajority in parliament did not translate into a majority for a constitutional amendment. Noting that opinion polls also indicated popular rejection, Jokowi and his aides grudgingly (and quietly) dropped the initiative.

With a third term off the table, Jokowi's supporters explored other options. The most prominent was a proposal to postpone the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections by two or three years. This would have not only extended Jokowi's term but also that of every legislator. Jokowi's inner circle hoped that the elites who were reluctant to endorse a third term for Jokowi would find a shorter extension more palatable, and that party politicians active in legislatures would welcome additional time in office without the need for an expensive campaign. With about half of Indonesian legislators losing their posts at each election, the expectations of Jokowi's aides were not unfounded. But the plan for an election postponement also foundered. Megawati, Prabowo and other political elites maintained their opposition. Non-incumbent candidates who had already spent money on preparing their campaigns protested loudly. As the elections drew nearer, the attempts to keep Jokowi in power for longer became increasingly unstructured. In March

2023, a Jakarta court granted a petition from an obscure party to suspend preparations for the 2024 elections because the party had been unduly excluded from running. However, the ruling was later overturned. Parallel to this, some of Jokowi's supporters filed a lawsuit at the Constitutional Court demanding that an incumbent two-term president be allowed to run for vice president. This was an obvious attempt to allow for an option in which Jokowi would run as Prabowo's vice-president. But this plan fizzled out, too. Eventually, electoral preparations progressed so far that any scheme to keep Jokowi in power was no longer feasible.

The failed term-limit evasion campaign is crucial to the understanding of Jokowi's subsequent actions. To begin with, it lowered his expectations as far as his ambitions for a beneficial succession deal were concerned. Because his most favoured scenarios were unworkable, he had to settle for less straightforward and riskier alternatives. Indeed, he had to accept that none of the options would deliver him strong guarantees of continued political influence. Instead, they would require complex negotiations, with the resulting agreements still vulnerable to later betrayal. The deal Jokowi chose at the end must be understood against this background. The events surrounding the collapse of his term-extension plans also helped Jokowi to better identify foes among his formal allies. Most crucially, Megawati's vocal opposition consolidated in Jokowi's mind the opinion that the PDI-P's chair would not look favourably upon him having any form of influence post-2024. Indeed, PDI-P politicians believed that Megawati's role in denying Jokowi a third term in office later led him to turn against her. In October 2023, for instance, party official Adian Napitupulu stated that "if [Jokowi] was angry when we rejected adding another term in office, [...] then that is up to [him]. What's clear is that we did it to protect the constitution."²⁷ On the other hand, Prabowo was gentler in his opposition to Jokowi's plans: he did not support a third term but did not personally attack the president, leaving his relations with Jokowi intact. Thus, with the term extension campaign behind him, Jokowi had a better idea of what sort of succession deal he could seek, and who should and should not be involved.

Endorsing Ganjar?

When analysing Jokowi's choices ahead of the 2024 elections, it is important to remember that political leaders rarely put all their eggs

into one basket. They might favour one specific option and pursue this strongly while keeping other scenarios open.²⁸ Jokowi was no different. While working on the plan to either extend term limits or delay the 2024 elections, he was aware that neither might actually succeed. Hence, he began to identify leaders who he could support as his successor. In doing so, three criteria were crucial. First, the candidate had to have a solid popularity basis from which to build a successful presidential campaign. As a passionate reader of opinion polls, Jokowi knew that a politician's popularity could be increased through electoral strategies, but it could not be manufactured from scratch. This ruled out politicians who were ambitious but lacked the basic foundations of electability. Second, any preferred successor had to commit to continuing Jokowi's policies. Third, nominees hoping to elicit Jokowi's endorsement had to accept that he would retain some influence, in terms of policies and personnel, in their government. Ideally, this understanding would come in the form of a formal agreement and/or from pre-existing personal loyalty. As a pragmatic politician, Jokowi was arguably aware that these three conditions were maximum goals that he would have to compromise on, but they were nevertheless the starting point in his search for a suitable successor.

Early on, Jokowi felt that Ganjar Pranowo ticked all three boxes. The poll numbers of the young, good-looking and energetic governor of Central Java were promising, with voters attracted to his high-profile handling of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ganjar was a member of Jokowi's PDI-P but, like the president himself, he had a strained relationship with many of the party's leaders. There was also good personal chemistry between the two, with both coming from non-elite backgrounds and having worked their way up from local politics to national prominence. Thus, as early as December 2020, Jokowi instructed his aides to start working with Ganjar on a possible candidature. The key figure in this scheme was Andi Widjajanto, Jokowi's 2014 campaign manager and his first cabinet secretary. According to Widjajanto, the president instructed him in December 2020 to initiate Ganjar's campaign, and the first meeting with Ganjar on this issue took place in January 2021.²⁹ Ganjar, too, was preparing to step into the role of Jokowi's heir. While publicly denying any ambitions, he talked to the president about how to proceed, and pro-Ganjar volunteer groups began to emerge. By June 2022, Ganjar was the top-polling presidential candidate, ahead of Prabowo and Anies Baswedan, the governor

of Jakarta and a Jokowi critic.³⁰ Surveys also showed that Ganjar was the candidate who voters thought was most likely to receive Jokowi's endorsement.

However, Jokowi's enthusiasm for Ganjar began to cool significantly by late 2022. To begin with, Jokowi did not get far in discussing Ganjar's candidacy with Megawati. As PDI-P's chairperson, Megawati, not Jokowi, held the formal authority to nominate the party's presidential candidate. But whenever Jokowi raised the issue with her, she tried to change the topic. In Jokowi's mind, this meant that she had no intention of giving him a role in selecting his successor or, for that matter, in the post-2024 government. Jokowi's inner circle took the view that even if Megawati were to agree to Ganjar's nomination, she would insist that he was her candidate, not Jokowi's. According to Luhut, "Megawati tried to control Jokowi as president and failed. This time, she wanted to take possession of Ganjar."³¹ Responding to this stalemate, Jokowi asked three other parties in his government to form an electoral alliance—the United Indonesia Coalition, consisting of Golkar, the Party of Unity and Development (PPP) and the National Mandate Party (PAN). The main task of this coalition was to nominate Ganjar should this become necessary. However, Ganjar refused to consider this option. "I don't need this vehicle. I am certain that Megawati will come around and nominate me", he told the author in 2022.³² Ganjar's refusal irritated Jokowi and his aides. "[Jokowi] went out of his way to offer Ganjar a non-PDI-P pathway to the nomination. Ganjar did not want it, so that was that", Luhut complained.³³

Adding to Jokowi's frustrations over the PDI-P's stance on the third-term proposal, the interactions with Megawati and Ganjar on an intra-party solution to the succession question left Jokowi with deep doubts. Significantly, he saw these doubts confirmed when in late March 2023 Ganjar sided with Megawati in rejecting Israel's participation in the FIFA Under-20 World Cup that was supposed to be held in Indonesia that year.³⁴ Jokowi had supported the holding of the event with Israel's involvement, while Megawati was opposed. The PDI-P asked Ganjar to take a stance, and he rightly viewed this request as a loyalty test. Siding with Jokowi would have signalled that he was the president's man, while taking Megawati's side would show that he was willing to follow the PDI-P chair's instructions. Ganjar was aware of the dilemma he faced, and his inner circle blamed the PDI-P for putting him in this position.³⁵ Ultimately, he took Megawati's side. (Indonesia would later be

removed as host of the event because of its opposition to Israel's participation.) Supporting Megawati's viewpoint brought Ganjar closer to obtaining her endorsement as the PDI-P's candidate, but it distanced him further from Jokowi. "I was surprised [hearing about Ganjar's decision], and there was no prior communication from him on this", Jokowi recalled.³⁶ For Jokowi, the final straw came in April 2023 when Megawati nominated Ganjar. Megawati did not discuss this with Jokowi but ordered him to attend the announcement on short notice. Clearly irritated, Jokowi tersely commented that he "appreciated" Megawati's announcement and that Ganjar was "close to the people".³⁷ However, he strategically avoided endorsing Ganjar, and instead stepped up his search for an alternative.

Prabowo as Jokowi's Heir

Jokowi's options were limited. As noted, one of the main conditions that Jokowi considered when selecting his favoured successor was that candidate's electability. This criterion massively shrank the field of candidates. Besides Ganjar, just two other contenders were competitive: Prabowo and Anies. Among these two, only Prabowo had friendly ties to Jokowi. While the pair had fought bitter electoral battles in 2014 and 2019, both recognized after the 2019 ballot that they were better off cooperating than attempting to destroy each other. Jokowi did not want to begin his second term with Prabowo still a threat to his regime's stability, while Prabowo accepted that his two defeats as a populist outsider called for a change of strategy if he wanted to run for president again. Hence, Jokowi and Prabowo reconciled their differences following the outbreak of post-election violence in May 2019, when Prabowo supporters protested following his loss. According to Jokowi, "I took the first step reaching out to him through some of my aides."³⁸ In Prabowo's camp, Jokowi's overtures were welcomed. Prabowo recalled that "when visiting my supporters in hospital after the May violence, I knew that we couldn't go on like this. We had to compromise."³⁹ After intense negotiations over what form their reconciliation should take, the pair agreed that Prabowo would enter Jokowi's cabinet as defence minister. The deal was finalized with the inauguration of the new cabinet in October 2019.

It is not clear, however, at what point exactly Jokowi began to seriously consider Prabowo as his heir. The press noticed that the pair had increased the frequency of joint appearances in the

final quarter of 2022.⁴⁰ In November of that year, Jokowi dropped his strongest hint yet. At a public event, he turned to Prabowo and joked that after having beaten him twice in elections, it was Prabowo's "turn" or "allocation" to become Indonesia's next president. But Jokowi's actions around this time must be read in a broader strategic context. In November 2022, Anies had made inroads in the polls while Prabowo's popularity suffered a drop.⁴¹ Had this trend continued, Anies would have become the presidential frontrunner. While Jokowi had not settled on his favoured successor at this stage, he was certain about one thing: he wanted to prevent Anies from becoming president. Jokowi had fired Anies from cabinet in 2016, only for him to run for the governorship of Jakarta a year later. In that election, Anies aligned with the Islamist segment of Indonesian politics and agitated against a close Jokowi ally: the incumbent governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, a Christian of ethnic Chinese descent. Basuki lost the election and was imprisoned for blasphemy.⁴² Famous for holding silent grudges, Jokowi never forgot Anies' role in one of the biggest crises of his presidency. Therefore, it is likely that Jokowi's moves in late 2022 were primarily designed to prop up Prabowo's standing in the polls in order to stop Anies' rise. He began to tell assistants that he could live with either a Ganjar or Prabowo presidency, implying that Anies was not acceptable to him.⁴³

For a brief period in early 2023, Jokowi pursued the option of a joint presidential ticket between Ganjar and Prabowo. This would have had two benefits: it would have created an electoral juggernaut that was certain to trounce Anies in the elections; and if Ganjar was paired with Prabowo, the PDI-P's influence over the former could have been reduced. At the time when Jokowi suggested a joint ticket to both men, Ganjar was leading in the polls and thus was confident that he should be the presidential candidate, with Prabowo his running mate. However, when Jokowi took the two on a trip to the Central Java countryside in early March 2023, Prabowo asked Ganjar to be his vice-presidential candidate. According to Ganjar, "Prabowo said to me that I should be his VP, and that he would only serve for one term. After that, I could be president for ten years."⁴⁴ Ganjar refused. Subsequently, Ganjar's polling numbers fell because many voters blamed him and his party for the cancellation of the FIFA Under-20 World Cup. In the following months, Prabowo overtook Ganjar in opinion surveys, but he did not gain a decisive lead, meaning that both men continued to

insist on their respective chances of being the lead candidate on the hypothetical joint ticket. Jokowi adjusted to this by developing a new scenario: Ganjar and Prabowo would run against each other, with both of their running mates nominated by him. After beating Anies, the two camps would reunite through Jokowi's mediation.⁴⁵ He told visitors in mid-2023 that if Prabowo and Ganjar both ran in the elections with his support, he could "sleep tight" and wait for the election's outcome.⁴⁶

Many in Jokowi's cabinet, and even in his inner circle, believed until very late in the process that this was the president's basic stance going into the elections: he would be formally neutral but lend tacit support to both Prabowo and Ganjar to overcome the challenge posed by Anies. The public took a similar view. Asked in August 2023 who they thought Jokowi supported as his successor, 41 per cent of respondents said Ganjar, 28 per cent Prabowo, and only 6 per cent Anies. A quarter of respondents were unsure, which was understandable given that Jokowi himself seemed to be wavering.⁴⁷ But behind the scenes, Jokowi was increasingly leaning towards Prabowo. As noted, the FIFA Under-20 World Cup affair and the lack of consultation on Ganjar's nomination had left Jokowi disappointed. While he did not fully break with Ganjar, their relationship was severely damaged. Prabowo took advantage of this and intensified his charm offensive *vis-à-vis* Jokowi. After entering the cabinet as defence minister, he had already shed his image as a populist who wanted to dismantle the political status quo. Instead, he portrayed himself as a loyal team player prepared to take orders from Jokowi. Over time, his obsequiousness towards Jokowi intensified, and he began to present himself as the best candidate to protect the president's legacy. Knowing that Megawati and Ganjar offered Jokowi little to no influence after the 2024 elections, Prabowo did the opposite. In a letter to Jokowi in mid-2023, written at the advice of Luhut, Prabowo promised that Jokowi would have an equal say in the formation of his would-be cabinet. Jokowi deemed Prabowo's radical transformation "genuine" and felt exceedingly drawn to him.⁴⁸

Prabowo sealed the deal by making Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, his running mate. Gibran was mayor of Solo—the position in which his father had started his career—but at 36 years of age, was formally too young to be nominated on a presidential ticket. According to the Constitution, the minimum age for a presidential nominee is 40. Nevertheless, Prabowo correctly believed

that pushing for Gibran's nomination would help convince Jokowi of his sincerity. In the end, it proved an offer too tempting for the president to reject. Initially, Jokowi was not sure whether Gibran's poll numbers would be good enough; his pollsters were divided on this. Thus, by August 2023, Jokowi had told Prabowo "four times" that he did not think Gibran was a good idea as running mate.⁴⁹ But Jokowi quietly prepared for the eventuality. Several petitions were filed at the Constitutional Court—chaired by Jokowi's brother-in-law, Anwar Usman—to remove the age barrier that obstructed Gibran's nomination. On 16 October, the court allowed Gibran to run—it maintained the age stipulations but created an exception for local government heads.⁵⁰ In the following days, Jokowi's pollsters told the president that there was no public backlash against this controversial decision and that Gibran's electoral standing was sound. Consequently, on 22 October, Prabowo officially announced Gibran as his running mate. While Jokowi claimed he would be neutral in the elections, it was obvious to elites and the broader population that Jokowi had made his decision: Prabowo was now the anointed heir, with Gibran next in line.

The Migration of Jokowi Voters to Prabowo

Before we analyse the electoral impact of Jokowi's *de facto* endorsement of Prabowo, let us pause for a moment and consider the significance and strategic implications of the president's decision. It is crucial to reiterate that this was *not* Jokowi's first—and certainly not his optimal—choice. Before making the call, he had run through several other options: a third term in office; delaying the election for several years; a Ganjar nomination on Jokowi's terms; and a joint ticket between Ganjar and Prabowo. In other words, Jokowi's support for Prabowo, with Gibran at his side, was not Plan A. It was, in Jokowi's view, the best he could get after other alternatives had fallen through. From a purely Machiavellian point of view, Jokowi's preference for Prabowo over Ganjar was plausible. After all, he had received no assurances from Megawati that he would continue to be influential after the 2024 election, while Prabowo offered an abundance of such guarantees. Thus, Jokowi felt that he would be better off under a Prabowo presidency. However, Jokowi clearly underassessed the likelihood that Ganjar could have emancipated himself from Megawati after becoming president (just as Jokowi had done after 2014). In such a scenario, Ganjar could

have provided a comfortable space for Jokowi in his own presidency, Megawati's protestations notwithstanding. Ganjar rightly felt that Jokowi dismissed this scenario too quickly and too harshly. Indeed, in several meetings in mid-2023, Jokowi told Ganjar bluntly that he would lose the elections if he did not have the courage to stand up to Megawati.⁵¹

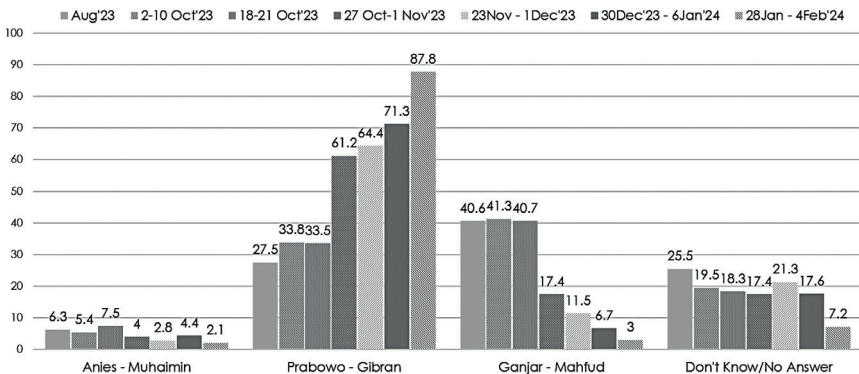
Jokowi, therefore, entered the campaign period with promises made by Prabowo and the prospect of his son becoming vice president, but no waterproof arrangements for his post-2024 influence. Nevertheless, he went all-in. Indonesian voters understood the nomination of Gibran exactly in the way that Jokowi and Prabowo wanted it to be understood—that is, as Jokowi's endorsement of their ticket. Between Gibran's nomination in late October and early December, Prabowo's electability in the three-way race with Ganjar and Anies jumped from 37 per cent to over 45 per cent.⁵² To be sure, other factors played a role, too: Prabowo ran a smart election campaign, which focused on softening his image. As noted, his advisers created a digital avatar of him, whose cheerfulness contrasted sharply with Prabowo's image in the 2014 and 2019 elections as an iron-fisted strongman. Gibran, not blessed with much charisma, was also digitally upgraded to a dynamic youngster.⁵³ Prabowo showed off his new image on stage through a dance specifically developed for him, shrugging off any critical questions by offering entertainment. Polishing his democratic credentials, he dismissed his earlier comments about wanting to restore the constitution of the Suharto era.⁵⁴ In speeches, he introduced himself as part of the "Jokowi team" and as the protector of the incumbent president's achievements. He promised free lunches to underprivileged students and their mothers,⁵⁵ and occasionally threw in a few of the nationalist lines from his 2014 and 2019 campaigns to keep his old base satisfied. Overall, Prabowo put on an effective performance, and especially young voters were fascinated by what they saw.

However, a careful analysis of the election data demonstrates that the primary reason for Prabowo's decisive victory was not the hype surrounding his own campaign, but the systematic migration of Jokowi's voters over to Prabowo. In turn, this migration was the result of Jokowi's actions. To substantiate this argument, let us first look at one of the most important indicators of Indonesia's 2024 polling data: that is, the question of which candidate was, according to respondents, endorsed by Jokowi as his successor. As noted, in August 2023, Ganjar was slightly ahead of Prabowo in this regard,

and a quarter of respondents were still in the dark. However, a significant change occurred after Gibran's nomination. In the last week of October, the percentage of respondents who believed that Jokowi supported Prabowo almost doubled, from 34 to 61 per cent. It then grew to 64 per cent in November, 71 per cent in December, and 88 per cent in January 2024 (see Figure 2). In contrast, the percentage of voters who believed that Ganjar was Jokowi's preferred choice collapsed from 40 to just 3 per cent over the same period. In addition to Gibran's nomination, these numbers were driven by Jokowi's frequent appearances with Prabowo, including one in which the president stood in front of his defence minister at a military airfield and indicated that he was considering formally joining Prabowo's campaign. Hence, the electoral significance of Gibran's nomination was not related to the popularity of the president's son. Instead, its importance was the signal that it sent to Jokowi's supporters about whom to vote for. That message was loud and clear. By election day, everyone had heard it.

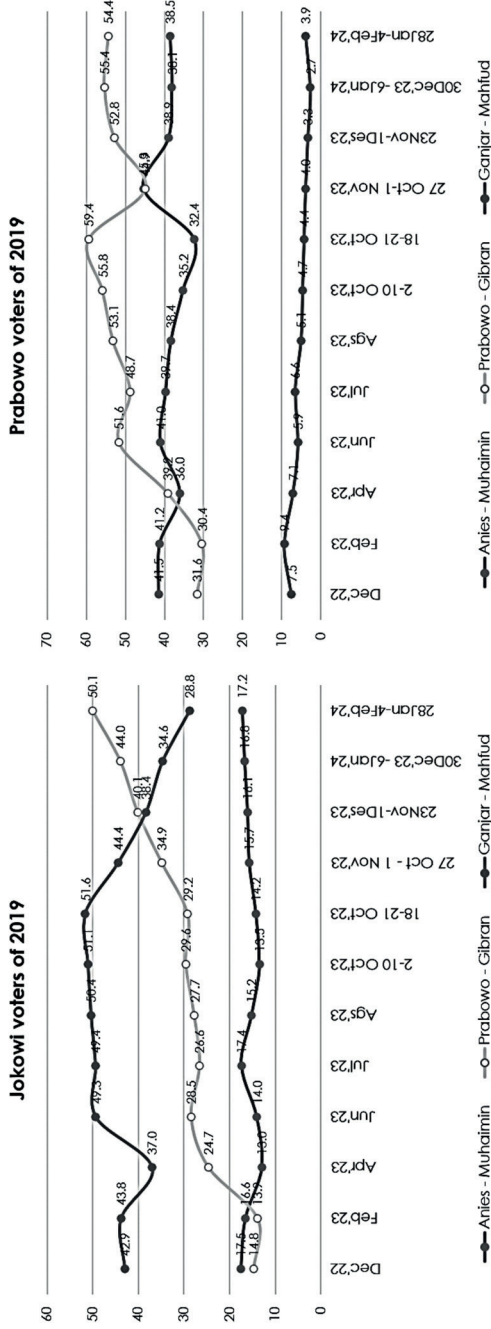
Following Gibran's nomination, voters who had previously voted for Jokowi rapidly and comprehensively migrated to the Prabowo camp. In October 2023, just before Gibran's anointment, 29 per cent of voters who had backed Jokowi at the 2019 elections said they supported Prabowo, up from 15 per cent in February 2023. This was the result of Jokowi's public "flirting" with Prabowo. However, Gibran's nomination changed the extent of this migration entirely. Some 35 per cent of Jokowi's voters said they supported Prabowo

Figure 2
Polls on Who Jokowi Supported in the 2024 Elections



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia.⁵⁶

Figure 3
2024 Voting Preferences of Jokowi and Prabowo 2019 Electorates



Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia.⁵⁷

in November 2023, rising to 40 per cent in December, and 45 per cent in January 2024. Just before the February 2024 elections, it increased to 50 per cent (see Figure 3). For Prabowo, this inflow of Jokowi loyalists was vital because his own base from the 2019 elections was unreliable. Pre-election polls showed that close to 40 per cent of Prabowo's 2019 electorate were deserting him to back Anies. These were mostly pious Muslim voters who believed that Prabowo had betrayed their cause by joining the Jokowi government. In short, Prabowo overcame the loss of parts of his political base by attracting half of Jokowi's former voters—a voter movement that, on balance, made him the frontrunner. In combination with the public's perception of Jokowi's preferred successor, the data demonstrates that as former Jokowi voters became convinced their patron favoured Prabowo, they followed his lead and pushed the latter over the electoral finish line.

Jokowi's Push for a One-Round Victory

But even though Prabowo was close to the 50-percent mark two months before the February election, and second-round scenarios showed him with an unbeatable 30-percent margin over both Anies and Ganjar,⁵⁸ Jokowi was unhappy. Although he, too, was surprised by the size of Prabowo's lead, he now set a new goal: the election had to be won in one round.⁵⁹ There were two reasons for his anxiousness: first, Jokowi feared that Anies might make a comeback if he was not finished off in the first round. In the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections, Anies had come second in the first round but then defeated Purnama in the run-off. Obviously, the 2017 elections had occurred in very different circumstances, and unlike Prabowo, Purnama was part of a vulnerable double minority. Nevertheless, Jokowi did not want to risk an Anies revival, and felt that Prabowo should win the election in the first round. Second, Jokowi's desire was also motivated by his concern for investor certainty. A run-off—necessary if no candidate received more than 50 per cent of the vote in the first round—would have been held in late June. That would have forced investors to wait for more than four months before they knew which government would rule next. For Jokowi, this constellation had particular implications for the development of Indonesia's new capital, Nusantara, which he planned to open with a big bang in August 2024. Private investors were reluctant to put money into the high-risk project, making a quick election outcome essential to address some of their scepticism.

To achieve his goal, Jokowi reached into the authoritarian toolbox.⁶⁰ Even before the final phase of election campaigning in late 2023 and early 2024, there had been widespread talk about Jokowi's undue intervention in the elections. During a visit to Australia in March 2023, Anies told academics that his pre-campaign tours throughout Indonesia were obstructed by authorities. He also called on foreign observer missions to monitor the Indonesian elections.⁶¹ Political and financial sponsors of Anies' campaign complained that people close to Jokowi had pressured them to withdraw their support for Anies and threatened to cut them off from business opportunities if they refused. Above all, the Constitutional Court's decision to allow Gibran to run for the vice-presidency served as a symbol of Jokowi and his aides' ruthless determination to pursue their agenda. In three of the four cases filed with the court, Anwar—Jokowi's brother-in-law and the chief justice of the Constitutional Court—had excused himself because of a conflict of interest. However, he then appeared at the deliberations of the fourth case and manufactured a majority for a clause that favoured Gibran. While Jokowi claimed to have had no knowledge of or influence on the proceedings, his critics found this implausible. Anwar himself was subsequently subject to ethics proceedings and removed from his position as chief justice. Yet, the decision he helped to produce stood. Jokowi did not seem to care much: he got what he wanted and could rely on the indifference of the silent majority. According to one survey, 76 per cent of respondents said they did not know that Anwar was related to the president.⁶²

Jokowi intensified his activism in the last weeks of the campaign. As mentioned, at the heart of his efforts was a nationwide tour in which he distributed social aid—cash and food—to the poor. To be able to do so, he had maintained the level of social assistance funding from the COVID-19 era, although the pandemic was long over. Indeed, some funding was cut from other ministries to beef up the social aid budget. In distributing benefits, Jokowi's main targets were Ganjar's Central Java strongholds, where Prabowo was behind in opinion polls. Post-election surveys showed that a quarter of the electorate received such aid, and 69 per cent of them voted for Prabowo.⁶³ As a result, Prabowo won Central Java, humiliating Ganjar in his home province. Formally, of course, Jokowi's distribution spree during the campaign was not illegal. However, the context in which it occurred made it an example of systematic presidential vote-buying. Other practices were even more

dubious. *Tempo* magazine reported on widespread efforts by state officials, including police officers, to promote Prabowo's candidacy.⁶⁴ It was alleged that bureaucratic underlings were pressured by their bosses to deliver high results for Prabowo or face sanctions. A few days before the elections, a film titled "Dirty Vote" which documented these patterns was released online. People involved in making the film were reported to the police, and a member of Ganjar's campaign team, who had accused the security apparatus of bias, was also questioned. The commentary in the international media on Jokowi's systematic favouritism was devastating. Noting Jokowi's "inglorious exit", *The Economist* commented that the president had "arrived as a breath of fresh air in 2014" but now "leaves behind a rotten smell".⁶⁵

The magnitude and effectiveness of Jokowi's all-out election drive notwithstanding, there were some limits to it. For instance, Jokowi failed to lift the party of his second son, Kaesang Pangarep, over the four per cent threshold it needed to clear to win seats in national parliament. Kaesang had taken over the struggling Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) in September 2023, and Jokowi's image subsequently featured on almost all of its campaign posters. The president even met publicly with party leaders during the campaign. But legislative elections in Indonesia have their own dynamics: some voters form long-standing patronage relations with incumbents; others accept one-off bribes and vote accordingly; and others again cast their ballots based on their communal, religious or ideological roots. This pattern favours established parties and candidates, and makes nationwide engineering of results near-impossible. Thus, the 2024 parliamentary results did not look much different from 2019. Eight of the nine parties that previously sat in parliament returned to it; no newcomers made it; the PDI-P again came first; and Suharto's former electoral machine, Golkar, obtained the second-most seats, as it had in 2019. Prabowo's Gerindra party did not benefit greatly from its chairman's popularity and finished third. Partly, this was because Prabowo had told voters that he did not care which party they supported as long as they voted for him as president.⁶⁶ But given Jokowi's meddling in so many other areas, some commentators credited him (rather implausibly) with that outcome, too: the president, so the theory went, wanted to keep Gerindra small to limit Prabowo's leverage as president. Clearly, the elections cemented Jokowi's image as Indonesia's main political puppet-master, and he did not mind.

Conclusion and Outlook: Indonesia under Prabowo

The end result of the elections—Prabowo won with 58.6 per cent of the vote—was primarily Jokowi's victory. His informal endorsement made Prabowo the favourite, and his interventions in the campaign raised Prabowo from a candidate at just below 50 per cent of support in the opinion polls to a solid one-round triumph. Had Jokowi endorsed Ganjar and backed him in the same way, the PDI-P nominee would have become president. But what will Jokowi gain from his success?

There are few reasons to believe that Jokowi fully trusts the promises that Prabowo made to him. In fact, many of Jokowi's closest aides warned him that the pledges were purely strategic in nature. We also already noted Jokowi's awareness that picking Prabowo was far from an ideal option—it was simply, in his judgment, the best available to him. Therefore, we must assume that Jokowi has expectations *vis-à-vis* a Prabowo presidency that are not dependent on Prabowo's supposed long-term gratitude towards him. Jokowi, like many others, closely followed events in the Philippines in 2024: namely, the public disintegration of the alliance between President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. and his predecessor, Rodrigo Duterte, whose daughter Sara Duterte is vice president.⁶⁷ Following their victory, Marcos had isolated Sara from government business, but she became more popular than him and is now the frontrunner for the 2028 presidential elections. In Jokowi's mind, then, even the worst-case scenario—that is, Prabowo reneging on all of his promises and cutting Gibran off from power—still holds the promise of giving his son a shot at winning the presidency in 2029. Moreover, there is the statistical possibility that Prabowo, now 72 years old, will not be able to serve out his term, in which case Gibran would become president.

But these are a lot of hypotheticals for a president who invested his entire political capital into a victory for Prabowo and Gibran. It is equally possible that Jokowi will end up with very few returns from his investment. Without a party to exercise influence and lacking the presidential powers to control elites, Jokowi could become a much-diminished figure after Prabowo's inauguration in October 2024. There is little doubt, by contrast, that Jokowi paid a very high price for his election activism. Many of his liberal supporters, who had stayed with him throughout his time in office despite many disappointments, broke with him after his nomination

of the Prabowo-Gibran ticket. This included several of his aides, who subsequently took him to task with unprecedented candour.⁶⁸ In a similar vein, many university professors across the archipelago, appalled by what they viewed as Suharto-style interventions in the electoral process, took the unusual step of issuing a series of highly critical declarations against Jokowi. In short, Jokowi traded in whatever was left of his democratic credentials for some risky gambles on his own and his family's political future. In the arena of international opinion, the "rotten smell" emanating from his electoral interference is set to penetrate any accounts of Jokowi's presidency and broader political legacy. Should Prabowo push Indonesia further towards autocracy, Jokowi will be considered the man who made that possible. In many ways, therefore, Jokowi's victory was a Pyrrhic one: costly and without guaranteed spoils.

On the other hand, Prabowo's prospects are brighter. His political investments have already paid off. For four years, he soaked Jokowi in flattery and accepted being called a sycophant as a result. As a notoriously proud larger-than-life figure, this must have been hard for him. However, unlike Anies, he understood that he could not win the 2024 elections against a candidate endorsed by Jokowi. There was no mood for change in the electorate, and Jokowi's popularity was a tremendous force. In that situation, Prabowo decided to lobby Jokowi to become his heir. It worked. Since his electoral victory, Prabowo holds all the cards. The full powers of the presidency will pass to him in October, and he alone will decide whether he abides by all or parts of the agreements he made with Jokowi. He might do so if he feels it will not hurt him, but he could also decide otherwise. As such, Jokowi will be subject to Prabowo's whim. Therein also lies the uncertainty for Indonesia: Prabowo's attitude towards democracy once in power remains anybody's guess for now. Given the weaknesses of the democracy he will inherit from Jokowi, there are few incentives for Prabowo to fully overturn it. Jokowi has already demonstrated that Indonesia's current minimalist patronage democracy allows a president to establish dominance over the elites and become hugely popular at the same time. Hence, it is likely that Prabowo will refrain from a complete overhaul of the Indonesian polity and, instead, sustain low-quality democracy while continuing its slow-paced decline.⁶⁹ But again, he might also choose a different path: his successful strategizing in the 2024 elections gives him the power to do so.

The story of Indonesia's 2024 elections fits neatly with the narrative of democratic recession globally. In 2023, Freedom House recorded the 18th consecutive year of global decline in political rights and civil liberties.⁷⁰ However, the dominating pattern in this decline is no longer immediate democratic breakdown because of coups or other forms of sudden institutional collapse. Instead, democratic decline is now often incremental and so carefully crafted that the public does not see the need to rise up in defence of democracy.⁷¹ Through his interventions in Indonesia's electoral process, Jokowi pushed the limits of democratic norms—and occasionally overstepped them. Yet, the majority of Indonesians did not see this as a big problem. Most also did not think that Prabowo's past involvement in human rights abuses or his prior threats to dismantle democracy were issues of concern. Similarly, while Jokowi's "inglorious exit" and Prabowo's rise are likely to lead to Indonesia's further deterioration in international democracy indexes, none of them will downgrade the country to an autocracy because of the 2024 election events. Instead, Indonesia remains a key member of the growing cluster of formal electoral democracies whose political substance is hollowed out by consistent trends of autocratization and illiberalism.⁷² In this cluster, democracy survives as the nominal foundation of political competition, but increasingly struggles to uphold its substantive promises of rights and freedoms. For many in Indonesia, this is an acceptable outcome; for others, it is a disappointing deviation from the post-authoritarian journey the country started in 1998.

NOTES

- ¹ Zach Hope, "It Takes a Special Politician to Draw a Crowd of 100,000: This One Has a Chequered Past", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 February 2024, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/asia/it-takes-a-special-politician-to-draw-a-crowd-of-100-000-this-one-has-a-chequered-past-20240211-p5f3ym.html>. The author was also present in the stadium.
- ² Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 16 February 2024.
- ³ Author's notes in Jakarta, 13 April 2019.
- ⁴ Abba Gabrillin and Sandro Gatra, "Beragam Janji Politik Prabowo dalam Pidato Kampanye Akbar di GBK" [The Various Political Promises Prabowo Made in His Speech at the Great Campaign in the GBK Stadium], *Kompas*, 9 April 2014, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2019/04/08/09032101/beragam-janji-politik-prabowo-dalam-pidato-kampanye-akbar-di-gbk>.

- ⁵ For a more conceptual contextualization of the 2024 Indonesian elections within the democracy debate, see Dan Slater, “Indonesia’s High-Stake Takeover”, *Journal of Democracy* 35, no. 2 (2024): 40–51.
- ⁶ Marianne Kneuer, “Unravelling Democratic Erosion: Who Drives the Slow Death of Democracy, and How?” *Democratization* 28, no. 8 (2021): 1442–62.
- ⁷ Author’s interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 14 October 2023.
- ⁸ Michael Berlemann and Sören Enkelmann, “The Economic Determinants of U.S. Presidential Approval: A Survey”, *European Journal of Political Economy* 36 (2014): 41–54. In the Indonesian case, Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle have made this argument more broadly, as far as the correlation between inflation levels and citizen support for the incumbent regime is concerned. See Saiful Mujani and R. William Liddle, “Indonesia’s Democratic Performance: A Popular Assessment”, *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 2 (2015): 210–26.
- ⁹ Author’s interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 14 October 2023.
- ¹⁰ An additional element of his price control regime was the import of key food items, including rice. He was often personally involved in such rice import deals. For example, in September 2023, he negotiated the import of one million tons of rice from China. Author’s interview with Joko Widodo in Nusantara, 22 September 2023.
- ¹¹ Author’s interview with Joko Widodo in Samarinda, 22 September 2023.
- ¹² Indikator Politik Indonesia, “Split-Ticket Voting dan Tren Elektabilitas Bakal Capres dan Partai Politik Jelang Pemilu 2024: Temuan Survei Nasional, 15–21 Juli 2023” [Split-Ticket Voting and Electability Trends of Future Presidential Candidates and Parties Ahead of the 2024 Elections: Findings of a National Survey, 15–21 July 2023], Jakarta, 2023, p. 21, https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RILIS-INDIKATOR-18-AGUSTUS-2023_.pdf. The graph also drew from data collected by Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI) and Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC).
- ¹³ Indikator Politik Indonesia, “Split-Ticket Voting”, p. 21.
- ¹⁴ Indikator Politik Indonesia, “Dinamika Elektoral di Tingkat Nasional dan 13 Propinsi Kunci: Temuan Survei Nasional, 30 Desember 2023 – 6 Januari 2024” [Electoral Dynamics at the National Level and in 13 Key Provinces: Findings from a National Survey, 30 December – 6 January 2023], Jakarta, 2024, p. 10, <https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/RILIS-INDIKATOR-18-JANUARI-2024.pdf>.
- ¹⁵ Herdi Alif Al Hikam, “Luhut soal Jokowi Rajin Bagi-bagi Bansos: Ngapain Sih Ribut?” [Luhut About Jokowi Being Busy Distributing Social Aid: Why Is This Seen as a Problem?]” *Detik*, 11 February 2024, <https://www.detik.com/jateng/bisnis/d-7187624/luhut-soal-jokowi-rajin-bagi-bagi-bansos-ngapain-sih-ribut>.
- ¹⁶ Author’s interview with Luhut Pandjaitan in Denpasar, 15 September 2023.
- ¹⁷ Ross Tapsell, *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and the Digital Revolution* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).
- ¹⁸ Wataru Suzuki, “Legal Woes Mount for Indonesian Media Mogul”, *Nikkei Asia*, 7 July 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Legal-woes-mount-for-Indonesian-media-mogul>.

- ¹⁹ Ambaranie Nadia Kemala Movanita, “Polri: Hary Tanoe Sudah Tersangka” [Police: Hary Tanoe Is Already a Suspect], *Kompas*, 23 June 2017, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2017/06/23/13473601/polri.hary.tanoe.sudah.tersangka>.
- ²⁰ For details, see Marcus Mietzner, “Coercing Loyalty: Coalitional Presidentialism and Party Politics in Jokowi’s Indonesia”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 2 (2016): 209–32.
- ²¹ Tim Detik, “Darurat Corona, Polri Patroli Khusus Pantau Hoax dan Penghinaan Presiden” [Corona Emergency: Police Conducts Special Patrol to Monitor Hoaxes and Insults to the President], *Detik*, 5 April 2020, <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4966256/darurat-corona-polri-patroli-khusus-pantau-hoax-dan-penghinaan-presiden>.
- ²² Achmad Nasrudin Yahya and Fabian Januarius Kuwado, “Survei IPI: 69.6 Persen Responden Setuju Publik Kian Takut Sampaikan Pendapat” [IPI Survey: 69.6 Per Cent of Respondents Agree That the Public Is Increasingly Afraid of Expressing Opinions], *Kompas*, 25 October 2020, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2020/10/25/16305891/survei-ipi-696-persen-responden-setuju-publik-kian-takut-sampaikan-pendapat>.
- ²³ Dirk Tomsa, “Regime Resilience and Presidential Politics in Indonesia”, *Contemporary Politics* 24, no. 3 (2018): 266–85.
- ²⁴ This section draws from Marcus Mietzner and Jun Honna, “Elite Opposition and Popular Rejection: The Failure of Presidential Term Limit Evasion in Widodo’s Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research* 31, no. 2 (2023): 115–31.
- ²⁵ Author’s confidential interview with a presidential aide, Jakarta, 18 September 2023.
- ²⁶ “Luhut Tolak Buka Big Data Tunda Pemilu, Pakar Sebut Tak Mungkin Ada” [Luhut Refuses to Disclose Big Data About the Election Delay, With Observers Saying It Doesn’t Exist], *CNN Indonesia*, 13 April 2022, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20220413094111-617-784158/luhut-tolak-buka-big-data-tunda-pemilu-pakar-sebut-tak-mungkin-ada>.
- ²⁷ Nicholas Ryan Aditya and Novianti Setuningsih, “Adian Napitupulu Ungkap Persoalan Jokowi dan PDI-P Bermula dari Ditolakny Permintaan Presiden 3 Periode” [Adian Napitupulu Reveals That the Problems between Jokowi and PDI-P Started with the Rejection of the President’s Request for a Third Term], *Kompas*, 25 October 2023, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2023/10/25/14150861/adian-napitupulu-ungkap-persoalan-jokowi-dan-pdi-p-bermula-dari-ditolaknya>.
- ²⁸ Ludger Helms, “Leadership Succession in Politics: The Democracy/Autocracy Divide Revisited”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 22, no. 2 (2020): 328–46.
- ²⁹ Author’s interview with Andi Widjajanto in Jakarta, 30 August 2023.
- ³⁰ Irfan Kamil and Dani Prabowo, “Elektabilitas Ganjar Pranowo Teratas, Unggul Signifikan dari Prabowo dan Anies” [Ganjar’s Electability Is on Top, Significantly Ahead of Prabowo and Anies], *Kompas*, 9 June 2022, <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2022/06/09/15093321/survei-smrc-elektabilitas-ganjar-pranowo-teratas-unggul-signifikan-dari>.
- ³¹ Author’s interview with Luhut Pandjaitan in Denpasar, 15 September 2023.
- ³² Author’s interview with Ganjar Pranowo in Semarang, 14 June 2022.

- ³³ Author's interview with Luhut Pandjaitan in Denpasar, 16 September 2023.
- ³⁴ Burhanuddin Muhtadi, "PDI-P's Own Goal? Controversy over Indonesia's Loss as U-20 FIFA World Cup Host", *Fulcrum*, 6 April 2023, <https://fulcrum.sg/pdi-ps-own-goal-controversy-over-indonesias-loss-as-u-20-fifa-world-cup-host/>.
- ³⁵ Author's interview with Ganjar aides in Sanur, 16 June 2023.
- ³⁶ Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 10 July 2023.
- ³⁷ Nikolaus Harbowo and Nina Susilo, "Presiden Jokowi: Ganjar Dekat dengan Rakyat dan Sangat Ideologis" [President Jokowi: Ganjar Is Close to the People and Very Ideological], *Kompas*, 21 April 2023, <https://www.kompas.id/baca/polhuk/2023/04/21/presiden-jokowi-ganjar-dekat-dengan-rakyat-dan-sangat-ideologis>.
- ³⁸ Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 14 October 2023.
- ³⁹ Author's interview with Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta, 14 September 2023.
- ⁴⁰ Dimas Ryandi, "Jokowi Ngaku Sering Tukar Pikiran dengan Prabowo Tentang Masa Depan" [Jokowi Often Discusses with Prabowo About the Future], *Jawa Pos*, 2 November 2022, <https://www.jawapos.com/nasional/01416833/jokowi-ngaku-sering-tukar-pikiran-dengan-prabowo-tentang-masa-depan>.
- ⁴¹ Cindy Mutia Annur, "Survei Indikator: Elektabilitas Anies Naik Pasca Deklarasi Capres Nasdem" [Indikator Survey: Anies' Electability Increases after Nasdem's Declaration of Its Presidential Candidate], *Databoks*, 2 December 2022, <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2022/12/02/survei-indikator-elektabilitas-anies-naik-pasca-deklarasi-capres-nasdem>.
- ⁴² Daniel Peterson, *Islam, Blasphemy, and Human Rights in Indonesia: The Trial of Ahok* (London, UK: Routledge, 2020).
- ⁴³ Author's confidential interview with a presidential aide in Jakarta, 14 February 2023.
- ⁴⁴ Author's interview with Ganjar Pranowo in Sanur, 17 June 2023.
- ⁴⁵ Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Jakarta, 10 July 2023.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Indikator Politik Indonesia, "Peta Elektoral di Akhir Masa Kampanye: Satu atau Dua Putaran? Temuan Survei Tatap Muka Nasional, 28 Januari – 4 Februari 2024" [The Electoral Map at the End of the Campaign: One or Two Rounds? Findings from a National Face-to-Face Survey, 28 January – 4 February 2024], Jakarta, p. 64, <https://indikator.co.id/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/RILIS-INDIKATOR-09-FEBRUARI-2024.pdf>.
- ⁴⁸ Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Bogor, 11 August 2023.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Tim Lindsey and Simon Butt, "A Twist in Indonesia's Presidential Election Does Not Bode Well for the Country's Fragile Democracy", *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 24 October 2023, <https://indonesiatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/a-twist-in-indonesias-presidential-election-does-not-bode-well-for-the-countrys-fragile-democracy/>.
- ⁵¹ Author's interview with Joko Widodo in Bogor, 11 August 2023; and author's interview with Ganjar Pranowo in Jakarta, 18 September 2023.
- ⁵² Indikator Politik Indonesia, "Peta Elektoral di Akhir Masa Kampanye", p. 41.

- ⁵³ Kate Lamb, Fanny Potkin, and Ananda Teresia, “Generative AI May Change Elections This Year: Indonesia Shows How”, Reuters, 8 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/technology/generative-ai-faces-major-test-indonesia-holds-largest-election-since-boom-2024-02-08/>.
- ⁵⁴ Author’s interview with Prabowo Subianto in Jakarta, 14 September 2023.
- ⁵⁵ Fakhridho Susilo and Jaysa Rafi Prana, “No Such Thing as a Free Lunch: Counting the Cost of Prabowo’s ‘Free Food’ Program”, *Indonesia at Melbourne*, 27 February 2024, <https://indonesiatmelbourne.unimelb.edu.au/no-such-thing-as-a-free-lunch-counting-the-cost-of-prabowos-free-food-program/>.
- ⁵⁶ Indikator Politik Indonesia, “Peta Elektoral di Akhir Masa Kampanye”, p. 68.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.
- ⁵⁸ Anies ran with Muhaimin Iskandar, the chair of the National Awakening Party (PKB), as his vice-presidential candidate, while Ganjar was paired with Mahfud MD, a senior Jokowi minister and former head of the Constitutional Court.
- ⁵⁹ “Manuver Jokowi Memenangkan Prabowo-Gibran Satu Putaran” [Jokowi’s Operation to Secure Victory for Prabowo and Gibran in One Round], *Tempo*, 14 January 2024, <https://majalah.tempo.co/edisi/2688/2024-01-14>. *Tempo* magazine offered the most detailed and substantiated reporting on the machinations behind the campaign. Its online podcast, *Bocor Alus* (Gentle Leak), was wildly popular in the elite and educated citizenry.
- ⁶⁰ Eve Warburton and Sana Jaffrey, “Explaining the Prabowo Landslide”, *New Mandala*, 17 February 2024, <https://www.newmandala.org/explaining-the-prabowo-landslide/>; Thomas B. Pepinsky, “Why Indonesian Democracy Is in Danger”, *Journal of Democracy Online*, February 2024, <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/online-exclusive/why-indonesias-democracy-is-in-danger/>; John Sidel, “Line of Succession”, *New Left Review*, 22 February 2024, <https://newleftreview.org/sidecar/posts/line-of-succession>.
- ⁶¹ Author’s interview with Anies Baswedan in Canberra, 6 March 2023.
- ⁶² Ria Rizki Nirmala Sari, “Survei LSI: 76 Persen Warga Tak Tahu Ketua MK Anwar Usman Adalah Adik Ipar Jokowi” [LSI Survey: 76 Per Cent of Citizens Do Not Know That the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court Anwar Usman Is Jokowi’s Brother-in-Law], *Suara*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.suara.com/kotaksuara/2023/10/27/173417/survei-lsi-76-persen-warga-tak-tahu-ketua-mk-anwar-usman-adalah-adik-ipar-jokowi>.
- ⁶³ Tommy Simatupang, “Survei LSI: 69 Persen Penerima Bansos Coblos Prabowo, 17 Persen Pilih AMIN, 13 Persen Coblos Ganjar” [LSI Survey: 69 Per Cent of Social Assistance Recipients Voted for Prabowo, 17 Per Cent Voted for Anies, 13 Per Cent Voted for Ganjar], *Tribun News*, 26 February 2024, <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2024/02/26/survei-lsi-69-persen-penerima-bansos-coblos-prabowo-17-persen-pilih-amin-13-persen-coblos-ganjar>. Two other polls—one by Indikator and the other by the daily *Kompas*—conducted on this issue presented different figures but overall produced the same conclusion. While they found that social assistance programmes did not increase Prabowo’s electability, they further boosted Jokowi’s popularity, which, in turn, correlated positively with support for Prabowo. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer who pointed this out.
- ⁶⁴ “Cara Lembaga Negara Mendukung dan Menghimpun Suara untuk Prabowo-Gibran” [The Way State Institutions Support and Collect Votes for Prabowo-Gibran]

- and Gibran], *Tempo*, 11 February 2024, <https://majalah.tempo.co/read/laporan-utama/170893/lembaga-negara-untuk-prabowo-gibran>.
- ⁶⁵ “What Jokowi’s Inglorious Exit Means for Indonesia”, *The Economist*, 8 February 2014, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/02/08/what-jokowis-inglorious-exit-means-for-indonesia>.
- ⁶⁶ Mohammad Arief Hidayat, “Prabowo: Kalian Bebas Pilih Parpol Manapun, Tapi Presiden Pilih yang Tengah” [Prabowo: You Are Free to Vote for Any Party, But You Must Vote for the President in the Centre], *Viva*, 13 January 2024, <https://www.viva.co.id/berita/politik/1677206-prabowo-di-depan-warga-medan-kalian-bebas-pilih-parpol-manapun-tapi-presiden-pilih-yang-tengah>.
- ⁶⁷ Karen Lema, “‘Open Warfare’: Philippines’ Marcos-Duterte Alliance Crumbles”, Reuters, 2 February 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/open-warfare-philippines-marcos-duterte-alliance-crumbles-2024-02-02/>.
- ⁶⁸ “Andi Widjanto: Kenapa Jokowi Nyeberang?” [Andi Widjanto: Why Did Jokowi Cross to the Other Side?], *Kumparan*, 3 November 2023, <https://kumparan.com/kumparannews/andi-widjanto-kenapa-jokowi-nyeberang-21VPJLELlEL/full>.
- ⁶⁹ Eve Warburton and Edward Aspinall, “Explaining Indonesia’s Democratic Regression: Structure, Agency and Popular Opinion”, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41, no. 2 (2019): 255–85.
- ⁷⁰ Freedom House, “Election Manipulation and Armed Conflict Drove 18th Consecutive Year of Decline in Freedom”, *Freedom House*, 29 February 2024, <https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-election-manipulation-and-armed-conflict-drove-18th-consecutive-year-decline>.
- ⁷¹ Larry Diamond, “Facing Up to the Democratic Recession”, *Journal of Democracy* 26, no. 1 (2015): 141–55.
- ⁷² Lars Pelke and Aurel Croissant, “Conceptualizing and Measuring Autocratization Episodes”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 27, no 2 (2021): 434–48.