

REVIEW OF POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

2013: A Prelude to the Political Year of 2014*Philips J. Vermonte***Introduction**

The year 2013 has been seen as a prelude to the so-called political year of 2014. One of the weirdest political scenes in 2013 was when political parties had to advertise in the media in order to find people to be listed as their candidates for the parliamentary election. Moreover, the parties had to rush in recruiting the candidates to meet deadlines for names submission set out by the Indonesian Election Commission (KPU).

This can be understood as a symptom of how dysfunctional our political parties are. Party recruitment and training program are indicators of whether or not a political party is well-functioning. A political party has to be ready with its recruitment process immediately after an election is done. It has to start all internal political process right away. By doing so, those who lost in the election will be able to quickly regroup while the winner consolidates. But what we saw in such an advertisement in the media simply reinforces the image widely held by the public that politicians and/or political parties are just regular job seekers. Politicians are no longer thought of as noble individuals. Politics then become an arena which good people do not intend to enter.

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Not surprisingly, until last year, anti-politics sentiment was pretty high. CSIS' survey in June last year (2012) revealed that more than 50 percent of the respondents thought that political parties had performed badly and/or very badly. The evaluation from the electorates about the parties' performance serves as an indicator that our political parties are so weakly institutionalized. Political parties rely more on their head figures than on their political machinery. This author believes that political parties' inability to carry out a regularized recruitment mechanism is one of the root causes of all political problems that Indonesia faces today.

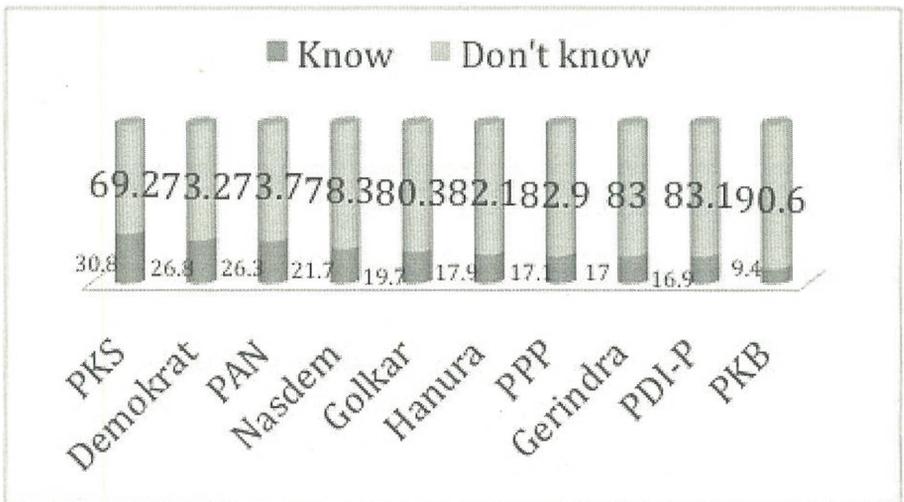
Political parties are then organized along the line of pragmatism, not on ideological principles. As a result, the electorate could not differentiate one party from another, resulting in a prolonged anti-party sentiment. For sure a certain degree of pragmatism is needed in politics. But the irony is this: pragmatism that becomes the new norm in party politics should bring good public policies, while in fact it is not. Corruption remains rampant to the level no longer acceptable to the public. Various public opinion surveys have revealed that political parties and the parliament are considered among the most corrupt institutions in the country.

Two basic functions of the lawmakers

There are two basic functions that have to be fulfilled by political parties through their representatives, i.e. the members of parliament, in the DPR: legislation and representation functions. These two functions can be set as benchmark to evaluate the performance of our members of parliament (MPs) in 2013. On the legislation side, in 2013, DPR was only able to pass seven laws -- very far from the 70 that they originally planned in the National Legislation Program (*Prolegnas*) for 2013. It repeats the low legislative performance that had been recorded in the past three years. In 2010, the DPR could only pass eight laws. Meanwhile in 2011 only 18, out of 93 that they planned, were passed. Last year, the DPR could only produce 10 out of 64 planned. It raises a pertinent question about the law-making capacity of our MPs, which this author believes goes back to the weak recruitment and training mechanism within each political party.

On the representation side, our MPs certainly also fall short, at least in the eyes of the electorate. CSIS' most recent survey, which was publicly released in November this year, shows a worrying number, which is that 81 percent of the constituent do not know the MP(s) from their electorate district (dapil). The survey also reveals an interesting fact that PKS' voters are relatively the most 'knowledgeable' about the MPs from their electoral district compared to the other political parties' voters. The number of PKS voters who know their MPs (regardless of the parties to which those MPs belong to) are higher than the other political parties: 30.8 percent of the PKS voters now the MPs from their electoral district, followed by the Democrat Party voters (26.8 percent) and PAN (26.3 percent).

Figure 1: Party Voters Who Know Their Representative

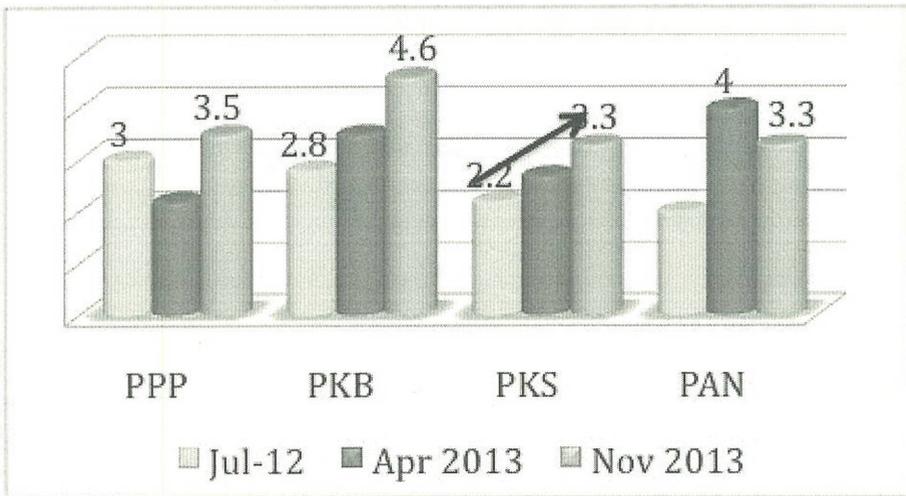


These numbers are higher than those of the old parties, such as PDI-P, Golkar and PPP. It is politically interesting because PKS, the Democrat and PAN are the new parties, formed after the fall of Suharto. Whether we are witnessing the new generation of voters who are more sophisticated and rational remains to be seen. At the very least, we start to see the fruit of our persistent efforts to reform our political party system.

One interesting development in the past three months is that there has been a slight indication that some Islamic parties seem to

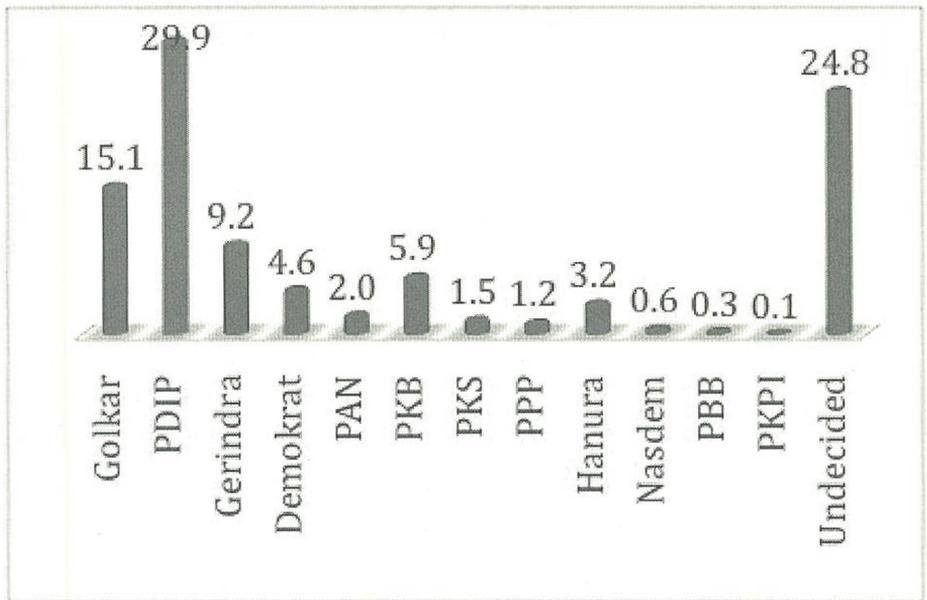
gain support (see below Figure 1 that compares CSIS' three surveys – July 2012, May 2013 and November 2013). Especially, PKB and PKS. Unlike the other political parties, these two Islamic parties have yet to find “political stars” who can pull up supports from the electorates. Whether the increased support for the two Islamic parties is a result of some electoral works at the grass root level remains to be seen.

Figure 2: Support for the Islamic Parties



Nevertheless, we continue to see the so-called coattail effect in the way our voters reveal their preference. That is, strong and popular individuals become the main vote getters for the party, not the systemic and organic electoral works by the party members. Approaching the 2014 election, the “Jokowi effect” becomes more discernible. The CSIS November 2013 survey finds that PDI-P is leading if the election is held today. PDI-P would get 17.6 percent, trailed by Golkar with 14.8 percent; followed by Gerindra 8.6 percent, and the Democrat by 7 percent (see Figure 3)

Figure 3: Votes for Party if Jokowi is on the ballot¹



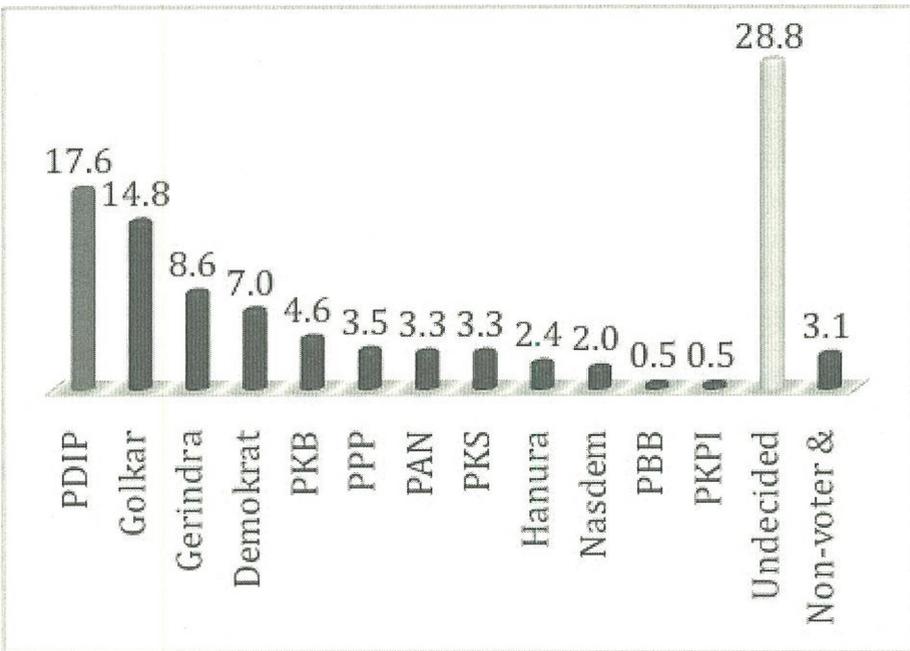
PDIP-P certainly hugely gains from the popularity of the Governor of Jakarta. If the name of Jokowi is on the ballot paper, according to the same CSIS survey, the number of votes that PDIP-P would garner almost doubled: 29.9 percent, dwarfing the number of votes that Golkar would win (15.1 percent), while Gerindra would get 9.2 percent and Demokrat 4.6 percent. Jokowi certainly generates more votes for PDIP should his name be on the ballot. Figure 4 shows “the original” votes garnered by all parties without mentioning any possible candidates.

This certainly creates a good prospect for another political “experimentation” by PDIP-P. If PDIP-P won 29.9 percent, the prospect for a minimum-winning coalition is clear. It surpasses the minimum 25 percent of the vote requirement to self-nominate a presidential candidate. PDIP-P does not need to form a coalition to nominate a presidential and vice presidential candidates. Consequently, should it win the election, PDIP-P can actually form a governing cabinet without

¹ The question asked was: “If Golkar nominates Aburizal Bakrie, PDIP-P Jokowi, Gerindra Prabowo Subianto and Demokrat Pramono Edhie Wibowo, which party will you vote for if the election is held today?”

having to accommodate the pressures from the other parties who want to access the power through cabinet seats.

Figure 4: Political Party Preference based on CSIS' November 2013 Survey²



President SBY succumbed to the pressure in 2009 despite the fact that he won by landslide in the presidential election. He opted for the “maximum-winning coalition” and included almost all of the political parties in his cabinet. Yet, we all witness how the “maximum-winning coalition” did not work and President SBY could not push through many of his policies.

PDI-P has taught us one important lesson in politics, which is: being an opposition party is good and your political power will not be diminished. PDI-P is now enjoying the fruits of their brave decision to be an opposition party for two electoral cycles, from 2004 to 2014.

² The generic question asked was: “Which political party are you going to vote if the election is held today?”

The year 2013 is probably the high time for PDI-P. It nearly won, and finally won, several important and strategic local elections. In the West Java province, their pair of candidate, Rieke Dyah Pitaloka and Teten Masduki, came second in the tally, with a small margin, against a strong incumbent. The same thing occurred again not long from the West Java governor election. In the governor election of the North Sumatera province, PDI-P's candidate also came second. The same was true in the Bali governor election. Finally, PDI won the governor election of the Central Java province. These are important provinces in the context of our national election. They are densely populated and have a large number of seats available for grab in the upcoming parliamentary election in 2014. The experiences in those four provinces tell us that PDI-P party machine is working and relatively more organized than the other political parties.

The 2014 Presidential Election

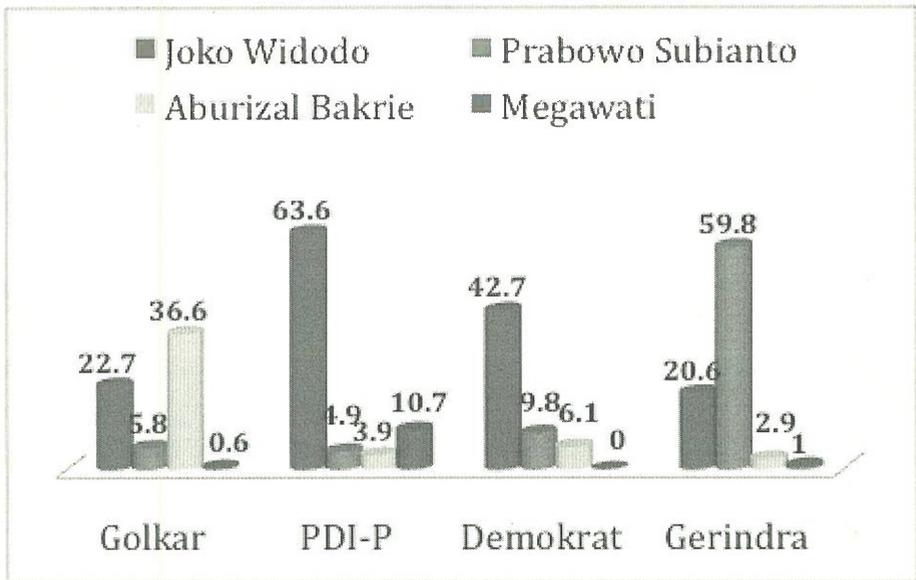
It is likely that PDI-P can once again teach the country another political lesson by forming a minimum-winning coalition should Jokowi be elected president. That is let the winner of an election governs and implement their preferred policies. Then, what we need is not a sore loser of election, but a good loser(s) who can then fill the role of opposition that have been consequently played out by PDI-P in the last ten years. Unfortunately, the fate of Jokowi's possible presidential nomination lies within the hands of a small number of elite circle within PDI-P.

The latest data from CSIS' twice-a-year survey that was published in November 2013 suggests that there are strong currents flowing in support of the Jakarta governor. CSIS' November survey revealed, that, in comparison to its May 2013 survey, support for Jokowi, as he is called, had increased by six percent while most of other presidential aspirants seemed to loose support. Only Aburizal Bakrie of Golkar and Wiranto of the Hanura party were able to strengthen their base of support. The survey found that there is a two percent increase for Aburizal Bakrie and 3.8 percent for Wiranto from the May survey. Jokowi's strongest contender now is Prabowo Subianto, the formal military general, whose support for him started to crumble after Jokowi's election as Jakarta governor last year.

Jokowi has been able to garner support across the board. His support base is gradually widening. The CSIS November survey found that his source of support was mainly from PDI-P supporters. About 64 percent of the respondents who said that they would vote for PDI-P in 2014 said that they would vote for Jokowi. Meanwhile, 42.7 percent of the Demokrat party voters said that they would vote for the governor. As for Golkar and Gerindra, the numbers of their supporters who switched to Jokowi were 23 and 21 percent respectively.

We can see in Figure 5 an almost unstoppable support from voters from different political parties towards Jokowi. His support base from PDI-P voters in the previous survey was 52 percent, while among the Gerindra voters the support for Jokowi significantly increased from 13 percent to 21 percent, which implies that some of Prabowo’s voters switched to Jokowi, abandoning the former Special Forces general. In sum, we see a widening gap between Jokowi and other presidential candidates the closer we come to the 2014 election.

Figure 5: Big Party Voters’ Preference for Presidential Election



PDI-P as a Democratic Test

Nonetheless, it is obvious that there is a significant difference between the top contenders of the upcoming presidential election,

which is about the "ownership" of the parties. Prabowo and Wiranto, for example, are the founders and hence the owners of their respective parties. They are the oligarchs of the political parties. Jokowi, on the other hand, is not, as he is just a "regular" member of the PDI-P.

With such a high level of public support for Jokowi, we can safely say that Jokowi enjoys support from different walks of life, from both the elite and non-elite members of the Indonesian electorate. In terms of democratic consolidation, this phenomenon gives us a little sign that political parties' oligarchic practices probably now is ceasing to exist. Indonesia has started the democratization processes and various reform initiatives have taken place since 1999. The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) have more or less returned to their barracks as the political reform dismantles their social and political dual functions. Indonesia's press is one of the freest in the world, something unimaginable during the New Order era.

Reform has also brought in a number of new business players, previously tightly controlled by a small number of elites, i.e. conglomerates. This is not to say that the country's economy is no longer controlled by certain powerful conglomerates, but at the very least the barrier to entry is not as high as before.

Yet, one important area that has not been touched upon is the heart where all the political processes start out: the way our political parties operate remains the same. The parties have not been internally democratized. Decision-making processes within parties continue to be controlled by a small group of powerful men and women, the party oligarchs. The power to nominate candidates lies within this small circle.

The PDI-P is our democratic test as Jokowi changes all political equations. In fact, the PDI-P has taught the country one important lesson in electoral politics. It demonstrated that being outside the power for two electoral cycles - they lost in the 2004 and 2009 elections - does not mean that the party should stagnate. On the contrary, the PDI-P has shown that being an opposition party is the new norm and that it can regain later. That is what electoral politics is all about: if one loses an election, re-group and re-focus and do the political homework.

What the PDI-P is enjoying right now is the fruit of the party's strong determination to be an opposition party for the past ten years.

Today, the party prides itself in its young and bright cadres who hold various important public positions. To name a few: Jokowi as the governor of Jakarta, Ganjar Pranowo in the Central Java Province, and Tri Rismarini, the phenomenal mayor of Surabaya City in East Java province.

This can be interpreted as a result of PDI-P's national leadership's bold decision not to join the "maximum-winning-coalition" formed by President SBY. As a result, the PDI-P and Jokowi are now able to position itself as an alternative to the incumbent party and the member of the party coalition.

Ironically, Jokowi, regardless of the huge support from the people outside PDI-P's elites, may not be on the ballot if the party elites decide not to nominate him and choose someone else. In this case, Jokowi is a case study of whether or not the voice of the elite really coincides with the voice of the people as a true democracy should. If not, then what we will have is a disconnection between the elites and the people and the party oligarchs, not only inside PDI-P but also within other parties. The PDI-P has the chance to teach the country yet another lesson.

Outside the PDI-P, another sign that the domination of the party oligarchs is crumbling can also be seen. The Democratic Party convention shows a democratic opening within the party. The convention allows some rooms for figures who are not part of the party elites. Critics attacked the motive behind the decision to hold such a convention. However, I am of the opinion that the point is not necessarily the motivation of the Democrat Party elites in deciding to have such a convention. What's important is the precedent it carries for Indonesian politics. That is, not long from now all parties must find some way to select and elect their presidential candidates in open processes.

Therefore, this "crack" within the "oligarchic wall" must be pushed further for the next generation of politicians to shatter that wall. The nation is waiting, the voters are watching. It is probably the biggest challenge for the future of our democracy. What has not been done in terms of political reform since 1998, ironically, is to internally democratize our political parties. The party oligarchs or the owners of the parties are tightly controlling our political parties. As such, our political parties, as a matter of fact, are not democratic platforms. Not only PDI-P, none of them are.

A quote from Hillary Clinton is relevant here. In her famous concession speech in 2008 as she lost the Democrat primary to Barack Obama, Clinton eloquently explained her heroic electoral fights in the male-dominated political processes to her 18 million or so mostly female supporters: "Although we were not able to shatter that highest, hardest glass ceiling this time, thanks to you, it's got about 18 million cracks in it.... The path will be easier next time".

** This article is an edited compilation of two previously-published articles by the author: "Indonesia towards 2014: the End of Political Oligarchy?", Tempo Magazine, 23 December 2013; and "In Search of Democratic Platforms," The Jakarta Post, January 2014.*