

## Prabowo's game plan

Let's be clear about one thing: Joko Widodo (Jokowi) has won Indonesia's 9 July presidential election. If the formal vote counting and tabulation process concludes without massive fraud, he will be sworn in as the country's new president on 20 October of this year.

The reason we can be sure of this despite the absence of an official announcement by the Election Commission (KPU) is the availability of quick counts carried out by Indonesia's credible survey institutions. Quick counts occur when a survey institute places field workers in a sample of polling booths and, when the formal counting of the ballots at the polling booth is complete, those workers convey the results (usually by telephone) to a central collation centre. If the sample polling booths are properly selected and sufficiently great in number and the count is administered correctly, well-organised quick counts can predict the final outcome of the formal count within a very narrow margin of error.

On voting day, within hours of the polls closing, eight of these institutions released their results showing that Jokowi had won the election by a solid margin:

Critically, most of these organisations are widely respected for their integrity, professionalism, and technical skills in survey methodology—a reputation they earned by producing highly accurate quick counts since 2004, when direct local and presidential elections were introduced. Even RRI (Radio of the Indonesian Republic), the country’s state broadcaster—a relative newcomer to the business of quick counts—had drawn praise for its performance in the 2014 legislative elections; indeed, its quick count came closest to the actual result. The fact that all of Indonesia’s credible survey institutions coincided in finding a Jokowi victory, and by a broadly similar margin, means it is all but a statistical impossibility that Jokowi will not emerge victorious in a properly conducted formal KPU count.

On the basis of these quick counts, Jokowi yesterday claimed victory in the election (though he used typically casual language in doing so) and he called on his followers to closely monitor the formal counting of ballots in the next two weeks. However, at the same time, four organisations produced quick counts of their own that showed a Prabowo Subianto victory, albeit by narrower margins.

On the basis of this smaller number of quick counts, Prabowo Subianto has also claimed victory.

Consequently, Indonesia is now set for a period of significant political confusion, uncertainty, and even instability, in the weeks leading to the formal announcement of the results by the KPU on 22 July.

How can this confusion have arisen? We wish to be very clear that this is not a matter of a range of equally credible quick counts showing a wide range of potentially legitimate results. Rather, the confusion is part of Prabowo Subianto's strategy to steal the election, a strategy that evidently has been long in the making. Reportedly, one of Prabowo's chief campaign strategists, Rob Allyn, has been known not only for his [expertise in negative campaigning](#) but also for producing surveys which create the impression [that an electorally weak candidate is competitive](#), and using the subsequent confusion among the electorate to manoeuvre this candidate into a more favourable position. Allyn has been known for this strategy in Mexican elections. It seems Indonesia is fertile ground for the same method.

### **Step 1. Muddy the statistical waters.**

Over the last decade or so, as well as an array of highly professional survey institutes, it is widely recognized that many organisations have arisen that are willing to tailor their survey results to favour their clients, and even to falsify surveys altogether. They typically do so when producing voter surveys, in the belief that some Indonesian voters are more likely to back a winner and that falsely high survey result will thus boost a sponsor's chance of being elected.

Though we have no direct evidence that the organisations producing the quick counts favouring Prabowo were paid to falsify their results, their track records give us every reason to be highly suspicious—indeed to be certain—that manipulation of some sort has taken place. For example, one of the organisations mentioned above, LSN (Lembaga Survei Nasional; National Survey Institute) has a consistent record of producing survey findings that show results for Prabowo and his Gerindra party that are much higher than the findings of established pollsters. As early as 2009, LSN predicted in the parliamentary elections then that Gerindra would get 15.6 percent of the votes—it eventually ended up with 4.5 percent. In the 2014 parliamentary elections, LSN issued a very early quick count even before polls had closed—stating that Gerindra would come first with 26.1 percent, obviously hoping that last-minute voters would bandwagon. At the end, Gerindra finished third with 11.8 percent. Two days before the presidential elections, LSN issued a poll that showed Prabowo leading by 9 percentage points—although other, credible pollsters had Jokowi leading by between 2 to 4 percent.

Puskaptis, another pollster whose quick count saw Prabowo ahead on the evening of 9 July, has a similarly questionable history. In 2013, the head of Puskaptis, Husin Yazid, had to be rescued from an angry crowd protesting against his manipulation of a quick count in the gubernatorial elections in South Sumatra. JSI (Jaringan Suara Indonesia; Indonesia Vote Network), for its part, has almost no track record, except for falsely predicting Governor Fauzi Bowo's victory against Jokowi in Jakarta in 2012, and for claiming in the same year that 64 percent of Indonesians thought that

Prabowo was the most suitable candidate for the Indonesian presidency. Finally, IRC (Indonesian Research Center) is reportedly owned by Hary Tanoesoedibjo, a media tycoon aligned with Prabowo. In June 2014, IRC predicted that Prabowo would win the presidency against Jokowi with 48 to 43 percent—using a thus far unheard-of methodology: it combined the polling numbers of all presidential candidates into an index and redistributed them based on whether they now supported Prabowo or Jokowi. It is hard to think of a less professional approach to opinion polling.

It is unsurprising, then, that these organisations came to the quick count results that they published on 9 July. And it is equally telling that all these organisations released their findings on tvOne—the television channel owned by Prabowo ally Aburizal Bakrie which has produced blatantly pro-Prabowo coverage throughout the election. In the lead-up to the presidential elections, tvOne had signed an exclusive contract with Poltracking, a new but relatively reputable institution. On the morning of voting day, however, Poltracking was told by tvOne that other institutions would join the quick count coverage of the pro-Prabowo station. Knowing about the questionable reputation of these institutions, Poltracking resigned from the contract with tvOne at 10am on 9 July. It later announced a quick count result that, like other credible survey institutions, saw Jokowi as the winner. The others, as explained above, followed tvOne's very obvious preference and published the quick counts that falsely declared Prabowo to have won.

## **Step 2. Steal the results.**

Why produce fake quick results? Votes have already been cast, so the intention cannot be to influence voter behavior. The purpose is clear: to buy time and sow public confusion about the election result, while preparing other methods to produce a victory in the formal count.

There are two ways through which Prabowo could potentially win at this stage. The first would be to wait for the formal announcement of the result and then challenge it in the Constitutional Court. The margin of Jokowi's victory, however, means that even if the Prabowo camp can find examples of maladministration in the count here and there—it will almost certainly be able to do this because Indonesian elections are far from flawless in their execution—it will not be able to overturn the result through a formal challenge. Jokowi's current advantage is an estimated 6.5 million votes; thus, Prabowo would have to swing around 3.3 million votes to draw even with Jokowi or gain a slight lead. No Constitutional Court decision, whether on cases at the local or national level, has ever shifted this amount of votes from one candidate to another. In rare cases, the Court agreed to move a few hundred or few thousand votes—but nothing of this magnitude. Similarly, the Court has ordered re-votes in some cases, but mostly in individual voting stations or districts.

This leaves one other option: manipulation of the formal counting and vote tabulation process. We know from other Indonesian elections—most recently the April legislative election—that vote 'trading' in the counting process is widespread. Candidates can and do bribe election officials at every level—from the individual polling booths up through the various levels of village, subdistrict, district and then provincial level commissions that collate the results—to shift votes from one party

or candidate to another, to enter votes ‘on behalf’ of voters that did not turn up at the booth, or engage in other forms of manipulation. In the April legislative elections, fraud was massive but likely had little effect on the overall share of the votes attained by different parties because candidates from all parties engaged in such practices in highly fragmented and uncoordinated patterns.

It will be unprecedented in Indonesia’s democratic experience for a candidate to try to steal the presidential result. But it is highly likely that Prabowo’s camp will make the attempt. Particularly vulnerable are areas (such as the island of Madura) where Prabowo supporters dominate local power structures and where Jokowi or his PDI-P had few scrutineers at the polling booths to record the results as they were counted (exit polls on voting day showed that Prabowo had observers at 88 percent of all voting stations, against Jokowi’s 83 percent). It’s also especially likely that such manipulation will occur in areas where governors are district heads are Prabowo supporters, and where they will be able to exert pressure on local officials to intervene in the count.

### **Where to now?**

During the election campaign, Prabowo Subianto posed as a democrat. In fact, he protested regularly against being portrayed as a “dictator”—even in his last Facebook message to supporters before the election, he complained about the non-democratic image given to him by unspecified forces. Now, however, he delivers the final piece of evidence that he truly is a would-be autocrat who has no respect for the will of the people and would stop at nothing to win power, even if he has to lie and cheat his way to the presidency.

We think that it is likely that Prabowo will fail in his efforts. The scale of Jokowi’s victory is such that too many votes would need to be shifted to Prabowo’s side of the ledger in order to steal the result. However, we cannot be fully confident about this prediction: what we know about Prabowo’s ruthlessness, past experiences of widespread fraud in vote counting, the weakness of the PDI-P’s monitoring apparatus, the strength of the Prabowo’s political networks in the regions, and the vast material resources they have at their disposal all suggest that the Prabowo camp will be able to make a concerted effort to overturn the result. Doing so, however, will not be easy. The scale of the manipulation required means it will be relatively easy to detect, and it will invite massive resistance from Jokowi’s supporters. A major escalation of political conflict is possible.

Indonesian democracy is not out of danger. In a series of previous posts ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)) we have warned that Indonesia’s post-Suharto democratic system would be endangered should Prabowo be elected president. He now looks prepared to destroy it in order to gain the post.

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