

Is a new political legacy emerging in Indonesia after the win of Jokowi-backed General Prabowo Subianto?

AUTHOR : [GURJIT SINGH](#)

Expert Speak: [Raisina Debates](#)

Published on Mar 12, 2024

It is highly probable that the newly elected President of Indonesia will maintain former President Jokowi's legacy



The seminal election in Indonesia on 14 February 2024 has brought in a new [President General Prabowo Subianto](#), currently the defence minister. He won enough votes to cross the 50 percent threshold despite having two rivals. This concluded the election as now no runoff election is required. Such an election is mandated among the top two contenders if none obtain a 50 percent + mandate.

The generational shift in the Indonesian elections is best seen through the fact that two-term President Joko Widodo will be succeeded by his rival in earlier elections—Prabowo. [His running mate was the son of current president Jokowi](#). A more unique combination of political alignment could not have been anticipated. Will the new presidency bring changes to the way Indonesia is run or will the Jokowi legacy

dominate, particularly through the presence of Jokowi's son Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the Vice President?

The generational shift in the Indonesian elections is best seen through the fact that two-term President Joko Widodo will be succeeded by his rival in earlier elections—Prabowo.

Jokowi is evidently building his own legacy, if not his own dynasty. His son succeeded him in 2021 as the mayor of Solo as a candidate of *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle or PDIP). He is now catapulted into the vice presidency, for which he was underage. His brother Kaesang Pangarep, the youngest of Jokowi's two sons, was [named as the head](#) of the youthful Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) in September 2023, which did not score well in the Parliamentary election. President Jokowi himself is 62 years old and, therefore, has years of political influence available.

Jokowi was pulled out of the relative obscurity of Solo, where he was a successful small entrepreneur and then Mayor in 2012. At that time, the PDIP of Megawati Sukarnoputri and the Gerindra party of Gen. Prabowo Subianto joined hands to continue their arrangement, which saw them lose the election to the Democratic Party in 2009. As a result, Jokowi was positioned as the new governor of Jakarta with Gerindra bringing in Ahok from a remote island to be the deputy governor. Ahok became governor when, two years later in 2014, Jokowi won the presidency on behalf of the PDIP.

The PDIP believes that, over a decade, it is still the party under matriarch Megawati Sukarnoputri which calls the shots. They perhaps erred in their assessment by excluding Jokowi from decision making, and treating him as just a party member. Perhaps, this assumption was true in 2012, when Jokowi was selected as the governor or even in 2014 when he was the presidential nominee. After 10 years, Jokowi has his persona and acumen, which the PDIP could have marshalled for itself. His 80 percent popular support was palpable. Instead, PDIP sidelined Jokowi and brought in governor of Central Java, Ganjar Pranowo, as its candidate. But Jokowi did not have his heart in it. He kept a better bargain with Prabowo than Megawati had promised but never kept in the past.

As president, he maintained a neutrality. His coordinating minister and close associate, Gen Luhut Panjaitan, did not hesitate to say that while Jokowi was neutral, it was probable Prabowo was most likely to maintain Jokowi's legacy.

Clearly in the campaign, Jokowi's hand was behind Prabowo. As president, he maintained a neutrality. His coordinating minister and close associate, Gen Luhut Panjaitan, did not hesitate to say that while Jokowi was neutral, [it was probable Prabowo was most likely to maintain Jokowi's legacy](#). Thus, the Jokowi–Megawati cleavage split the uncommitted voter who had backed the PDIP. A generation of younger people seem to have deserted the party and moved towards [Prabowo's cuddly grandfather image](#). His robust social media activities seem to be far more effective than others.

There are other cleavages in the Indonesian polity too. The traditional Muslim groups have diminished influence. The Nahdlatul Ulama (95 million) and the Muhammadiyah (50 million members) often tried to work in unison behind the scenes. Their support and leadership were split.

In his second term, Jokowi had a Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) leader Ma'ruf Amin as his vice president, but he was rarely seen or heard. Several NU leaders are pro-Prabowo. Some of the junior levels support former education minister and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan. The radical Muslims outside Muhammadiyah and the NU in 2019 supported Prabowo up to a point; but this time, they went behind Anies, but then split ranks with many coming behind Prabowo in the later stages. This is despite Anies having the chairman of Indonesia's largest Islamic party as his running mate. Muhaimin Iskandar, leads the National Awakening Party (PKB), which has strong ties with Indonesia's biggest Islamic organisation, NU. This helped Anies, nudging him to second place with 25 percent of the vote while Prabowo had about 58 percent and Ganjar less than 20 percent.

Thus, with the PDIP support base, the traditional Muslim institutional support and the radical Muslims all split, Prabowo managed to carve out a larger constituency for himself. In this, there is also the Jokowi support from among the PDIP and regular Muslims supporters. Prabowo with Jokowi's charisma and popularity behind him was catapulted to a wide lead over the other candidates.

The radical Muslims outside Muhammadiyah and the NU in 2019 supported Prabowo up to a point; but this time, they went behind Anies, but then split ranks with many coming behind Prabowo in the later stages.

Prabowo was attacked for his alleged old links to human rights violations. He handled these with aplomb in the debates. [Fifty two percent of Indonesia's 204 million voters are below 40. They were too young to understand much](#) about the allegations. This youth factor is critical in Prabowo's victory.

Does this signal an end to the Sukarno dynasty? Megawati, the daughter of Indonesia's founding father, Sukarno, became president with some difficulty. She was [Vice president](#) from 1999 to 2001 and president between 2001 to 2004, but did not have a full term. Her subsequent effort in alliance with Prabowo did not succeed. She started to play the role of a political godmother, enlisting Jokowi for the presidency and many others for local governors and other positions. This is because of a stronghold on the party, which could win about 20 percent+ votes and consequent number of seats in parliament.

Her own children did not seem to have the charisma. Her daughter, Puan Maharani, was accommodated by Jokowi in the first term as a coordinating minister, which is a step higher than a minister. In the second term, she was the speaker of parliament. An amiable person, she has not been able to exhibit the political progress which Megawati had. Her son has also not made a political mark despite having been in Parliament.

What happens to the Sukarno legacy now? Megawati's party lost the Presidency badly but is still the major party in parliament and in the provinces. She absolved herself of having Jokowi as a possible inheritor of her legacy. Jokowi is now setting up his own legacy with two young sons in politics.

What we will now see is a new elite emerging out of the shadow of Megawati. This new elite will owe allegiance to Jokowi. Prabowo will bring in his own elite, which, for some time had been, excluded. In the last term, he was brought in by Jokowi as defence minister despite losing the election to him. He brought his Gerindra party into government. This role will now expand.

An amiable person, she has not been able to exhibit the political progress which Megawati had. Her son has also not made a political mark despite having been in Parliament.

Jokowi would like his legacy to be maintained. This would include infrastructure building in Indonesia, for which much support is obtained from China. [Prabowo is likely to try and maintain this but also add other partners so that China does not have a larger leverage over Indonesia.](#) Jokowi also sought a greater nationalistic approach to begin processing nickel and other minerals. These have a larger importance due to the growth of the electric mobility sector. China has invested heavily in nickel mines in Indonesia. [Jokowi wanted more processing to be done in Indonesia so that value addition takes place.](#) This will bring in investments in power plants, which are

a crucial element of nickel processing. Jokowi wants Indonesia to become part of the Electric Vehicle supply chains. Prabowo is likely to continue this effort.

Jokowi's pet project is the new capital in Kalimantan called [Nusantara](#). While this may not decongest Jakarta as ordained, but it could move government offices to a distant place. More than that, it will create a new city that may be more contemporary and sustainable. Even if Prabowo does not have the same strong views about Nusantara, he did not deny in a presidential debate that he owned large tracts of land near Nusantara, which could benefit from a rise in urbanisation.

And, finally, Jokowi would like his name and legacy to be known beyond the Sukarno-Megawati legacy. [Prabowo will help in pursuing this](#) particularly as Jokowi's son is his vice president and could possibly be a future president.

For this, their ruling Onward Indonesia Coalition will gather support. Already, Golkar and Gerindra the second and third largest parties in the new parliament are in it. The Democratic Party, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and other smaller parties will align. What happens to the PDIP and the parties that backed Anies will be interesting. [Jokowi has the capability of large coalition building. He had 471 MPs – or 82 per cent of the 575 lawmakers in his support.](#) But, for now, Prabowo will count on Jokowi's skills in his initial period as President.

Gurjit Singh has served as Indian ambassador to Germany, Indonesia, Ethiopia, ASEAN, and the African Union. He is the Chair of the CII Task Force on Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC).

<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/is-a-new-political-legacy-emerging-in-indonesia-after-the-win-of-jokowi-backed-general-prabowo-subianto>