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Intimidation Versus Inclusion: New Strategies in Indonesian Election Campaigning

Vera Altmeyer

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INTRODUCTION

This photo essay shows pictures from the 2012 gubernatorial campaigns in Jakarta, Indonesia.¹ It covers the two main pairs of candidates in the field: then-incumbent Governor Fauzi Bowo (Foke) and his running mate Nachrowi Ramli (Nara) versus challenger Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and his running mate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. The photos give an impression of the great contrasts between the candidates and their respective campaigning styles.

Fauzi Bowo and Nachrowi Ramli relied primarily on typical strongman tactics including money politics, voter intimidation, ethnic and religious discrimination, and the mobilization of various allied groups from their patronage network, but also staged media events and expensive advertising. The team carried out two main kinds of public campaign events: The first consisted of staged media events mostly held at their media center for journalists only; the second type took place outdoors and usually involved VIP pavilions, a stage, and microphones to bridge the distance between speakers and voters. A lineup including local leaders, strongmen, and party allies delivered long-winded speeches of support and even the occasional threat of consequences for voters, should the election result be unfavorable. In addition, there were also closed-door events for selected audiences and widespread ‘black campaigning’ (discriminatory, illegal, or otherwise morally dubious strategies such as defamation, falsehoods, and personal attacks). Despite both teams having been accused of black campaigning, the attacks by the Foke-Nara campaign were perceived as more obvious, widespread, and often particularly nasty. It was a major part of their campaign strategy, particularly in the second, more aggressive election round. Pamphlets attacking the moderate Muslim and Javanese Jokowi or the Christian and Chinese-Indonesian Basuki were frequently distributed. Hate sermons against both candidates were frequently heard in conservative mosques, and social media such as Twitter were also utilized for the smear campaigns. This black campaigning was aimed at polarizing between a predominantly Muslim electorate and the non-Muslim minorities of Jakarta as well as between the local ethnic group Betawi and other ethnic groups, in particular Chinese-Indonesians.

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1 An extended version of this photo essay can be viewed at <http://infocus.asiaportal.info/2013/06/07/how-to-win-elections-in-indonesia-2/>

While Indonesian election campaigns are typically complex and may involve a wide range of other strategies as well, the abovementioned should be recognized rather as standard features than exceptions – especially when a powerful and rich incumbent is seeking reelection. A typical example of such an incumbent, Fauzi Bowo was expected to win an easy first-round victory. Yet, against all expectations, the radically different campaign strategy of challenger Joko Widodo resulted in a surprising lead in the first round and an even more pronounced victory in the second (first round: Jokowi-Basuki 43 percent versus Fauzi-Nara 34 percent, second round: JB 54 percent versus FN 46 percent).

Jokowi and Basuki combined strategic face-to-face campaigning with a marketing technique aimed at capturing media attention. They campaigned on a good governance agenda aspiring to provide services for the population, opposing ethnic and religious discrimination, and promoting the inclusion of the electorate in politics. Most of their events were held in Jakarta slums. While their arrival was often anticipated with a mixture of curiosity and skepticism, they usually managed to quickly create an atmosphere of excitement and even euphoria. They successfully portrayed themselves as down-to-earth candidates and easily struck up conversations with local residents, inquiring about their problems, listening patiently, and explaining their political program.

The fact that Fauzi-Nara still won 46 percent in the second round suggests that traditional strongman tactics continue to work well. However, Jokowi's success with his campaign style has already turned out to be more than a one-time fluke. It has enabled his rise from small-town mayor to Governor of Jakarta to top presidential candidate this year. The "phenomenon Jokowi" – as it is called in Indonesia – has resulted in the imitation of parts of his campaign style all across Indonesia. The Indonesian term *merakyat* (to mingle with the common people) has become almost synonymous with him. Joko Widodo has topped nationwide polls for the upcoming presidential election on 9 July 2014 and has been officially nominated by former president and *Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan* (Indonesian Democratic Party – Struggle) leader Megawati Sukarnoputri.

His chances of winning are considered to be very high: With his approach of including rather than intimidating the electorate, Joko Widodo hits the nerve of a population tired of being treated as the passive subjects of the state – something which has changed little in the 15 years since Indonesian democratization.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vera Altmeyer is a PhD candidate at the Department of Society and Globalisation at Roskilde University and associated PhD candidate at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies in Copenhagen, both Denmark. Her main research interests lie in questions of societal power relations, the institutions shaping these relations, and the role of the state in this context. For her PhD, she investigates how recent changes of institutions and actors involved in election campaigning influence power structures in the political sphere of Indonesia and ultimately impact the democratization process of the country.

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Jokowi explains his program, including a health card and cheaper education. Instead of campaign shirts with party colors, he is wearing an informal checkered shirt, meant to represent the many different identity groups in Jakarta.



A few close campaign team members and party allies remain quietly at a distance. Only inconspicuous plain-clothes bodyguards stay close-by. There are no speeches by local leaders or party members.



Jokowi and Basuki occasionally stop to inquire about local problems. Here, a resident explains to Jokowi the flooding and sewage problems along the local canal.



Keeping physical and social distance from the population: Together with several VIPs, Nara (in the blue shirt on the right) sits in the back of the stage while waiting for his turn to speak. He is hardly visible to the audience, all dressed up in new campaign shirts.



Nara acknowledges the allies present and makes a few jokes, which occasionally lighten the otherwise tense mood. For the rest of his speech, the audience seems to be disinterested, skeptical, and uneasy.



Several men are wearing caps with the writing FBR (*Forum Betawi Rempug* or Betawi Brotherhood Forum) – a Jakarta organization with close ties to Fauzi-Nara, which is a powerful local actor that may be described as ethnic gang, local mafia, strongmen, and employer on the informal market. FBR presence at this event sends a clear and intimidating message.



This banner says, “The children of the police will vote for Foke-Nara”. Child (*anak*) here has a double meaning: It can refer to members of the police as well as to the client in a patron-client relationship. This is more than a mere statement of support – it can be read as a ‘friendly reminder’ for the local population to be on the ‘right’ side if they want to avoid trouble.



In stark contrast, the Jokowi-Basuki campaign creates a personal and lively atmosphere. People are laughing and joking as they follow the candidates through their neighborhood or pose for journalists' cameras with the 'rock 'n' roll' campaign gesture.



As an important result of these face-to-face events, the population feels genuinely respected and sometimes even honored because the candidates take time for personal discussions, as the Christian Basuki does here in a conversation with a pious Muslim man.



BOTH PAGES: After Nara's speech, the press is called over to take the key picture: central figures from allied groups – all men in the prime of life, several wearing expensive watches, seal rings, and sunglasses concealing their eyes. They also wear white caps and shirts with the "Task Force Against Money Politics" logo. Instead of posing with the campaign sign of one index finger (for ballot no. 1), they show a typical strongman gesture with their fist raised right into the cameras, conveying a picture open to interpretation.



To dispel accusations in this respect, the Fauzi-Nara campaign holds the event “Action Task Force Against Money Politics”. Again, a VIP pavilion is set up in the back. Speakers give their support from a small podium at a large distance from the audience; only selected press is allowed to come a little closer.



At the main Fauzi-Nara campaign event, first election round: Rhoma Irama, a famous singer and controversial Muslim preacher, just finished a performance with his band (a few weeks later, he sparked an outcry of protest when he preached in a Jakarta mosque that Muslims should not accept a non-Muslim leader like Basuki). After his performance, the usual range of prominent speakers followed, including high-ranking party officials such as Anas Urbaningrum (at the time still chairman of the Democratic Party, he later had to step down because of corruption allegations), Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono (son of the incumbent president), and Wiranto (military commander during Soeharto’s dictatorship).



The Jokowi-Basuki team tried not to make Basuki's Christian beliefs a topic of debate, but rather to portray Jokowi and Basuki as candidates for all religions and ethnicities in Jakarta. Jokowi also toured through the Jakarta Muslim communities and ate and talked with local Muslim leaders to portray himself in the media as a pious but moderate Muslim.



On the last day of campaigning, supporters of both teams assemble in central Jakarta. Suddenly, the Jokowi-Basuki campaign song starts playing and about 3,500 people start dancing and pull off their jackets and shirts, revealing the iconic checkered campaign shirt. This marks the peak of their campaign and sends a final key message to voters: Campaigning and politics can be done in a creative and positive way, and to make this work you should get involved and participate voluntarily. By contrast, Fauzi-Nara supporters distributed anti-Chinese flyers directed against Basuki at the same time and place.



The Jokowi-Basuki team managed to counter the aggressive negative campaigning by Foke-Nara, who tried to mobilize anti-Chinese sentiments and conservative Muslim ideas discriminating against other groups. Finally, Jokowi-Basuki even garnered around 48 percent of the Muslim vote and the vast majority of votes from all ethnic communities except for the local Betawi minority.



Fauzi Bowo on one of the last nights of second round campaigning: He speaks in front of rich Chinese-Indonesians at a distance of about 50 meters even to the first row, alone, on a huge and empty stage. Despite his aggressive anti-Chinese and anti-Christian mobilization, the upper class of the Chinese community was expected to dismiss this black campaigning as mere election rhetoric and not perceive it as a real threat. Five days later, 93 percent of Jakarta's Chinese-Indonesians voted against Fauzi Bowo a second time.

