

Indonesia's April 17 election: what you need to know

Sunday 21 April 2019, by [BIRSEL Robert](#), [Reuters](#), [SINGH Karishma](#) (Date first published: 18 April 2019).

Indonesian President Joko Widodo on Thursday declared victory in a presidential election to lead the world's third-largest democracy but his challenger also claimed he had won and complained of widespread cheating.

Unofficial results from private pollsters based on vote samples from Wednesday's election pointed to a comfortable win for Widodo, with about 55 percent of the popular vote, giving him a lead of almost 10 percentage points over his rival, former general Prabowo Subianto.

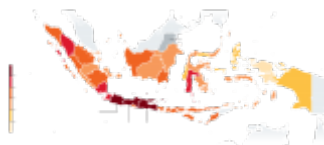
The counts from reputable pollsters have proved to be accurate in previous elections, though the official result will not be announced until May 22.

At a separate news conference just minutes after Widodo declared victory, Prabowo appeared defiant and said his team had evidence of cheating and claimed to have won 62 percent of the popular vote based on internal polling.

Election in Indonesia

Indonesians voted in the world's biggest single-day election on Wednesday across the sprawling equatorial archipelago following a six-month campaign to choose a new president and parliament. Voting began first in the far-flung eastern province of Papua, which is two hours ahead of Jakarta, the capital.

Voter population



Source: Center for Strategic and International Studies unofficial quick count based on sample of votes

By Chris Inton | REUTERS GRAPHICS

Widodo narrowly defeated Prabowo in the last election, in 2014.

The campaign has been dominated by economic issues, but also marked by the growing influence of conservative Islam, with politicians including Widodo taking pains to appear more Islamic. The worry for investors is that the appeal for conservative votes will translate into populist policy.

The election has been a huge logistical operation with 245,000 candidates vying for votes cast during a mere eight hours.

Voters had five paper ballots - for president, vice president, and national and regional legislative candidates - and some clearly struggled with the process.

Nearly 350,000 police and military personnel, in addition to 1.6 million paramilitary officers, fanned out across the archipelago of 17,000 islands to safeguard the vote.

More than 10,000 people also volunteered to crowd-source results posted at polling stations in a real-time bid to thwart attempts at fraud.

Polling stations opened at 7 a.m. (2200 GMT on Tuesday) in the east and closed at 1 p.m. (0600 GMT) in the west.

THE 'NEW FACE' IN POLITICS, WIDODO SEEKS A SECOND TERM

When Widodo was elected five years ago he offered a break from the military and political elite that had clung to power since the fall of strongman ruler Suharto in 1998.

Now, Widodo, 57, was running on his own record for a second term.

With his easy smile and signature "*blusukan*", or impromptu walkabouts, he came to power on a wave of support for the clean, can-do image he cultivated as a small-city mayor, and then as governor of the capital, Jakarta.

Still, during his political rise, Widodo, a moderate Muslim from the city of Solo in Java island, has had to fend off smear campaigns suggesting he was anti-Islam, a communist or in debt to China. On Sunday, he made a pilgrimage to Islam's holiest site, Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

As president, Widodo was saddled with expectations he could fix a host of problems, from human rights abuses to pervasive graft. Jokowi, as he is popularly known, also inherited an economy coming off a commodities boom, and faced an obstructive parliament.

He stitched together a majority in parliament and while unable to hit an economic growth target of 7 percent, led a push to build ports, roads and airports.

THE CHALLENGER - FORMER SPECIAL FORCES COMMANDER

Challenger Prabowo Subianto, 67, has long harbored ambitions for the top job and has cultivated a strongman image and ties with hardline Islamist groups in the hope of boosting his chances.

In the last election, in 2014, Prabowo, the head of the Great Indonesia Movement party, came within 6 percentage points of beating Widodo.

A former special forces commander, Prabowo comes from an elite political family. His father was one of Indonesia's most prominent economists, serving in the cabinets of both presidents Sukarno and Suharto. The latter was his father-in-law.

Prabowo has fired up his rallies with warnings the country is at the mercy of unspecified foreign powers and on the verge of fragmentation.

CLAWING BACK VOTER SUPPORT IN MUSLIM HEARTLAND

Since taking office, Widodo has made efforts to bring religious parties into his coalition, and to secure the backing of the conservative voters he failed to win over in 2014.

His decision to pick Islamic cleric Ma'ruf Amin, 76, as his running mate was part of a strategy to enhance his ticket's appeal among conservatives but it disappointed some of his moderate and progressive supporters, who say the president is pandering to conservatives and fear the erosion of Indonesia's reputation for religious tolerance and pluralism.

Widodo's aides say the mobilization of grassroots support and canvassing of thousands of Islamic schools in conservative provinces is crucial to prevent a repeat of 2014, when the opposition attacks cost him votes.



Reuters Graphic

DISGRUNTLED RURAL VOTERS WEIGH OPTIONS

Economic growth has hovered at about 5 percent over Widodo's first term, but there has been a drop in real income for its nearly 40 million farmers, who account for a third of the labor force.

Widodo has sought to tame inflation with a cap on prices of staples such as rice and shallots, and to import more food. He remains popular in many rural areas though some farmers are considering the opposition even though Widodo has led an infrastructure drive that has improved access to markets.

Prabowo has said some of Widodo's infrastructure projects have failed to help ordinary people.

SOCIAL MEDIA ELECTION BATTLE

This election has been fought out over social media as never before. So-called buzzer teams have proliferated, named for the buzz they aim to create, to spread propaganda on behalf of both Widodo and Prabowo, sometimes with fake accounts.

Under Indonesia's broad internet defamation law, creating and spreading fake news is illegal, but holding social media accounts in false names is not, unless a real person is being impersonated. Both campaign teams deny using buzzers or spreading fake news.

Misinformation is rampant on Facebook, which counts Indonesia as its third-largest market globally with an estimated 130 million accounts, as well as on its Instagram and WhatsApp affiliates and rival service Twitter.

The companies say they are working with the government and fighting false content.

BREAKDANCING, HOLOGRAMS TO WIN YOUTH VOTE

People aged 17 to 35 account for more than a third of the electorate. Both Widodo and Prabowo ramped up efforts to appeal to them, deploying everything from holograms, campaign messaging in comic strips, and breakdancing.

PUSHING THE ENVELOPE IN INDONESIA'S MONEY POLITICS

Indonesia has some of the worst money politics in Southeast Asia, according to researchers. Handouts of cash and gifts, anti-graft advocates and politicians say, lead to rampant corruption as successful candidates recoup election expenses, and more, once elected.

Envelopes, usually stuffed with cash ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 rupiah (\$1.42 to \$7.08), are commonly doled out to voters. Though small amounts, the overall cost can be huge over a six-month campaign.

The going rate for a serious run for one of 560 seats in the national legislature is about 10 billion rupiah, or \$708,000, according to the former deputy chief of the Corruption Eradication Commission.

PALM OIL CENTRAL TO ENERGY SELF-SUFFICIENCY PLEDGES

Both candidates have pledged to achieve energy self-sufficiency by boosting the use of bioenergy, particularly from palm oil. Indonesia opposes a European Union plan to curb the use of palm oil over deforestation concerns.



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