

***A USINDO 2014 Elections Open Forum Series***

**Political Outlook 2014: An Independent Perspective of  
Indonesia's Third Democratic Elections**



**Wimar Witoelar**  
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Political Observer, Writer, and Media Personality*

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***Mr. Wimar Witoelar, a former Presidential Spokesperson, political observer and writer, discussed the political outlook for the 2014 Indonesian elections and the role of civil society in Indonesia's future democratic development.***

***The talk was part of USINDO's 2014 Elections Series, which welcomes leaders from all Indonesian political parties, and experts, to present their views and take questions.***

### **Summary of Wimar Witoelar's Remarks**

Indonesian President Yudhoyono cannot seek re-election—he's already served two terms—so there are many new political faces this year. But even though the Indonesian electorate may not recognize all of them, the new candidates are not political novices. The presidential race remains anybody's game.

Mr. Witoelar said that Indonesia's current president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY), has proven to be the best head of state in terms of international and strategic issues. Indonesia's recent economic growth has occurred in large part, he said, because of SBY's government. Also, Mr. Witoelar added that SBY has worked on the REDD+ initiative. Now he is cooperating with the Norwegian government on other measures to prevent deforestation and climate change.

In recent years, though, Indonesians have become disappointed with SBY's government. During the previous election, only 43% of the electorate voted. But Indonesians are excited for the upcoming 2014 elections. They feel that the new candidates, many of whom are political outsiders, offer new and compelling visions for Indonesia's future.

The media will play a large role in the 2014 election. Even though coverage is biased—politicians own many of the country's media outlets—Indonesians have other ways to get news about their candidates. Social media, Mr. Witoelar noted, could be a game changer, allowing people to access differing opinions.

Not surprisingly, Indonesians want non-corrupt leaders. Unfortunately, Mr. Witoelar said clean politicians are rare in Indonesia. According to a BLSI poll, which asked respondents to name their ideal presidential nominee, no respondent mentioned a current candidate. However, when a fresh face emerges, the public flecks to him or her. For example, Joko Widodo—otherwise known as Jokowi—had little political experience before he ran against Fauzi Bowo to become Jakarta's governor. But that did not hurt Jokowi; rather, it helped him. Since he had a clean record and the people trusted him, they did not mind his lack of experience.

Jokowi, who ran as an independent, may be at the forefront of a new trend. Independent candidates, Mr. Witoelar reported, are increasingly popular. The public believes they can

actually implement meaningful reforms, unlike other establishment candidates whose political support relies on the status quo.

There is hope for the 2014 elections. If people get involved, they will be able to influence the parties' and presidential candidates' platforms. But if people remain on the sidelines, then they, not the system, are to blame for Indonesia's dysfunctional government.

## **Question and Answer Session**

### ***Q: Can you explain what REDD+ is?***

REDD+ stands for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation. The concept is simple: as the name suggests, to reduce emissions by preventing deforestation and degradation. When trees disappear from bio-diverse forests, carbon escapes into the atmosphere, thereby contributing to climate change.

To make REDD+ more effective, the agreement includes market incentives. If the Indonesian government reduces deforestation, it will get a monetary reward. Palm oil plantations are another concern. They destroy bio-diversity.

Therefore, the crucial question remains: does the Indonesian government implement REDD+'s policies, so it can get the future financial reward? Or does it continue to export palm oil, which provides an immediate source of revenue? It is a complex question, and I do not know the answer.

### ***Q: Illegal logging continues to destroy Indonesia's forests. How does the government keep track of the destruction? China still imports a lot of Indonesian lumber. How can all that be controlled?***

I think the illegal logging problem is disappearing. There are easier ways to make money. Particularly now, the accessible forests are depleted. You have to work much harder to get marketable timber. Second, palm oil plantations are much easier to run than logging operations. Also, in Sumatra, you can plant Acacia and feed the paper industry. Indonesia has the largest paper pulp mills in the world. Illegal loggers will switch to another source of income soon.

Only indigenous people have successfully protected and maintained pristine forests. However, they need our help. With more access to information—from forestry experts and scientists, for example—they can better protect Indonesia's forests. Without our help, though, their ability to protect forests is limited.

***Q: What about the rising sea level? Indonesia is made up of a lot of little islands. What is being done about the marshlands and industries on the coasts?***

The only fundamental solution is to mitigate climate change.

***Q: What are your thoughts on Jokowi in national elections?***

I do not think Jokowi would be considered if Indonesians already had a credible presidential candidate.

***Q: The Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), an opposition party, has done well in district- and provincial-level elections. In a national election, whose side will they be on and what's your prediction?***

Megawati needs to modify her political role. She should be a supervisor. Like many other Indonesians, I respect her. But as a candidate, she would be trounced.

***Q: Sri Mulyani has a very good reputation, but even your efforts in promoting her as a presidential candidate have run into some obstacles. What can she do to help her case?***

Sri Mulyani has a very good career. She just has too many choices. She's had offers to run as vice president numerous times. But she doesn't have any political blood in her. We need to support her.

***Q: Where has Yeni Wahid been in the The National Awakening Party (PKB)?***

Because of her authority and lineage, Yeni wants to start her own political party. She didn't want her former party, the PKB, to align itself with President SBY. Even though she used to advise him, when he promoted Muhaimin over her, she was marginalized. And as a result PKB party members followed Muhaimin. She tried working with Sri Mulyani's party, but eventually she decided to go her own way. During the Democrat Party's Congress, she was asked to join the party's board. Scandals had decimated the party's upper ranks. They wanted to recruit politicians who had honest reputations. She will not be the next Indonesian president, but she will promote Sri Mulyani.

***Q: Is it realistic to think that prominent women can be elected? Or will they receive pushback from the Muslim parties?***

I don't think Muslim political parties will oppose women. Indonesians would accept a female political leader. Indeed, Megawati already was president. The three components that can make a female candidate competitive are: *jujur, tegas, dan mampu* (honesty, fierceness, and competence). Sri Mulyani has proven to have all three.

***Q: In the US, it is increasingly hard to get good people to run for office. Does the same thing happen in Indonesia?***

In Indonesia, there's a similar situation. But once a good person runs and wins, I hope others will follow. For example, Kuntoro's REDD+ Task Force recruits only from the private sector, so they can get the best people. They don't recruit from the public sector. That's a worrying sign.

***Q: How will populism affect the economy and politics of Indonesia? In particular, with foreign companies? And what will the relationship be like between those companies and the Indonesian government in the future?***

Populism, if it discourages foreign investment, will obviously affect the economy. But current investors will not run away. They know the dangers are exaggerated. Also, we want good jobs. Indonesians know that nationalism will scare away foreign companies. However, if the government fails to provide social services, people will get angry. They will blame the government and the outside world.

***Q: What is your assessment of Golkar?***

We need Golkar. It's a secular and open party, and it's not controlled by one ethnic group or race. However, the party worships money. Its members buy support from the populace and from the media, so Golkar is not held accountable. Through Golkar's connections, party members try to make a lot of money to finance their debts. If Bakrie doesn't win the 2014 elections, he will lose his company.

Golkar's platform is good. But the party has no organizational culture, so in the future, Golkar will weaken. While the party appears strong—because of its PR companies and media outlets—they aren't. They always lose elections.

***Q: Regarding new election rules, especially those relating to party structures and parliamentary thresholds: How will they influence legislative elections and the Islamic parties in particular? Will Islamic parties become more fragmented?***

The new election rules limit the number of parties. Most Indonesians think that is a good thing. We don't want too many parties. Also, the new rules force parties to work together and to consolidate. Strong parties that don't compromise will suffer. Coercion doesn't work anymore.

***Q: There is a general perception that Indonesia is in a nationalistic mood and doing things that are in its sole national interest. Are those perceptions accurate?***

In Indonesia, you have a lot of chest thumpers, but you also have a lot of peaceful people. If the outside world perceives Indonesia like that, then I'm very sorry. We should work to paint a more accurate picture.

***Q: What do you see happening to the Islamic vote as a whole? Will the Islamic parties become less influential, more influential, or dissipate?***

An Islamic party, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), is probably going to weaken, but perhaps another secular party will become more religious. The United Development Party (PPP) is inactive. Its members just occupy seats. The National Awakening Party (PKB) is torn by internal strife, but it is not a true Islamic party anyway. It accepts Christian candidates. Even in 1955, when Masyumi was quite strong, Indonesia never became an Islamic political order. Some regions, such as Aceh, want one. But on a whole, we remain skeptical of politicians—regardless of their party.

***Q: Everybody in Indonesia, at least formally and certainly in political campaigns, is against corruption. Yet it persists. Why?***

Indonesians are against corruption, but not many of us do anything about it. One reason is that the Corruption Eradication Committee (KPK) has been effective. Now there's less corruption. But many people are still committing the crime. It is hard to douse fires when they are everywhere.