

The upcoming presidential election has highlighted two terms, namely electability and eligibility.

Electability is a statistical notion that refers to the likelihood of someone being elected as measured through opinion polling. On the other hand, eligibility is a legal-political notion, according to which someone has the possibility of becoming a candidate if he or she is nominated by a political party or a coalition of political parties.

At present the governor of Jakarta, Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, tops the ranking of electability as of November 2013, with up to 34.7 percent, leaving other potential candidates far behind. Second to Jokowi is Lt. Gen. (ret.) Prabowo Subianto who gets 10.7 percent, while Aburizal Bakrie has 9 percent, Gen. (ret.) Wiranto 4.6 percent and Megawati Soekarnoputri 3.3 percent (Tempo, Jan. 6-12, 2014).

Convincing as that may be, the rivals of Jokowi are still optimistic by arguing that despite his outstanding electability, Jokowi is so far not eligible because no party has nominated him as a presidential candidate. The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), to which Jokowi belongs, is still indecisive in nominating its candidate, while Megawati as chairperson sticks to her stance that the party’s presidential aspirant will be announced after the legislative election results are made public.

The question arises: Why after the legislative election? At this point one is faced with a political conundrum. Other political parties like the Golkar Party and the Great Indonesia Movement (Gerindra) Party introduced their presidential candidates fairly early, the People’s Conscience (Hanura) Party is even more advanced in naming both presidential and vice presidential candidates.

In this instance two different political objectives are aimed at. In the first case, there is ample time to introduce the presidential candidate and the would-be vice president to the largest possible segment of potential voters. People know who is whom and can make their judgment on the basis of this knowledge about who best suits their expectations for good and effective political leadership.

Second, as in the case of Jokowi, a political party tends to wait and see what will happen after the legislative election, this being done with two considerations. The party wants to see whether or not the votes it can gain in the legislative election are sufficient (20 percent) to entitle it to nominate a presidential candidate. At the same time, by virtue of postponing the candidacy, the supporters of Jokowi still keep the hope for Jokowi’s candidacy, and because of this hope might give their votes to the PDI-P.

We can observe an interesting interaction between the electability of a person and his or her eligibility, and the electability of a person and the electability of his or her political party.

In the case of Jokowi it is expected that his high electability will raise that of the PDI-P if he is made eligible. In the case of Prabowo his personal electability exceeds by far that of Gerindra, whereas it is still uncertain whether Prabowo's electability can boost that of his party. In the case of Aburizal, his personal electability is lower than that of Golkar. This has raised some concerns within Golkar, because it is still uncertain whether Golkar's electability can help increase that of Aburizal.

For other presidential candidates there is not the problem of eligibility, as it still is for Jokowi. What is of greater interest to a political observer is the fact that there is no direct correlation between the rate of electability of a candidate and his or her eligibility to become a presidential candidate, if the candidate is firm in his or her loyalty to the political party to which he or she belongs. If the candidate decides to risk running as an independent candidate without relying on a political party's support and if the independent candidacy is allowed by law, the problem of eligibility is resolved. However, this is not likely to be the case with Jokowi who is known for his loyalty to the PDI-P.

In that case he is faced with two possibilities. First, he might be allowed to become the running mate for whoever will be the presidential candidate from the PDI-P. Some surveys have shown clearly that as a vice presidential candidate, the vote for both Jokowi and the PDI-P would decrease considerably. People obviously understand that as vice president he would not be in the position to make political decisions in government.

Second, if the votes for the PDI-P do not reach the minimal 20 percent in the legislative election, the political party should build a coalition with other parties to jointly support the candidate from the PDI-P. If the presidential candidate is not Jokowi, it has been predicted on the basis of survey results that the vote for the candidate would not be high enough and the PDI-P would be required to make more concessions to its coalition partners in order to get more support.

Megawati seems to be at the crossroads of politics and history. She can make history by foregoing the usual political interests or she can continue to play politics while losing the historical momentum once and for all.

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