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# Title Page

## **President Jokowi and the Obor Rakyat Controversy in Indonesia**

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**ABSTRACT:** During the 2014 presidential election in Indonesia two diametrically opposed candidates appeared to abide by an informal set of rules whereby neither candidate challenged the other's integrity in public. Privately, however, campaign advisors devised ways to attack their opponents, primarily by using media contacts to spread rumors and allegations. As a result, the 2014 presidential race in the world's third largest democracy became in many ways the most negative and polarizing witnessed since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998. We argue that the *Obor Rakyat* media scandal, a major political event in 2014 that remains understudied, represents a new manifestation of rumor politics and smear campaigning that might also reveal some half-truths about President Jokowi, who is widely hailed as a novel reformist politician because of his relatively clean record and lack of direct association with the Indonesian political establishment. The *Obor Rakyat* reports contain serious allegations against Jokowi, and for the purposes of this article we will focus on the three most prominent allegations: (1) Jokowi is a bad Muslim, (2) he is a puppet president, and (3) he is in the pocket of Chinese financiers known as *cukong*.

**Keywords:** Jokowi; Indonesia; presidential branding; smear campaigning; elections

## Introduction

During the 2014 general election in the world's third largest democracy, two diametrically opposed candidates running for office in Indonesia appeared to abide by an informal set of rules whereby neither candidate made direct personal attacks or raised questions about the other's integrity in public. The five rounds of national televised debates in June 2014 saw neither candidate stray very far from this campaign pact, perhaps for fears of further inflaming the passions of an already polarized electorate. Privately, however, campaign advisors devised ways to attack their opponents, primarily by using their media contacts to spread rumors and allegations. As a result, the 2014 presidential race in Indonesia became in many ways the most negative and hostile witnessed since the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998. We argue that the *Obor Rakyat* media scandal, a major political event in 2014 that remains understudied, represents a new manifestation of rumor politics and smear campaigning that might also reveal some half-truths about President Jokowi, who is widely hailed as a novel reformist politician because of his relatively clean record and lack of direct association with the ostentatious Indonesian political elite.

One report in particular published by the *Obor Rakyat* tabloid newspaper in May 2014 — at the height of the national campaign cycle — contained serious allegations against Jokowi, and for the purposes of this article we will focus on the three most prominent allegations: (1) Jokowi is a bad Muslim, (2) he is a puppet president unable to disassociate himself from former president Megawati, and (3) he is in the pocket of Chinese financiers known as *cukong*. Many of the ethnic, religious and political stigmatizations that were salient during the 2014 campaign continue to reflect the general political realities in Indonesia today. When it comes to the specific case of Jokowi, however, his popularity remains high and only the puppet president allegations really seems to stick, with possible political repercussions for his leadership.

Negative campaigning and mudslinging nasty politics are perennial features of electoral politics in democratic countries. Some studies identify fluctuations in the levels of civility and nastiness in electoral politics, however, reaching conclusions about the durability of systems of electoral democracy despite rising public cynicism and distrust.<sup>1</sup> These fluctuations are certainly evident in post-1998 Indonesia, where for instance former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a retired army general who held office for two full terms, began his political career with a reputation as a bold reformer but faced intermittent popularity crises because of his

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<sup>1</sup> Shea and Sproveri 2012, 416.

overly cautious, indecisive and “regal” style of leadership.<sup>2</sup> Indonesia’s seventh president, Joko Widodo, is also a divisive figure who took Indonesia and much of the rest of the world by surprise by cultivating a unique presidential brand in a country longing for change. Jokowi as he is popularly known took office in October 2014 with a good governance agenda to fight corruption, reform Indonesia’s lethargic bureaucracy and attract foreign investors in order to improve infrastructure. A furniture trader-turned politician with no family ties to the military or the established political elite, Jokowi appears to represent a new generation of reformists who are highly attuned to social media trends and political branding strategies.<sup>3</sup> The president secured a 53.1 percent majority in the 2014 general election, overcoming a serious contender in Prabowo Subianto, an authoritarian throwback candidate with more direct ties to Indonesia’s oligarchy and armed forces.

Margaret Scammell argues that modern politics is increasingly defined by competing images, as rival candidates and parties strive to develop brand resonance in order to influence voter preferences and shape the public imaginary.<sup>4</sup> Jokowi’s contingent political branding and strategic imaging (*pencitraan*) has largely been defined by close advisors and refined by media agents. A carpenter by trade, Jokowi was brought up in the urban village of Gilingan, Central Java province, and spent some of his impoverished youth near the banks of the Kalianyar River. The experience of relative deprivation at an early age provides Jokowi with a degree of credibility and helps differentiate his candidacy from his political competitors, most of whom are drawn from a familiar roster of oligarchs and heirs to political dynasties. Jokowi’s arrival on the national political stage began when he was named one of Indonesia’s top local leaders by the influential *Tempo* newsmagazine. Ten men appear on the front cover of the December 23, 2008 *Tempo* issue, and Jokowi is clearly overshadowed by his peers, cutting a timid figure in the background of the photograph. It was inconceivable at the time that Jokowi would secure the backing of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia*

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<sup>2</sup> Fealy 2011. Yudhoyono won successive elections in 2004 and 2009. The constitutional limit in Indonesia is two terms in office.

<sup>3</sup> For instance the campaign Twitter tag #AkhirnyaMilihJokowi (Finally Vote for Jokowi) was the fourth most popular Indonesian hashtag in 2014, gaining some 34 million mentions. Jokowi’s campaign strategy follows a similar pattern to the strategies found in India and the US, where Narendra Modi and Barak Obama used Twitter and new social media to connect to wider constituencies (Pal 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Scammell 2015.

Perjuangan, PDIP) and lead a catch-all coalition of parties to victory in the 2014 presidential election.<sup>5</sup>

Jokowi gained a global profile and won successive mayoral elections in Surakarta (2005–2012) and the gubernatorial election in Jakarta (2012–2014) because of his unique political branding and appeal, as well as his golden handcuffs nomination by the PDIP, one of the largest, most established and powerful political parties in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> He campaigned as a political outsider, a humble down-to-earth man of the people with the support of a loose network of grassroots volunteers (*sukarelawan*) and intrepid political activists. It can be argued that presidential branding helped create a mirror effect, where the public could see, or at least imagine, a part of themselves in their prospective leader. The president's campaign advisors turned his lack of political experience into a competitive advantage, which in some ways is reminiscent of the Corazon Aquino strategy in 1980s transitional Philippines. Aquino found it advantageous to concede that she could never match the experience of her rivals, particularly authoritarian strongman Ferdinand Marcos; indeed, she happily conceded that she had no experience in cheating, stealing, lying, or assassinating political opponents.<sup>7</sup> Branding can also expose the personal anxieties and vulnerabilities of a candidate, however, and message transference is never straightforward given the wide, floating spectrum of emotional intelligence and dissonance registered amongst free-thinking voting publics.

### **Branding Jokowi**

Throughout the election campaign cycle in 2014 Jokowi seemed to perform a double act, appearing as an ordinary, unpretentious man of the people who also happens to run a thriving wood-based furniture and housing business and has the support of a network of oligarchs. Over the past decade Jokowi has accumulated a surplus of what Isa Duce refers to as “status power,” which is power derived from a combination of personal prestige, moral authority and a

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<sup>5</sup> The PDIP represents the nationalist spirit Sukarno, Indonesia's first president (1945–1966), and was one of the first parties to openly challenge the monopoly of political power held by Suharto's Golkar Party in the 1970s, with anti-corruption and pro-poor campaigns ensuring blocs of support for the PDIP in urban slums and Christian neighborhoods in Surakarta that persist to this day (Pemberton 1986, 5).

<sup>6</sup> For more on Jokowi's substantive performance as mayor of Surakarta, see Majeed (2012) and Bunnell et al. (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Thompson 2002, 547.

reputation for good governance.<sup>8</sup> Jokowi's positive reputation is based on his political branding as well as his substantive performance as mayor of Surakarta and governor of Jakarta, where he governed according to the principle of economic pluralism, working with and promoting an even spread of business associations and interest groups that cut across religious and ethnic lines.<sup>9</sup> One local informant drew comparisons between Jokowi and Ali Sadikin, the energetic modernizing governor of Jakarta who came to power in the early years of Suharto's authoritarian New Order (1966–1998), suggesting that both men had the capacity for transformational leadership and came to represent the hopes and aspirations of Indonesians at a time of significant social and political change.<sup>10</sup> Another valid comparison is with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who was elected in 2014 in part because of his reputation as an entrepreneurial modernizer and a man of the people, with a proven track record in Gujarat that helped propel him to the top of the political hierarchy. Since taking office, however, Modi's ability to govern has been constrained by structural impediments and domestic compromises, which in some ways mirrors Jokowi's experience.<sup>11</sup>

A cornerstone of Jokowi's transformational governance strategy has been the effort to minimize the "gap between superiors and subordinates" (*jarak antara atasan dan bawahan*).<sup>12</sup> One week after the Indonesian Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) confirmed that Jokowi won the presidency he announced his intention to spend 70 percent of his time in the field conducting spot checks, site inspections and neighborhood visits, and the remaining 30 percent in the relative comfort of the presidential palace.<sup>13</sup> Impromptu neighborhood visits (*blusukan*) allow the president to check government reports and figures for accuracy, and ensure that he remains emotionally connected to the general public, especially to those who are experiencing hardship. Jokowi does not hesitate to visit the most tragic urban slums and congested marketplaces. He tends to be single-minded in his approach and demands to hear the voices of ordinary Indonesians.<sup>14</sup> This gives the president all the ammunition he needs to expose lethargic or dishonest bureaucrats, often referred to in Indonesia as the "ABS

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<sup>8</sup> Duce 2002, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Von Lübke 2014, 519.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with a member of the provincial election commission, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ahmad and Ebert 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with former election commission official, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Teresia 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Idhom 2013.

class” (asal bapak senang, as long as the boss is happy). This leadership approach and style formed the basis for Jokowi’s well-rehearsed political brand: being an ordinary and humble public servant, capable of self-sacrifice, with an aversion to grandeur and a robust style of participatory governance.

Jokowi is attempting to have it both ways, cultivating an everyman image despite being a self-made millionaire from Central Java province. Many powerful political families have their roots in Central Java, including former presidents Suharto (1966–1998) and Megawati (2001–2004) and their inner circles of patrons and protégés. The elite political operator Amien Rais (former chairman of the National Mandate Party) was born in Surakarta, while retired general Wiranto (founder of the Hanura Party) was born in the central Javanese court city of Yogyakarta. The Djojohadikusumo dynasty – including 2014 presidential runner up Prabowo, his father Sumitro (a Sorbonne-trained economist), and grandfather Margono (founder of Bank Indonesia) – is rooted in the Banyumas-Kebumen region of Central Java. These Javanese elites are rather like Tualang trees; their political legitimacy has been cut down after decades of corruption and scandal, but their vast economic foundations remain intact, and new generations of political reformists and modernizers such as Jokowi are coppiced from these foundations.

Michael Vatikiotis is one of the first observers to make a direct comparison between Jokowi and former president Suharto, citing their mutual conservatism as well as their immersion in the homespun wisdom of Javanese history and culture.<sup>15</sup> The comparison seems shallow if we consider that Suharto was one of the most powerful world leaders of the twentieth century, spending three decades constructing a wholly new Indonesia with frightening intensity.<sup>16</sup> By contrast, Jokowi was until recently a provincial businessman who benefitted under Suharto’s authoritarian regime by gaining access to state funding and timber resources. A graduate with a degree in forestry from Gadjah Mada University in 1985, Jokowi was not one for environmental conservation. He turned to his father after graduation to secure start-up funds for his furniture business PT Rakabu Sejahtera, and then to the state for loans and support under the “foster parent” (bapak angkat) scheme for small and medium enterprises established during Suharto’s New Order era.<sup>17</sup>

The New Order is best understood as a capitalist authoritarian model of development, and resource extraction is a key feature of this model. The export-oriented forestry sector was

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<sup>15</sup> Vatikiotis 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Elson 2001, vi.

<sup>17</sup> Shin 1991, 131.



controlled by an oligarchy of domestic timber industrialists led by Chinese Indonesian businessmen and Suharto loyalists such as Prajogo Pangestu and Mohamad (Bob) Hasan, the “forest king.”<sup>18</sup> Bob Hasan had the power to shape national forestry policy, and was positioned as head of all the major wood-related trade associations in the country, including Asmino, the Indonesian Association of Furniture and Handicraft Producers. Jokowi’s furniture businesses are based in Central Java, where the furniture trade relies heavily on illegal logging, and he profited from the export boom that occurred in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis that drove down the value of the Indonesian rupiah.<sup>19</sup> In 2002 Jokowi took on the chairmanship of the Asmino Surakarta branch, and according to reports established a joint venture in 2009 with PT Toba Sejahtera, which is owned by retired army general Luhut Binsar Panjaitan, who holds forest concessions in Kalimantan.<sup>20</sup> These general facts combine to implicate Jokowi indirectly in the nefarious business and governance practices that have come to define the Indonesian extractive sector as a whole, creating a branding dilemma for a president who campaigned as an honest and clean political outsider.

Jokowi’s duplicitous presidential branding during the 2014 campaign saw him portrayed as a lightweight, soft spoken, inexperienced political outsider who is relatively untainted by elite scandal and corruption. Presidential runner-up Prabowo Subianto, by contrast, is a heavyweight, hard speaking, volatile old guard politician embroiled in scandal and intrigue. Prabowo was an Army Special Forces commander operating in East Timor in the early 1990s and in Jakarta during Suharto’s final days as president in 1998. According to reports, he accepted responsibility for the kidnap and torture of nine political activists in early 1998, although his wider role in the mass riots and killings in Jakarta that same year remains ambiguous.<sup>21</sup> After several lucrative years of self-exile in Jordan, Prabowo, the “victim” of the democratization movement, returned to Indonesia with great political ambitions. In 2008 he formed a new political party called Gerindra with the help of his brother Hashim, a multimillionaire, and two of Indonesia’s main media tycoons, Hary Tanoesudibjo from the

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<sup>18</sup> Broad 1995, 323; Gellert 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Loebis and Schmitz 2005. Indonesia has taken some initial steps to improve environmental regulation, for instance by introducing a timber legality assurance system (Sistem Verifikasi Legalitas Kayu, SVLK) in 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Widhiarto and Ayuningtyas 2014.

<sup>21</sup> Tesoro 2000.

MNC Group and Aburizal Bakrie, the owner of TVOne.<sup>22</sup> We found that ultra-rich, scandal-prone candidates like three-star general Prabowo and corporate tycoon Aburizal Bakrie, who is implicated in the Lapindo mudflow disaster in East Java, are considered by many Indonesian voters to be inaccessible “ivory tower” (menara gading) politicians. Jokowi, by contrast, is perceived as a grassroots candidate with a “modest and clean” (sederhana dan bersih) background and a reputation for good governance, despite his close association with the extended PDIP political family in Central Java.

One former election commission official we spoke to attributes Jokowi’s political rise to a mix of fortuitous timing and a shrinking pool of plausible candidates to compete against.<sup>23</sup> Political branding and visibility are also factors, and Jokowi campaigned exhaustively in order to secure votes by inviting journalists to follow him on motorbike tours of small towns and villages, attending open-door events and public festivals, visiting traditional marketplaces, and taking symbolic Friday afternoon walkabouts (known as *mider projo* in Javanese) in local neighborhoods around Surakarta after prayer. According to a senior reporter in Surakarta, local voters yearn for and respond to a leader who can literally be touched (*pemimpin yang merakyat yang bisa disentuh*), a leader who is real and has flaws.<sup>24</sup> To explore the factors behind Jokowi’s victory in a more systematic way, we surveyed 1,400 voters in Surakarta as well as in the Central Javanese districts (kabupaten) of Boyolali, Karanganyar, Klaten, Sragen, Sukoharjo, and Wonogiri. Our survey was completed with the assistance of approximately 50 university student volunteers who worked in the field from 13 June to 5 July 2014. The campaign ended on 5 July and was followed by a legally mandated cooling off period before voters went to the polls. To summarize the results of our randomized survey, we focus on four specific questions about the presidential election:<sup>25</sup>

1. Who will you vote for?

Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla (64%)

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<sup>22</sup> Aspinall 2015, 24. Prabowo had the backing of the MNC Group and TVOne, whereas Jokowi’s campaign received favorable coverage from Surya Paloh’s Metro TV.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with a member of the electoral commission, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with a senior reporter from the Solo Pos newspaper, Surakarta, 21 November 2014.

<sup>25</sup> A basic breakdown of the sample (n=1,400) shows that 57 percent of respondents are male and 43 percent are female. All respondents are of voting age, and 75 percent are aged 50 or under. 37 percent are students, 36 percent manual laborers, 12 percent are teachers, and the remaining 15 percent of respondents are in varying types of employ.

Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Rajasa (32%)  
 Undecided (4%)

2. What is the most important factor that will shape your vote?
  - The reputation of the candidate (59%)
  - The vision and mission statement of the candidate (37%)
  - Instructions [on how to vote] from local political leaders (3%)
  - Not sure (1%)
  
3. Have you been influenced by the media in this election?
  - Yes I have been influenced by media (66%)
  - No I have not been influenced by the media (30%)
  - Not sure (4%)
  
4. What are the main domestic issues in this election?
  - The need to eliminate corruption (54%)
  - The need for economic improvements (35%)
  - The need to enhance national pride (8%)
  - Not sure (3%)

Our polling (Q1) across six districts and one city turned out to be very close to the mark. The election results in Central Java, after nearly 19.5 million votes were tabulated by the election commission, were 66.6 percent for Jokowi and 33.4 percent for Prabowo. Survey respondents assigned the following attributes to the candidates: Jokowi is a simple, honest, locally-born leader with a positive record in governance, whereas Prabowo is a strong, assertive, handsome, elite figure with the ability to regulate the military and fight for the pride and prosperity of Indonesia. Jokowi's clean image played well with voters, who were primarily concerned with the eradication of corruption. In-depth interviews were used to help contextualize and problematize the survey responses that we gathered. One civil society activist in Surakarta, for instance, referred to the vision-mission statements and political manifestos published by candidates as mere "cut and paste" exercises, with parties and candidates recycling generic campaign materials and platitudes year after year.<sup>26</sup> The interviewee added that it is the individual qualities of the candidates that really matter, and that it is becoming increasingly difficult for campaign teams to engage in vote-buying and old-fashioned money politics these days, as payment is no guarantee of electoral outcomes or voter loyalties.

The use of strategic political branding played on the public desire for a different type of leader and became one of the key factors behind Jokowi's success. During his time as mayor of Surakarta Jokowi proved to be a highly pragmatic leader, committed and decisive, although

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with a civil society activist, Surakarta, 12 May 2014.

not all of his policies or initiatives were effective. Based on a very general diagnosis of his own governance record, Jokowi once admitted that he achieved a mere 40 percent of his reform agenda in Surakarta (2005–2012), and his work in the capital Jakarta had only just begun when he cut short his term as governor in order to run for president.<sup>27</sup> As a result, Jokowi and his brand advisors needed to select specific sites and aspects of urban development, such as the Banjarsari Monument Park in Surakarta, as a synecdoche for his success as a political leader.<sup>28</sup> The president's approach to leadership and his personal integrity came under attack in 2014, however, following the rise of a new style of "black campaign" (*kampanye hitam*) that targeted Jokowi's business and political networks and questioned his religious convictions. While the black campaign against Jokowi is largely based on rumor and conjecture, it plays on a number of ethnic, religious and political stigmas that continue to have resonance in Indonesia today.

### **The Black Campaign**

Since standing for governor of Jakarta in 2012 Jokowi has been supported by social media volunteers and coordinators such as Kartika Djoemadi, who hired a professional agency in Jakarta called Arwuda to help sharpen Jokowi's political image.<sup>29</sup> One of Jokowi's most prominent image mentors during the presidential campaign was believed to be Widodo Muktiyo, the vice rector of Universitas Sebelas Maret, Surakarta's top university.<sup>30</sup> Ross Tapsell also found that media staffers such as Riffa Juffiasari helped shape Jokowi's campaign strategy by focusing on young, urban, internet-active and politically engaged first time voters.<sup>31</sup> At the other end of the socio-economic spectrum, local religious leader Kyai Abdul Karim from Surakarta helped manage Jokowi's Facebook page and social media image, appealing to middle class Javanese-Muslim sensibilities and responding to the concerns of the underprivileged.<sup>32</sup> The media was a key vehicle for the branding of Jokowi, as campaign materials were trafficked on new social media platforms, and political messages were spread via creative adaptations of internationally recognized films, music videos and videogames.<sup>33</sup> To counter Jokowi's rapid

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<sup>27</sup> Majeed 2012, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Bunnell et al. 2013.

<sup>29</sup> Perdana 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with a campaign advisor, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Tapsell 2015.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with a former election commission official, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Tapsell 2015, 38.

rise, some traditional media and new online platforms were used to undermine Jokowi's political legitimacy and social standing. A rumor-driven smear campaign against Jokowi began in 2012 with the *Suara Islam*<sup>34</sup> tabloid articles that attacked Jokowi and his Christian and Chinese-Indonesian backers, and then escalated in 2014 with the allegations contained in the tabloid newspaper *Obor Rakyat*.

One document at the center of the black campaign against Jokowi was a 16-page report entitled "The Puppet Presidential Candidate" (*Capres Boneka*) published by *Obor Rakyat* in May 2014. The report, of which at least 100,000 copies were printed, portrays Jokowi as Megawati's deferential puppet (*boneka*) who must do the bidding of the PDIP and serve the interests of Megawati's inner circle of elite powerbrokers.<sup>35</sup> Some of the stories in *Obor Rakyat* accuse Jokowi of being a deviant Muslim who has Chinese ancestry and communist sympathies, outrageous messages that were distributed to networks of Islamic boarding schools and mosques (*Nahdlatul Ulama* strongholds) throughout the island of Java.<sup>36</sup> This controversial content excited the national press corps into printing hundreds of investigative stories in 2014.

[Insert Image 1]

A police report was filed on 6 June 2014, leading to libel and defamation charges against Setiyardi Boediono, the founder of *Obor Rakyat*, and chief editor Darmawan Sepriyossa. Though first assumed to be a substandard tabloid engaged in gutter politics, the *Obor Rakyat* "puppet president" edition printed in May 2014 is rather different than British tabloids such as *The Sun* or the *Daily Mirror*. A range of serious political topics are covered throughout, and pages 12-13 contain an in-depth interview and an editorial. We have been informed that Setiyardi and Darmawan, who hail from Lampung, South Sumatra, are not mere hacks; indeed, they used to work for the well-respected newsmagazine *Tempo*, and Setiyardi was at one time

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<sup>34</sup> Assadullah 2014.

<sup>35</sup> Simanungkalit 2014.

<sup>36</sup> *Nahdlatul Ulama* (NU), meaning "the revival of Muslim scholars," is Indonesia's largest socio-religious organization with some 50 million members (Bush 2009, 2). The PDIP is said to have expected massive support from traditional NU voters in 2014, but the evidence suggests that the leaders of the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, NU and Muhammadiyah, did not align themselves consistently with either presidential candidate and behaved rather unpredictably during the 2014 elections (Winarni 2014, 264).

considered to be a strong opponent of the Suharto regime and a champion of democracy.<sup>37</sup> A senior journalist in Indonesia claims that Setiyardi received funding for Obor Rakyat from a source in the state intelligence agency (Badan Intelijen Negara, BIN) operating under the cover of a state-owned enterprise, with presumed links to the Prabowo campaign.<sup>38</sup> There are also rumors that Setiyardi worked as a special advisor in the presidential palace during Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's second term in office.<sup>39</sup>

We conducted surveys in Bandung, Jakarta and Surakarta from June to July 2015 in order to begin to measure the impact of the Obor Rakyat puppet president report.<sup>40</sup> Based on a simple yes or no question we found that 58 percent of respondents, from a total sample of 324, claim to remember the controversial Obor Rakyat report. The 189 respondents who answered "yes" were then asked if they remembered anything specific about the report, leading to the following results:

1. What do you remember about the Obor Rakyat report?

- Jokowi is not a proper Muslim (34%)
- Jokowi is Megawati's puppet (21%)
- General SARA scaremongering (16%)
- Jokowi favors the cukong / has Chinese ancestry (14%)
- Jokowi is a communist (9%)

All 324 respondents were then asked:

2. Do you agree or disagree with the representation of Jokowi as a puppet president?

- Disagree (54%)
- Agree (38%)
- No answer (8%)

In relation to Q1, respondents who mentioned SARA (suku, agama, ras, antar golongan) were making general reference to ethnic, religious, racial and intergroup tensions in Indonesia and most likely answered in this way because they have only a vague recollection of the Obor Rakyat report. For the 173 respondents who disagreed with Jokowi's puppet president

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<sup>37</sup> Personal correspondence with a Tempo journalist, 18 June 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Personal correspondence with a Kompas journalist, 15 June 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Wiwoho 2014.

<sup>40</sup> A general breakdown of the sample (n=324) shows that 61 percent of respondents are male and 39 percent are female. 57 percent work in manual labor and basic trades, 21 percent are professionals, 13 percent are students, and the remaining 9 percent are in varying types of employ.

caricature, the main reason stated was that it is perfectly natural for the president to respect his party (the PDIP) and reward his political patrons for their support. For the 121 respondents who agree with the caricature, the main reason stated was Jokowi's subservience to Megawati, her daughter Puan, and the various PDIP patronage networks that remain influential throughout Indonesia. We will now proceed to examine the three main allegations against Jokowi.

### **Allegation 1: Bad Muslim**

It is generally accepted that Indonesian voters are increasingly likely to choose candidates on rational or pragmatic rather than religious grounds, although Sunny Tanuwidjaja rightly points out that political Islam, and religious sensitivities more generally, are still influential political forces in Indonesia today.<sup>41</sup> Despite Indonesia having such a complex and diverse socio-political landscape — it a Muslim-majority country with 250 million people from at least 300 different ethnic backgrounds spread across a vast archipelago — the backers of *Obor Rakyat* felt they could undermine Jokowi's campaign by spreading doubt about his religiosity and his willingness to protect the interests of Indonesia's Muslim communities (*umat*). In mid-2014 approximately half a million copies of *Obor Rakyat* were circulated throughout Java, and a rapid distribution strategy in Central Java province was carried out by religious scholars (*kiai*) from a network comprising hundreds of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*).

In the “puppet president” edition of *Obor Rakyat* there are several stories and references to Jokowi's nefarious business and political alliances and his general betrayal of the *umat*. For instance, Jokowi stands accused of contributing to the Christianization of Java in his blind pursuit of political power.<sup>42</sup> By virtue of his PDIP nomination — which *Obor Rakyat* calls the “party of the cross” (*partai salib*) — the president is alleged to be serving the interests of Christian groups (*kelompok Nasrani*) and is guilty by association because of the fact that influential Chinese-Indonesian figures such as Michael Bimo Putranto, former deputy head of PDIP Surakarta, and Charles Honoris, a current member of the Indonesian House of Representatives, supported his mayoral campaigns in Surakarta.<sup>43</sup> The PDIP dared to field 184 non-Muslim legislative candidates in 2014, which apparently represents some sort of existential threat to ordinary Indonesians. One short editorial published by *Obor Rakyat* even used a crude form of onomastic analysis to claim that Jokowi's father is actually a Chinese

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<sup>41</sup> Tanuwidjaja 2010, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Dari).

<sup>43</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Partai).

businessman named Oey Hong Liong who, out of political necessity, changed his name to Widjiatno Notomihardjo.<sup>44</sup>

[Insert Image 2]

Rumors, no matter how implausible, can have an agenda-setting effect and an influence on electoral outcomes. For example, one month before the 2008 US presidential election some 12 percent of the voting public still believed that Barack Obama was a Muslim harboring a secret political agenda.<sup>45</sup> As with the *Obor Rakyat* case in Indonesia, numerous unreliable sources in the US were responsible for the initiation of the rumor, but the mainstream media played a significant role in perpetuating the rumor. We found that Kompas has an archive of 153 stories under the tag “kampanye hitam *Obor Rakyat*” published online between 27 May 2014 and 21 January 2015, whereas Tempo has an online archive of 64 stories covering the *Obor Rakyat* controversy. It is argued that the Indonesian media played a critical role in the 2014 elections by furthering the polarization of the electorate and by ensuring that the controversial messages contained in *Obor Rakyat* were heard on a national scale.<sup>46</sup> Of the 189 respondents we surveyed who have some recollection of the *Obor Rakyat* controversy, 34 percent made specific reference to the attack on Jokowi’s standing as a Muslim who is responsible for protecting the interests of the *umat*.

In order to limit the damage caused by the rapid spread of rumors about Jokowi, his campaign team enlisted the support of the highly regarded and influential Nahdlatul Ulama leader Kiai Haji Muhammad Yusuf Chudlori, who runs his own pesantren in Tegalrejo, Central Java. Yusuf Chudlori found that issues of *Obor Rakyat* were distributed to at least 430 schools in Central Java province, and he personally visited 130 of these schools, where he urged

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<sup>44</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Jokowi). The reaction in the national press and social media was to ridicule the assertion by providing biographies of Singaporean billionaire Oei Hong Liong, even though the *Obor Rakyat* article did not specify which Hong Liong they were actually referring to. The story we heard in Surakarta is that Jokowi’s father ran his own local furniture business, which he built from the ground up. During the communist purges in the 1960s Jokowi’s father was accused of being a member of the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI) but his name was recently cleared following an investigation by the state intelligence agency (BIN) in 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Weeks and Southwell 2010, 342.

<sup>46</sup> Fionna and Njoto-Feillard 2015, 147.



teachers to either burn the newspapers or use them to wrap nuts or other edibles.<sup>47</sup> In 2015 we obtained one of the few remaining original copies of the tabloid newspaper from a pesantren just outside of Surakarta. In response to *Obor Rakyat* and various other manifestations of the smear campaign against Jokowi, a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Indonesia initiated a “movement for clean campaigning” (*gerakan kampanye putih*) and appealed to the public to ignore, or protest against, all forms of “black campaigning” (*kampanye hitam*). The owner of Jawa Pos Group, Dahlan Iskan, commissioned a special edition in *Pelayan Rakyat* in order to challenge and debunk the *Obor Rakyat* report by outlining Jokowi’s “proper” Islamic credentials and his core beliefs.<sup>48</sup>

During a visit to Gilingan village we met Pak Suparto, a local tailor who designed Jokowi’s popular plaid shirt (*baju kotak-kotak*) for the 2012 gubernatorial elections in Jakarta. Business is booming for Pak Suparto, who praises the president for being true to his roots and for supporting local heritage, enterprises and mosques.<sup>49</sup> There is also a tendency in Surakarta to relate Jokowi’s political rise to the Joyoboyo prophecy (*ramalan Joyoboyo*), where a righteous king saves Java during a time of great deprivation or great expectation. Jokowi raised expectations to new heights during his presidential inauguration speech in October 2014, making references to Indonesia’s glorious maritime past (*jalesveva jayamahe*, “in the sea we are great”) and welcoming the opportunity to navigate the country towards greater prosperity.<sup>50</sup> Local elites in Surakarta seem to appreciate this type of politically symbolic grandstanding, and often speak of President Jokowi as though he is a reincarnation of past kings, making comparisons with nobles such as *Tunggul Ametung* of the great pre-Islamic state of Majapahit (dating back to the fourteenth century), as well as the celebrated Sultan Pakubuwono X (1893–1939) of Surakarta.

The occurrence of divine intervention is considered a pivotal factor in Jokowi’s leadership by a wide range of local informants. For instance, we were told by campaigners, volunteers, artists, journalists, hotel general managers, members of the chamber of commerce, university lecturers, and even the royal prince *Gusti Dwipokusumo* of Surakarta that Jokowi’s presidential victory was the will of God (*pertolongan Tuhan*).<sup>51</sup> Jokowi’s business associates and political

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<sup>47</sup> *Tempo* 2014, 38.

<sup>48</sup> Tapsell 2014.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Pak Suparto, Surakarta, 28 July 2015.

<sup>50</sup> Medcalf 2014.

<sup>51</sup> Field research in Surakarta, 20-23 November 2014.

supporters from the Surakarta Chamber of Commerce indicate that the president is a complex character; he is an easy going, ordinary man (*santai dan sederhana*) but also, according to Javanese legend, a prophetic warrior figure (*satrio piningit*) destined for greatness.<sup>52</sup> In 2014 artistic impressions of the “warrior president” were on display in a number of volunteer offices and popular hangout spots in Surakarta. The combination of prophecy and a divine right to rule may be difficult to reconcile with Jokowi’s rather dull managerial approach to democratic governance, but in Central Java, for the time being at least, these beliefs have overpowered the negative, occasionally slanderous messages found in *Obor Rakyat*.

### **Allegation 2: Puppet President (Boneka)**

In the violent aftermath of Suharto’s resignation in May 1998 the PDIP reasserted control in Surakarta and attempted to broaden Megawati’s social and political influence in the Javanese heartland.<sup>53</sup> During the interregnum period before direct presidential elections were introduced, Megawati was appointed president of Indonesia (2001–2004) but she failed to convince and lost the next two general elections, including an ill-fated attempt to team up with Prabowo Subianto, who stood as her deputy in 2009. Despite these losses, Megawati’s political network in Central Java remains formidable, including for instance the current Interior Minister, Surakarta-born Tjahjo Kumolo (who is also the Secretary General of PDIP), the provincial governor Ganjar Pranowo and his deputy Heru Sudjatmoko, as well as Wardoyo Wijaya, the mayor of Sukoharjo, and Fransiskus Xaverius Hadi Rudyatmo in Surakarta. There is evidence to suggest that Jokowi’s flagstone pathway to power was designed and constructed by presidential aspirants Megawati and Prabowo. They struck a deal, albeit reluctantly, to endorse Jokowi and his Chinese-Indonesian running mate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (better known as Ahok) in 2012, after which Megawati broke her pact with Prabowo by pairing Jokowi with former vice-president Jusuf Kalla during the 2014 presidential elections.<sup>54</sup> Jeffrey Winters

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<sup>52</sup> Interviews with members of the chamber of commerce, Surakarta, 23 November 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Kusno 2010, 231.

<sup>54</sup> Jusuf Kalla, who hails from South Sulawesi, is an old guard politician and part of the Indonesian oligarchy, making him an awkward but perhaps necessary deputy for Jokowi, who in 2014 was still relatively inexperienced. Kalla stands accused of judicial interference and corruption, for instance the summoning of Constitutional Court judges in order to “reprimand them for ‘wrong’ verdicts” (Dressel and Mietzner 2012, 406). He may not be a clean politician, but he is an effective vote mobilizer with

argues that the ability of unrestrained oligarchic forces to determine who can rise as a political contender remains a key factor in Indonesian elections, where “the power of wealth placed Jokowi before the voters.”<sup>55</sup>

The nomination of Jokowi for president was seen as a betrayal by Prabowo, went against the advice of Megawati’s powerful husband, the late Taufik Kiemas, and came as unwelcome news to her daughter Puan Maharani, who reportedly withheld campaign funds and obstructed Jokowi’s campaign team in 2014. Jokowi was forced to rely on an alternative support base, a “street parliament” (parlemen jalanan) consisting of volunteers and activists, and one member of the Surakarta Chamber of Commerce recalls that Jokowi raised over US\$7.5 million in micro-donations, the first time that a presidential candidate in Indonesia has created a specific fundraising account and an online platform for supporter engagement.<sup>56</sup>

In a “first hundred days” leadership appraisal, Vatikiotis argued that despite these fundraising and volunteer initiatives, Jokowi is still wedged between powerful factions within the PDIP and shackled to the party chair, Megawati, who handpicked cabinet members and attempted to nominate loyalists to key institutional positions.<sup>57</sup> For example, Megawati’s relatively unqualified daughter Puan Maharani landed the job of Coordinating Minister of Human Development, while Megawati’s longstanding confidante with a questionable human rights record, retired army chief of staff Ryamizard Ryacudu, became the new Minister of Defense. Megawati attempted to select H. M. Prasetyo for attorney general and Budi Gunawan for chief of police, despite ongoing investigations into these two men by Indonesia’s anti-corruption commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, KPK).<sup>58</sup> Jokowi’s national campaign steering committee included AM Hendropriyono, a retired army general known as the Butcher of Lampung (he is implicated in a village massacre in 1989), who was also allegedly involved

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deep political connections who is, for instance, capable of drumming up support for Jokowi in eastern Indonesia.

<sup>55</sup> Winters 2013, 25.

<sup>56</sup> Interview in Surakarta, 22 November 2014. At least 15 national volunteer groups supported Jokowi in 2014, the most prominent being Bara JP, Projo, Seknas Jokowi, Relawan Merah Putih, the PDIP affiliated Posko Perjuangan Rakyat (Pospera), and smaller groups such as Sahabat Muda. In 2014 the activist Reinhard Parapat emerged as the main spokesperson and representative for this diverse community of volunteers.

<sup>57</sup> Vatikiotis 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Damuri and Day 2015, 4.

in the poisoning of human rights activist Munir Said Thalib in 2004.<sup>59</sup> There is pressure on Jokowi to approve nominations and maintain a free flowing patronage superhighway for the benefit of Megawati loyalists, although notable reformers and modernizers such as Anies Baswedan, Andrinof Chaniago, Rizal Sukma, Ahok, and Andi Widjanto still have the president's ear.

The editors of *Obor Rakyat* seized on the PDIP's intra-party tensions and Puan's apparent unease with Jokowi's presidential nomination. Puan allegedly expelled (*mengusir*) Jokowi from a number of party meetings, but Jokowi had nowhere to turn because he lacked the resources to run independently.<sup>60</sup> As a consequence, Jokowi became a mere pawn who serves the interests (*kepentingan*) of the Megawati family and their cronies. Strict party discipline and the nature of hierarchy within the PDIP, we are told, will ensure that Jokowi remains Megawati's subordinate for as long as she holds the position of party chair (*ketua umum*).<sup>61</sup> According to a senior reporter from *Solo Pos* who followed Jokowi's daily campaign activities closely in Surakarta, Jokowi was often criticized for submitting (*tunduk*) to the higher authority of Megawati, and his tepid response was simply "I must show respect to my elders."<sup>62</sup> In the aftermath of the *Obor Rakyat* controversy some of our Indonesian colleagues noted an increase in pejorative taxi chatter about Jokowi the "puppet president" in major cities. According to Jonathan White, taxi drivers are "exposed to a wide range of social stimuli" and the taxi experience is a fertile site for "studying forms of discursive practice likely to extend more widely in society."<sup>63</sup> Jokowi is still struggling to shake off the "puppet" label, as indicated by the ongoing national media coverage of the internal politics and power struggles within the PDIP.<sup>64</sup> Marcus Mietzner, quoted in *The Economist* 2016 special report on Indonesia, claims that Megawati "expected absolute reverence" from Jokowi but that the two figureheads have managed to settle into an uneasy political truce, for the time being at least.<sup>65</sup>

### **Allegation 3: Chinese Financiers (Cukong)**

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<sup>59</sup> Van Klinken 2014.

<sup>60</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Capres Boneka).

<sup>61</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Capres Jokowi).

<sup>62</sup> Interview with a senior reporter from *Solo Pos*, 21 November 2014.

<sup>63</sup> White 2010, 414.

<sup>64</sup> Kuwado 2015; Kuwado and Ihsanuddin 2016.

<sup>65</sup> *The Economist* 2016, 5.

Indonesia's ethnic Chinese minority played a key role in the country's economic development and impacted on power relations during the Suharto era. Chinese-Indonesian elites were indispensable because of their business expertise, international networks, business links with the armed forces, and their outsider status that ensured they would not become an independent political force, and as such these elites contributed to Suharto's rent-seeking and politically insulated conglomerates.<sup>66</sup> As with any seemingly privileged, rich minority, there is always the threat of a public backlash resulting from popular resentment or political scapegoating, but despite periodic anti-Chinese riots in Indonesian cities there has been a gradual dilution of popular prejudice against this ethnic minority, in part because of the rise of an indigenous (pribumi) middle class as well as the diversification of private enterprise.<sup>67</sup> Analysis of the cukong influence in Indonesia dates back to the 1970s, when new collaborations were established between ethnic Chinese who had business nous and members of the armed forces and politically well-connected pribumi who had ease of access to licenses, contracts and other types of concessions.<sup>68</sup>

The designers of *Obor Rakyat* would have their readers believe that Jokowi (and by extension the nation) is now hostage (sandera) to a group of cukong and Christian missionaries. In one article Amien Rais, a notorious political operator who was once the head of Muhammadiyah and the founder of the National Mandate Party, is quoted as saying that an unspecified "brain trust" is propping up and systematically informing the Jokowi campaign, which raises fears about Indonesia being held hostage by external forces.<sup>69</sup> Taking considerable liberties, the editors of *Obor Rakyat* then suggested that the foreign threat comes from high profile cukong such as James Riady, a student of the controversial US evangelical Pat Robertson who supposedly has a plan to build 1,000 Christian schools across Indonesia. The *Obor Rakyat* articles claiming that there are multiple Chinese conglomerates backing Jokowi are full of conjecture and rely heavily on the personal views of an academic named Gun Gun Heryanto who is the executive director of the Political Literacy Institute and a lecturer at the State Islamic University in Jakarta.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Reid 2010, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Reid 2010, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Suryadinata 1976, 773.

<sup>69</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Disandera).

<sup>70</sup> *Obor Rakyat* 2014 (Cukong).

The elite interviews we conducted revealed that many Jokowi supporters in Surakarta accept that the influential Chinese-Indonesian business community actively supported Jokowi's campaigns in Surakarta through the exchange of ideas, concepts and strategies.<sup>71</sup> When Jokowi ran for president in 2014 the local Chinese-Indonesian community is said to have provided significant financial support, presumably with some expectation of reciprocity. One of the driving forces behind these financial transactions was supposedly the Sun Motor Group, founded in Surakarta in 1974 by Imelda "Tio" Sundoro and her late husband Sundoro Hosea.<sup>72</sup> It is well known that former president Megawati, chair of the PDIP, has longstanding relations with prominent *cukong* such as Liem Sioe Liong, founder the Salim Group, but then again it is common for Indonesian politicians across the spectrum to have links to some of the approximately 600 affiliated companies of the Salim Group. Indeed, following Liem's death in June 2012, Megawati, Prabowo and two of Suharto's daughters were in attendance at the Mount Vernon funeral hall in Singapore.<sup>73</sup> It is one of the more unusual and ironic aspects of the black campaign in 2014 that somehow Jokowi is seen to be more culpable and politically compromised by his association with *cukong* than Prabowo, despite the fact that Prabowo has much deeper business links with *cukong* and the military, and that he actually comes from a multi-religious family.<sup>74</sup>

[Insert Image 3]

During the 2005 election it was PDIP strongman F. X. Hadi Rudyatmo, a Surakarta-born Christian, who orchestrated Jokowi's mayoral victory by securing funding and mobilizing party loyalists and grassroots supporters. We were told that Rudyatmo, who ran as Jokowi's deputy in 2005, created and supervised a vast provincial network of "vote mobilization squads" (*Guralih*).<sup>75</sup> These controversial squads consisted of small-time gangsters and bosses operating

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<sup>71</sup> Anonymous interviews with elites in Surakarta who supported Jokowi, 23 November 2014.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with an informant close to the electoral process in Surakarta, 22 November 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Borsuk and Chng 2014, 504.

<sup>74</sup> Purdey 2016, 372. Prabowo, following his father's religion, is Muslim, while his brother Hashim, following his mother, is Christian.

<sup>75</sup> Interviews with a member of the electoral commission, Surakarta, 23 November 2014. In February 2016 F. X. Hadi Rudyatmo was re-elected as mayor of Surakarta with 60.4 percent of the popular vote,

at village level and minding the polling stations during election season. Rudyatmo turned a plurality of gangs from Central Java into strategically positioned vote mobilizers, one of the main driving forces (penggerak) behind Jokowi's candidacy. Endorsements for Jokowi also came from the influential Islamic mass organization Nahdlatul Ulama, as well as local Islamic boarding school networks such as Al Qur'ani in Surakarta's historic Laweyan district, led by Kyai Abdul Karim. Jokowi's campaign team raised money from a number of Chinese Indonesian businesses, and enlisted the support of PDIP affiliated paramilitary youth groups such as Banteng Muda. We observed that some of the Banteng Muda members who supported Jokowi's campaign are indirectly associated with Suharto's youngest son, the notorious Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putra, through his business interests in Surakarta.

Having analyzed the three main allegations against Jokowi, it seems that attempts to superimpose negative and hostile images of Jokowi can produce a number of complex, transformative outcomes. For instance, when audiences view distorted images and read printed lies about Jokowi, they may attempt to recompose the images and lies in whatever fashion they choose.<sup>76</sup> The perplexing, and at times outrageous, content of the *Obor Rakyat* puppet president report reveals some of the negative elements of Indonesian political culture and society that are still relevant today, and exposure to the report has the potential to produce a lingering effect. One way a behavioral psychoanalyst might explain this effect is through the prism of the obsessional, intrusive thought. Intrusive thoughts are often distressing — Jokowi colluding with evangelical politicians from the US, or being held hostage by predatory Chinese-Indonesian financiers — prompting individuals to attempt to suppress these thoughts, but paradoxically generating a greater frequency of thought, reflection and expression about the issue, creating a "rebound effect."<sup>77</sup> In other words, the deeply offensive political images and rumors published in *Suara Islam* in 2012 and *Obor Rakyat* in 2014 can leave a lasting impression, with the potential to gradually discredit Jokowi's political image and undermine his presidential brand, although some local observers argued quite the opposite, suggesting that the smear campaign actually increased Jokowi's popularity in his hometown of Surakarta.<sup>78</sup>

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which can be considered a landslide although he faced no serious opposition and no one expected the PDIP candidate to lose the election.

<sup>76</sup> Castillo 2001, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Purdon 1999, 1033.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with a scholar from the State Islamic University of Surakarta, 20 November 2014.

A number of local volunteers, campaigners, small business owners, and bureaucrats that we interviewed in Surakarta still believe that Jokowi's honesty (*kejujuran*) and integrity make him a unique and exceptional leader, regardless of the hold Megawati has over him. Many locals we spoke to refuse to abandon their hope for a new politics in Indonesia, one defined by "clean records and fresh faces" (*catatan bersih dan wajah baru*). Fervent Jokowi supporters such as Pak Lazano, an artist-activist who rode his bicycle 600 kilometers from Surakarta to Jakarta with only US\$15 in his pocket in order to drum up support for the president, insist that Jokowi should not be judged too hastily and should be given time to establish his reform agenda.<sup>79</sup>

Jokowi has now served as president for over two years, and in this time he has upheld some of his campaign promises, for example combatting corruption in order to improve Indonesia's international standing as a reliable trading partner, although in other areas such as human rights and religious tolerance his record has been disappointing.<sup>80</sup> For instance, the National Human Rights Commission (*Komisi Nasional Hak Asasi Manusia, Komnas HAM*) sent an open letter to the president in April 2016 calling for much firmer measures to be taken against the police when they abuse their authority and for more to be done to ensure that the fundamental rights of all Indonesians are protected.<sup>81</sup> If he decides to seek reelection in 2019, which he is almost certain to do, Jokowi's image as a modernizer and a reformer will still have some credibility, whereas his association with the PDIP, Christian groups and Chinese financiers will be used against him by campaign strategists working for opposition candidates who believe they can continue to use these stigmas to influence an anxious and inherently prejudiced general public. This logic runs contrary to Anthony Reid's assertion that Indonesia is witnessing a gradual dilution of religious intolerance and anti-Chinese prejudice, but it is consistent with Karl Jackson's survey data suggesting that prejudice against Chinese Indonesians remains a dreary fact of life in Indonesia.<sup>82</sup> Of the three main allegations against Jokowi initiated by *Obor Rakyat* and popularized by the national media, only the puppet president (*boneka*) allegation really sticks, as Jokowi's reliance on Megawati continues to influence cabinet appointments, personnel decisions, civil-military relations, and so forth. For all of the slanderous and bigoted stories and caricatures that were circulated about Jokowi, the

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<sup>79</sup> Interview with Pak Lazano, Surakarta, 21 November 2014.

<sup>80</sup> Hamayotsu and Nataatmadja 2016, 130.

<sup>81</sup> Sari 2016. See Komnas HAM letter number 030/TUA/IV/2016.

<sup>82</sup> Reid 2010, 71. Jackson 2014, 88.



president enjoys a 68 percent approval rating as of August 2016 according to polls by Indikator Politik Indonesia, a well-known research institute that conducts public surveys about elections and democracy in Indonesia.<sup>83</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The year 2014 marked another milestone in Indonesia with the holding of successful, largely non-violent legislative and presidential elections. Coverage and analysis of Jokowi's rapid rise in politics has been comprehensive although not exhaustive, and we gathered new evidence from interviews, observations and intermittent surveys conducted in Indonesia from May 2014 to June 2015. We found that Jokowi has been performing a double act for as long as he has been competing in elections. His political branding has been highly duplicitous, creating a profile of a leader from a humble background who became a successful furniture trader and entrepreneur while remaining relatively untainted by scandal and corruption. This profile is problematic for at least three reasons. First, there is the legacy of the timber industry in Central Java, which includes widespread illegality and unsustainable logging and extractive practices, particularly in the 1990s. Second, there is the dubious Banteng Muda association and the alleged deployment of controversial vote mobilization squads (Guralih) in 2005 to help secure Jokowi's electoral victories in Surakarta. Third, there are the ongoing political compromises imposed upon Jokowi by Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) who nominated him for governor of Jakarta and then president of Indonesia.

Two of the key enablers for Jokowi's quantum leap from small town mayor to president come from the old guard of Indonesian politics. Megawati Sukarnoputri (daughter of Indonesia's first president, Sukarno) and Prabowo Subianto are believed to have struck a deal in 2012 enabling Jokowi to run for governor of Jakarta, which created a platform for his presidential bid 18 months later. Elite grooming is important, although Jokowi also has "the masses" on his side, affording him a degree of independence from his powerful patrons. Having the support of a core base of grassroots activists and unpaid volunteers willing to invest their time and resources in the Jokowi campaign bodes well for the president in the short term, although there is a risk of a public backlash if the president is unable to deliver on the promises made to his core constituency.

In line with recent debates in political communications, we agree that modern politics is increasingly defined by competing images and brands designed to influence voter preferences.

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<sup>83</sup> Faiz 2016.

Jokowi and his advisors achieved a branding triumph overall, although they are constantly struggling with Jokowi's political reliance on Megawati and the PDIP juggernaut. There are also forces beyond their control, such as the *Obor Rakyat* media scandal in 2014 that arguably represents a new manifestation of rumor politics and smear campaigning with the potential to gradually undermine Jokowi's leadership. The field of behavioral psychoanalysis provides a clue as to how and why distorted and absurd images of Jokowi — he is a closet Christian with communist sympathies, who is also in the pocket of Chinese financiers and hostile American evangelicals — continue to resonate with the public, with the likelihood of a rebound effect produced by intrusive thoughts. A number of dubious sources and media outlets were responsible for the initiation of rumors about Jokowi, although the mainstream media has been largely responsible for perpetuating these rumors and discursive practices.

Jokowi's campaign advisors helped identify key positive aspects of his leadership style, governance and city planning agenda, including physical sites of urban renewal such as the Banjarsari Monument Park in Surakarta and the Blok G market in Tanah Abang, Jakarta, as a synecdoche for his success. They cannot however change the fact that, driven by deep political ambition, Jokowi has made a series of political compromises since running for mayor in 2005, or the fact that he was so quick to leave his constituents in Surakarta behind after winning an astonishing electoral victory in 2010, with 90 percent of the vote. It is true that any upward-moving politician would do the same, but the point is that his core constituency in Surakarta had such great expectations for his second term as mayor, and some now feel betrayed. Jokowi was replaced in 2012 by his old ally and political confidante F. X. Hadi Rudyatmo, a high school-educated grassroots politician who has frozen some of Jokowi's reforms and urban planning initiatives. Alternative sources of support — from volunteers, micro-donors, ordinary village folk, civil society actors, and netizens — afford him a degree of independence from Megawati and her formative network, although the pendulum effect of the ongoing power struggle between elite factions will prove difficult to manage, jeopardizing Jokowi's residual "status power" and diminishing his stockpile of political capital. Jokowi remains a pragmatist concerned with everyday politics; he has managerial nous and a formidable work ethic, although it is proving difficult for Jokowi to step out of the shadow of the *Obor Rakyat* report, particularly the allegations related to his political dependence on Megawati, and we expect to see new manifestations of rumor politics and smear campaigning in the run-up to the 2019 presidential election.

[Insert Image 4]

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