

On first indications, Indonesia's electors have chosen the status quo. Which will be a relief to many.

In a re-run of the 2014 election, President Joko Widodo has returned to power with about 54 percent of the vote over his opponent, Prabowo Subianto's 46 percent, while the distribution of votes by party suggests that the composition of the National Parliament will see minimal change.

President Widodo's Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) was one of 16 parties competing for 575 seats in the House of Representatives (the House). Early counts indicate PDI-P will occupy about 19 percent of the House. In the 2014 polls, PDI-P won 18.95 percent. PDI-P is led by former President Megawati Soekarnoputri, the daughter of Indonesia's founding President Sukarno. The PDI-P's principal coalition partners, Golkar and the National Awakening Party (PKB), secured 11.94 percent and 9.62 percent, respectively, according to a quick poll by Kompas (Indonesia's national newspaper).

In the opposition camp, Gerindra, which is led by Widodo's rival Prabowo Subianto and currently has 13 percent of the parliamentary seats, has 12.7 percent in the quick poll. The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and National Mandate Party (PAN), allies of Gerindra, have secured 8.5 percent and 6.45 percent respectively. Religious parties have overall underperformed.

If the quick polls are as reliable as they have been in the past, President Widodo will begin his second and final term with a familiar balance of forces with which to continue his practice of coalition-building. While he is in an even stronger position to prosecute his primary agenda – largely focused on capacity building and infrastructure – wider reforms are likely to remain constrained by the reality of a diverse Parliament.

Local elections which accompany the presidential vote will be an important sign of the general direction of Indonesian politics. President Widodo's emergence from local government in Solo via the governorship in Jakarta to the presidency has inspired reformers in a number of local electorates and others may emerge from this poll.

While Prabowo will almost certainly repeat his 2014 response in challenging the legal status of the election result, his focus appears to have been on sustaining Gerindra's numbers and influence in the inevitable horse-trading that follows after an election. However, in an effort to avoid escalating tensions Widodo has told his team that he will wait for the official results on May 22 to pronounce his victory speech.

A new Widodo Cabinet is expected to involve significant changes, partly in line with some evident frustrations over performance and inevitably through the effects of coalition-building. Widodo will however lead the appointments, reportedly frustrated that his broader coalition did not deliver a significant increase in vote counts compared to 2014 (53.15 percent in 2014). Earlier this year significant changes saw ex-military officers installed in some key areas,

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reinforcing the effect created in 2016 when former General Wiranto was allocated the portfolio of political, legal and security affairs. Others are expected to follow.

If the quick polls are confirmed, Indonesia will have opted for a steady persistence with “Jokowi” over a populist and potentially divisive Prabowo.

Note:

Indonesia’s elections on April 17 are significant. Not only because the elections were the largest undertaking of electoral voting on a single day, but with 193 million voters it represents the world’s biggest direct presidential election. For the first time, Indonesians have simultaneously voted in presidential, parliamentary and local legislative elections, contested by more than 245,000 candidates across 20,000 seats.



Michael Gill is the former Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Financial Review Group (1998-2011) and former Chairman of the Australian Associated Press (1999-2011). He was also the President of UNICEF Australia between 2007 – 2014.