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# An Urban Explanation of Jokowi's Rise: Implications for Politics and Governance in Post-Suharto Indonesia

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## Abstract

Earlier explanations of Jokowi's rise to presidency in 2014 have mostly focused on his distinct qualities or the types of political support he received from Indonesian society. However, such explanations, albeit informative, pay insufficient attention to a key factor in Jokowi's rise: Indonesia's urbanisation. In this article, I first propose an urban analytical framework comprising three factors: urban-led national economic growth, decentralisation, and Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics. Then, I examine whether this framework can be applied to Jokowi's rise by drawing on existing scholarship and data. Finally, I argue that urbanisation has shaped several key constituencies and grievances in Indonesia, contributing significantly to Jokowi's rise. My argument concerns the following two ideas: first, the urban has become a new pathway to power in Indonesia for local politicians such as Jokowi; second, urban-centrism in Indonesia has made urban areas, especially Jakarta, important stages for political performance.

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## Keywords

Indonesia, Jokowi, urban governance, decentralisation, Jakarta-centrism, urbanisation

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## Introduction

Why did Joko Widodo, commonly known as Jokowi, rise to power in 2014? How do we make sense of his unexpected rise to presidency or the enormous amount of support he received? So far, scholars have analysed Jokowi's many identities – Javanese, businessman, technocrat, and “populist”<sup>1</sup> – to explain his nationwide appeal and rise to presidency in 2014 (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2014; Mietzner, 2015). Jokowi, a man of humble origins, initially seemed to have little chance against the prominent Prabowo Subianto – a former three-star general and former son-in-law of the dictator Suharto. However, Jokowi's electable qualities and unpretentious campaign strongly resonated with a disenchanting electorate. His pluralist platform kindled excitement among the marginalised, while his democratic orientation appealed to those who saw Prabowo's authoritarian tendencies as a threat to Indonesia's democracy (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2014; Mietzner, 2015). Others argued that the unprecedented nature of Jokowi's campaign led to an influx of grassroots support comprising voluntary organisations and social media users (Sefsani and Ziegenhain, 2015; Suaedy, 2014; Tomsa and Setijadi, 2018; Lay, 2018). Such are the explanations of Jokowi's rise that have been mainstream, especially within the field of political science.

While the above explanations do paint a compelling picture of Jokowi's rise, we must ask if they sufficiently answer why Jokowi rose to power. Existing explanations of Jokowi's rise tend to focus on his distinct qualities or the types of political support he received from different segments of Indonesian society. However, these explanations pay insufficient attention to a key factor which, in my view, contributed significantly to Jokowi's rise: Indonesia's urbanisation. Urbanisation, as in the increase of the urban population share<sup>2</sup> (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014), has occurred at breakneck speed in Indonesia, with an average annual pace of 4 per cent (World Bank, 2016). Between 1960 and 2019, Indonesia's urban population has increased from a mere 15 per cent to 55 per cent of the entire population; it is expected that over 68 per cent of Indonesia's population will reside in urban areas by 2025 (World Bank, 2016). Given such imposing statistics, Indonesia's urbanisation has long been the subject of scholarly analysis. In particular, McGee (1991) and Jones (1997) have made important contributions by revisiting the urban–rural dichotomy and examining the uniqueness of urbanisation patterns in East and Southeast Asia. More recently, a number of scholars have paid attention to the socio-political implications of urban processes in Indonesia, analysing urban politics and socio-economic groups such as the urban middle class and the urban poor (Kusno, 2013; Simone, 2015; van Leeuwen, 2011).

In this context, it is reasonable that contemporary analyses of Indonesian politics pay close attention to urban dynamics. Yet, it is curious why this has not been the case for Jokowi's rise. Considering that Jokowi earned a national (and international) reputation based on his successful performance in Solo (2005–2012) and Jakarta (2012–2014), it seems plausible to draw a connection between urbanisation and Jokowi's rise. Nonetheless, only a few scholars have paid close attention to the role of urban dynamics in Jokowi's rise (Bunnell et al., 2013; Bunnell et al., 2018; Tapsell, 2015; Tapsell, 2017). As their findings suggest, there is reason to believe that Indonesia's unique urban hierarchy and the Jakarta-centric nature of Indonesian media and politics contributed to the

national prominence of Jokowi. Thus, under-analysing the role of urbanisation in Jokowi's rise would lead to an insufficient understanding of an important dynamic that contributed to it.

To address this gap, I propose an “urban” analytical framework comprising three factors which link urbanisation and politics in Indonesia: urban-led national economic growth, decentralisation, and Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics. First, I focus on the influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) since the 1990s and ensuing urban-led national economic growth in Indonesia. Here, I focus on issues of widening income inequality, inter-regional disparities, and increasing economic vulnerability in Indonesia's urban areas. Second, I focus on Indonesia's decentralisation, especially the phenomenon of *pemekaran* – the rapid subdivision of existing provinces into smaller municipalities (*kota*) and districts (*kabupaten*). I shed light on administrative fragmentation and the relative lack of satisfactory urban governance as possible factors of grievances in Indonesia. Third, I pay attention to the importance of Jakarta as a special capital region and an important political stage that garners national attention. The dominance of Jakarta-based media outlets (Tapsell, 2015) is examined as a key factor that contributes to Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics.

Then, based on the above discussion, I elaborate on how the above framework can help us analyse and explain Jokowi's rise. I also highlight how this framework can help coherently organise existing findings on Jokowi's rise, giving rise to new insights and future research agendas. As will be later discussed, my analysis mainly concerns the following two ideas: first, the emergence of new socio-economic groups in Indonesia's urban areas has made them a new source of political power; second, Jokowi's governorship in Jakarta was key to his PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan*, Democratic Party of Struggle) nomination and electoral victory in 2014 due to Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics. In short, the aim of this article is twofold. First, I organise the key insights offered by existing urban scholarship into an analytical framework that can help further analyse and explain Jokowi's rise. Second, by utilising this framework, I show how urbanisation, in addition to the dynamics highlighted by earlier explanations, contributed to Jokowi's rise.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. In the second section, I review existing explanations of Jokowi's rise and contend that a new analytical framework – an explicitly urban one – is needed. In the third section, I provide definitions of the key terms in my analysis by drawing upon relevant urban scholarship. In the fourth section, I identify three factors that link urbanisation and politics in Indonesia, collectively presenting them as a new analytical framework for Jokowi's rise. In the fifth section, I examine the applicability of this framework to Jokowi's rise and provide an urban explanation of Jokowi's rise. The sixth section concludes.

## Existing Explanations of Jokowi's Rise

Broadly speaking, existing explanations of Jokowi's rise in 2014 can be divided into mainly two groups: leader-centred explanations and society-centred explanations.

Simply put, the former emphasises the role of Jokowi's distinct qualities, while the latter emphasises the role of social actors such as individual volunteers and grassroots organisations. There is a general sense of agreement in the literature that Indonesian democracy endured in 2014, yet there seems to be a nuanced but important difference between the two explanations. The former tends to describe Jokowi's rise as the *survival* of Indonesian democracy, while the latter tends to describe Jokowi's rise as the *deepening* of Indonesian democracy. It is important to identify this difference because it mirrors the larger debate on democracy and politics in post-Suharto Indonesia.

On the one hand, Indonesian politics post-1998 has been viewed as largely controlled by oligarchic interests and limited in its success with democratic reform (Hadiz and Robison, 2013; Winters, 2013). On the other hand, Indonesia's democratic transition has been viewed as relatively successful, aided by a free press and a vibrant civil society. While deep-rooted traditions of patrimonialism and the strong presence of the state linger, Indonesia has benefited from high levels of civic engagement on its road to democratic consolidation (Webber, 2006; Yazid and K. Pakpahan, 2020). Consequently, to those who argued in the tradition of the so-called "oligarchy thesis", Jokowi's rise signified that oligarchic interests have been meaningfully challenged. In contrast, to those who argued in light of Indonesia's relative success with democratisation, Jokowi's rise was a sign of deeper democratisation.

The problem with this particular lineage of scholarship is that it writes the narrative of Jokowi's rise almost solely in terms of its implications for Indonesia's liberal electoral democracy. Indeed, Jokowi's rise has strong implications for Indonesian democracy and analysing them in depth has allowed us to garner crucial insights about Indonesia's current socio-political state. Nevertheless, such a linear focus limits current and future analyses. Hence, in what follows, I make clear the gap that I see in the previous literature and demonstrate the relevance of my approach.

### *Leader-Centred Explanations*

Several scholars have pointed to Jokowi's unique qualities as the main factors of his rise. Mietzner (2015: 4) has described Jokowi as a "technocratic populist", who promoted "inclusivism, technocratic competence, and moderation" as the core elements of his campaign. Jokowi's technocratic populism was seen as in direct contrast to the "traditional populism" of Prabowo. Prabowo attempted to mobilise the rural poor and right-wing Islam through his confrontational, "textbook populism" modelled after the political style of other populist leaders such as Hugo Chavez and Thaksin Shinawatra (Mietzner, 2015: 21). This characterisation of Jokowi and Prabowo led to a consensus that the 2014 presidential election was a battle between two populists. As for Jokowi, his relatively ordinary background as a slum-born furniture maker from Solo was considered a major factor of his popularity among the marginalised. Many voters saw Jokowi as one of *them* – a member of the "governed". Jokowi was also seen as a clean candidate with no ties to the New Order elites, thus free of corruption and nepotism. Meanwhile, some scholars took interest in the national prominence of a former small-city mayor and analysed

Jokowi's populism in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial elections. Hamid (2014: 106) has argued that Jokowi's populist appeal successfully resonated with Jakartans disillusioned with their government in 2012. Jokowi's other personal attributes such as his ethnicity and religious orientation were also found to have affected his electoral results in 2012 (Miichi, 2014).

While leader-centred explanations of Jokowi's rise have undoubtedly contributed to our current understanding of Jokowi's rise, we should question if categorising Jokowi as a figure with a certain set of identities gets us far enough in our analysis. I agree that, at first glance, Jokowi's image as a political outsider with no ties to the existing elites seemingly fits the common profile of a populist. However, as Mietzner (2015) himself tries to differentiate Jokowi from hitherto observed populists in Asia, Jokowi's actual political performance prior to his incumbency did not parallel that of figures typically described as populist leaders. Jokowi neither employed anti-foreign rhetoric nor vociferously attacked the status quo to rouse the masses. Rather, he was known for his pluralist platform and embracing ethno-religious diversity and democratic ideals, well demonstrated by his choice to run with Ahok,<sup>3</sup> a Christian-Chinese politician, in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial elections. Granted, Jokowi's unique leadership style may deserve a new characterisation of its own, rather than simply being treated as a variant of populism – an already ambiguous concept.

Furthermore, explaining Jokowi's rise through a populist lens limits an otherwise dynamic analysis of the intricate relationships formed between political leaders and voters. This becomes particularly problematic when it comes to analysing a nation as heterogeneous as Indonesia. The variegated nature in which voters respond to political leaders is difficult to capture under a populist framework because it tends to shed light on the most visible or extreme dichotomies among voters. Hence, it is necessary to revisit the pervasive view of Jokowi as a populist and further delve into the deeper origins of his popular appeal and upward political mobility.

### *Society-Centred Explanations*

Society-centred explanations of Jokowi's rise have mainly analysed the role of social movements, social media, and grassroots activism in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial elections and the 2014 presidential election (Sefsani and Ziegenhain, 2015; Suaedy, 2014; Tomsa and Setijadi, 2018; Lay, 2018). To begin with, Suaedy (2014) has discussed the significance of "partisan" social movements in the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial elections, treating it as a turning point in Indonesia's history of social movements. According to Suaedy (2014: 28), good reputation, voluntary participation of voters, continued monitoring of candidates by volunteers, and a congenial relationship between volunteers and local governments served as crucial factors of the Jokowi–Ahok pair's victory in 2012. Tomsa and Setijadi (2018: 558) also assessed the type of campaign activism that elected Jokowi and Ahok in 2012 as meaningful alterations to the usual money politics and professional consultancy-dominated elections in Indonesia.

Similar assessments of Jokowi's campaign in the 2014 presidential election followed, as Sefsani and Ziegenhain (2015) found the enormous support of civil society

organisations and volunteer groups (*relawan*) as a crucial factor of Jokowi's victory in 2014. In a case study of volunteer organisations in Surakarta that worked for Jokowi's presidential campaign, Lay (2018) has also argued that Indonesia's volunteerism has become an integral part of Indonesian political processes. As such, this group of scholars has characterised Jokowi's rise in 2014 as a case of bottom-up change brought about by democratic-minded citizens, non-governmental organisations, and volunteers. According to their analysis, Jokowi's transparent and citizen-friendly track record appealed to a public frustrated by a corrupt and unresponsive regime, making him an attractive candidate. While their analysis also finds "non-democratic" aspects involved in Jokowi's campaign, it is clear that they cast Indonesian democracy in a more optimistic light.

However, scepticism towards such explanations of Jokowi's rise has also been expressed. For instance, Hurriyah (2019) has called the democratic role of civil society in the 2014 presidential election a "myth", cautioning scholars from painting a rosy picture of Indonesian democracy. She contends that volunteers not only failed to constantly monitor Jokowi after his election but also exhibited opportunistic behaviour by asking for government posts after the election. Hurriyah (2019) sees the dysfunction of political parties, rather than the spontaneous will for democratic development, as the main reason that fuelled volunteer support for Jokowi. She certainly points to an important dynamic that leads us to rethink the implications of Jokowi's rise for Indonesian democracy. Still, her criticism, at its root, returns to the broad debate on post-Suharto Indonesian politics – a debate that has yet to pay sufficient attention to the role of urbanisation. From this particular standpoint, the problem with society-centred explanations is that it has not sufficiently analysed how Indonesia's urbanisation changed different segments of Indonesian society. For instance, how do the urban youth, the urban middle class, and the urban poor perceive Indonesian politics? How does the concentration of resources and growth in urban areas, namely Jakarta, affect perceptions of public institutions and political leaders? What other possible factors fuelled such widespread excitement for a figure like Jokowi?

### *The Need for a New, "Urban" Framework to Analyse and Explain Jokowi's Rise*

At this point, it is worth noting that existing explanations of Jokowi's rise have been revised by their very upholders or challenged by others in light of Jokowi's "authoritarian turn". Only a couple months into his incumbency, Jokowi disappointed citizens as he began to make several political compromises. Jokowi prioritised economic development over anti-corruption efforts and human rights improvement; his failure to spearhead democratic reform led to plummeting approval ratings in 2015. Then-Jakarta governor Ahok's imprisonment for blasphemy in 2017 undermined Jokowi's pluralist platform, exemplifying the alarming rise of ethno-religious extremism and polarisation in Indonesia. Accordingly, the literature began to focus on Jokowi's authoritarian turn, developmentalism, and overall democratic decline in Indonesia (Muhtadi, 2015; Power, 2018; Warburton, 2016).

However, the question remains: why did Jokowi, as opposed to any other figure, rise to power in 2014? If we were to provide a more coherent narrative of Jokowi's political career, including both his ascendancy and incumbency, what would be the most suitable approach? In my view, such questions can only be answered by further analysing the manifold dynamics that contributed to Jokowi's initial rise to presidency. For this reason, I propose a new analytical framework that draws from existing findings in urban scholarship and apply it to Jokowi's rise. Given the scale of urbanisation, decentralisation, and growth of media in Indonesia, it would be reasonable to suspect that they played a role in a recent case of Indonesian electoral politics. Such an approach will allow us to identify additional dynamics that contributed to Jokowi's rise and help us better answer the question of "Why Jokowi?"

## Capturing Indonesia's Urbanisation

Before presenting my analytical framework, it is necessary to define the key terms in my analysis. To start with, the terms "urban" and "urbanisation" have been notoriously difficult to define, entailing much scholarly debate. Generally, urbanisation has been understood as "the shift in population from rural to urban settlements (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014: 4)". However, many scholars have found Western notions of urbanisation, including the idea of an urban–rural dichotomy, to be problematic in an Asian context. Focusing on the regions of East and Southeast Asia, Terry McGee (1991: 7) famously coined the term *desakota* to refer to "regions of an intense mixture of agricultural and nonagricultural activities that often stretch along corridors between large cities". Most importantly, this model takes into account the blurred boundaries between urban and rural areas in East and Southeast Asia. Thus, a definition of urbanisation that presumes a strict divide between urban and rural (or non-urban) areas would be inadequate. As a result, I adhere to McGranahan and Satterthwaite's (2014: 4) definition, which considers urbanisation as the rate at which the urban population share increases.

Notwithstanding the substantial traction the *desakota* model has gained in urban studies, census data of urbanisation tend to rely on only a few factors such as population size and/or density, a practice that poses many challenges for capturing levels of urbanisation (McGranahan and Satterthwaite, 2014). For instance, the 2010 census data by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik) uses population density, reliance on agricultural activities, and access to facilities to classify urban and rural settlements. Nonetheless, the practical limitations of capturing the blurred boundaries between the urban and non-urban in censuses or large-scale surveys should be recognised and reconciled through scholarly contextualisation. In my analysis, I rely on McGee's notion of *desakota* to conceptualise the urban and non-urban in Indonesia. From this standpoint, the urban would not only include the core city but would also include surrounding areas, often referred to as peri-urban areas, that can be reached via transportation or are under the influence of the core city.

Here, it is important to note that Indonesia's urban areas show significant variegation. This is in part a result of unequal development and perpetual inter-regional inequalities,



illustrated by the disproportionate growth of certain urban areas such as the Jakarta Metropolitan Area or the Surabaya Metropolitan Area. Given the sheer size and scale of these areas compared to those of other urban areas in the nation, it follows that Indonesia's urban can neither be presented as a coherent entity nor reduced to a single variable. For the sake of analysis, however, I resort to the term "urban areas" throughout this article to broadly refer to administrative jurisdictions in Indonesia that have been officially granted urban status. Yet, this is not to say that urban areas can be demarcated by clear boundaries; I acknowledge that they are venues constantly shaped by both tangible and intangible forces. The ways by which I envision the urban to play a role in Indonesian politics will become clearer in the next section as I will discuss specific links between urbanisation and politics.

Other terms that require clarification in my analysis are the "urban middle class" and the "urban poor". Strictly speaking, the urban middle class has long been in existence in Indonesia, as its origins date back to the Dutch colonial era (Dick, 1985; Hoogervorst and Nordholt, 2017). As Dick (1985: 71) points out, the urban middle class originates from the intelligentsia during the late colonial era and older groups of Chinese and Muslim traders. However, in my analysis, the urban middle class and the urban poor refer to socio-economic groups whose recent growth was induced by Indonesia's economic growth and rapid urbanisation in the last three decades or so. I recognise that the concept of the middle class in Indonesia has long been the subject of heated debate, but inquiring into its existence and identity is beyond the scope of this article. Thus, I adapt an existing classification of the middle class and the poor in Indonesia set forth by the World Bank (2019).

Among various definitions of the middle class, the World Bank uses an economic security-based definition. I deem this definition as having particular merits in light of the socio-economic realities in Indonesia's urban areas: the informal economy is expanding, and economic vulnerability is increasing. In its 2019 report, the World Bank distinguishes between the aspiring middle class and the middle class. The main difference between the two is that the former has less than a 10 per cent chance of being poor the next year while more than a 10 per cent chance of being (economically) vulnerable the next year, while the latter has less than a 10 per cent chance of being vulnerable the next year (World Bank, 2019: 88). According to this categorisation, in 2016, 20 per cent of the Indonesian population were considered as having middle class status, while approximately 45 per cent belonged to the aspiring middle class. The numerical standard that divides the middle class and the aspiring middle class is as follows: the economic security line starts at a consumption of 1.2 million rupiah per month, which is equivalent to about US\$ 7.75 a day (World Bank, 2019: 86). As for the poor, they are defined as those below the national poverty line, which is a monthly consumption of 350,000 rupiah per person (World Bank, 2019: 86). As I focus on mainly two socio-economic groups, the urban middle class and the urban poor, I use the term "urban middle class" to refer to both the aspiring middle class and the middle class that reside in Indonesia's urban areas. In the same manner, the "urban poor" refers to the poor that reside in Indonesia's urban areas.

## **Urbanisation and Politics in Indonesia: Towards a New Analytical Framework**

In this section, I propose an urban analytical framework that can help analyse and explain Jokowi's rise. The three factors that uphold it – urban-led national economic growth, decentralisation, and Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics – reflect my organisation of some of the most core issues that previous urban scholarship has addressed. Such an organisation of existing insights into an analytical framework will help construct a coherent vision of how exactly the urban, or in my analysis, urbanisation, has contributed to Jokowi's rise to political power. Indeed, there are numerous other factors that link urbanisation and politics in Indonesia, allowing the urban to exercise influence on politics. I would like to note that this article takes a step towards devising a new analytical framework. That is, it calls for a recognition of the issues discussed in urban scholarship as potential variables in the analysis of recent political phenomena in Indonesia, including the case of Jokowi's rise.

### *Urban-Led National Economic Growth*

Indonesia's urban areas have long been at the forefront of Indonesia's many developments, one of them being its immense economic growth in the last three decades. Focusing on the fact that this period of economic growth coincides with the period of rapid urbanisation in Indonesia, Hassan and Pitoyo (2017) have identified a positive causal relationship between regional levels of urbanisation in Indonesia and regional levels of economic development. One factor that can help explain this causal relationship is the enormous amount of FDI that Indonesia attracted since the late twentieth century. According to Sjöholm (2016: 2), FDI in Indonesia grew by more than 800 per cent between 1989 and 1996, amounting to more than US\$6 billion. As a result of the 1997 Asian financial crisis, FDI inflows dipped between 1998 and 2003 but rose again in 2004 (Sjöholm, 2016: 2). FDI inflows have consistently accounted for more than 20 per cent of Indonesia's GDP since 2010 (OECD, 2020), attesting to their importance for Indonesia's economy. FDI inflows are significant not only for economic growth but also for infrastructural development, especially in rapidly urbanising nations like Indonesia. Public infrastructure is key to sustaining a burgeoning urban population and further stimulating economic growth. However, FDI inflows in Indonesia have been polarised in terms of geographical location (Fitriandi et al., 2014). Through a panel analysis of Indonesia's FDI data between 1990 and 2011, Fitriandi et al. (2014) have shown that Java Island, the most urbanised region in Indonesia, attracted 77 per cent of FDI inflows while Jakarta alone attracted 33 per cent. This concentration of FDI inflows in Java Island explains its immense growth, which occurred at the expense of other regions (outer Java). Such a concentration of resources in a few urban areas has perpetuated highly unequal regional development in Indonesia. In other words, Indonesia's model of urban-led economic growth has consequences for growth and redistribution – issues with strong political implications at the national level.

At the same time, the core city of Jakarta and its adjacent areas (known as a whole as Jakarta Metropolitan Area, JMA, or, locally, as Jabodetabek) suffer from diseconomies of scale, while its environmental degradation, disaster vulnerability, and unsustainability are becoming unignorable challenges. For instance, Jakarta's traffic congestion costs the city approximately US\$ 6.5 billion every year (World Bank, 2016). In 2014, flooding affected 17 per cent of JMA, displacing around 64,000 people (World Bank, 2016). These statistics suggest that the explosive growth of Jakarta and other highly urbanised areas has spearheaded Indonesia's national growth early on, but it has now become a double-edged sword for Indonesia. Furthermore, the precarity of labour and overall economic vulnerability have increased in Indonesia's urban areas (World Bank, 2019), mostly due to large-scale economic restructuring following Indonesia's market liberalisation and transition into an export-oriented economy. Urban areas in Java island have constantly demonstrated their strength in drawing in-migration from outer Java (Hassan and Pitoyo, 2017), a flow that contributes to the constant supply of labour to the informal economy in Java island's urban areas.

Such a trend has historically been associated with the increase of urban informal settlements such as *kampungs*,<sup>4</sup> which contrasts with the increase in gated communities or luxurious housing built for the upper and middle classes. In many of Indonesia's urban areas, those who cannot access or afford proper housing are being denied access to the most basic services such as electricity, clean running water, and plumbing, let alone healthcare and education. Moreover, this dichotomy in employment and housing has led to palpable forms of discrimination and segregation, giving rise to new forms of social stratification in Indonesia. The creation of polarising class identities has in turn rendered Indonesia's urban areas as spaces in which different socio-economic groups emerge and compete for the advancement of their preferences and interests. In sum, regional inequalities and social stratification induced by Indonesia's urban-led economic growth have laid the foundations for political contention among different regions as well as emerging socio-economic groups in Indonesia.

### ***Big Bang Decentralisation and Pemekaran***

Towards the end of the twentieth century, Indonesia experienced extreme political turmoil, one caused by the fall of Suharto. This led to two major transformations in Indonesia: first, the promulgation of regional autonomy and, second, fiscal decentralisation through the passage of Laws 22/1999 and 25/1999 (Firman et al., 2007). Indeed, the concept of decentralisation, as in the transference of certain central state powers and resources to local administrative jurisdictions, was not novel to Indonesia (Nordholt and van Klinken, 2007). In fact, the Suharto regime endorsed decentralisation in the 1970s; however, this was largely a strategy to improve public sector performance without relegating central rule and had the adverse effect of increasing local dependency on the central state (Silver, 2003). It was thus only after Suharto's fall that Indonesia experienced its so-called Big Bang decentralisation, which aligned closer to the model championed by the international donor community.

Still, such a donor-driven model of democratic decentralisation clashed with local contexts of power and authority. Devas (1997) has argued that for Indonesians who saw power and authority as rooted in a single source, the idea of fragmenting power was puzzling. Similar tendencies have been captured by more recent scholarship: Firman (2014: 218) has argued that local governments tend to rule their own “kingdom of authority” and perceive decentralisation as a mere empowerment of local governments rather than a division of both power and responsibilities at multiple levels. Here, we need to pay particular attention to how the conflict between existing socio-political contexts and the provisions of a new administrative hierarchy structured the initial establishment of Indonesia’s urban institutions.

As Devas (1997) and Firman et al. (2007) suggest, post-colonial discourses of national identity and constant fear of national disintegration were the actual factors that precipitated decentralisation in Indonesia from 2001. As mentioned earlier, only in 1999 were regional autonomy and fiscal decentralisation promulgated in Indonesia, meaning that less than two years of planning went into Indonesia’s mass-scale decentralisation. Without sufficient legal, fiscal, and administrative planning, Indonesia’s initial period of decentralisation was marked with confusion and the unprecedented phenomenon of *pemekaran*. *Pemekaran*, meaning “blooming” or “blossoming” in Bahasa, refers to the rapid proliferation of municipalities (*kota*) and districts (*kabupaten*). In fact, the number of municipalities and districts outside the metropolitan capital area of Jakarta increased from 292 in 1998 to 434 in 2004 (Fitriani et al., 2005: 58).

Referring to *pemekaran* as “administrative involution,” Nordholt and van Klinken (2007: 19) have noted that the devolution of power from the centre was accompanied by an “endlessly repeated subdivision [of districts]”. Fitriani et al. (2005: 66) have identified the motivations for the creation of these new regions as follows: administrative dispersion, preference for homogeneity, fiscal spoils, and bureaucratic and political rent seeking. This implies that many of the new municipalities or districts were intentional creations driven by private interests or ethno-religious cleavages. As a result, local jurisdictions that were begot by *pemekaran* often experienced difficulties equipping themselves with well-trained officials, effective institutional arrangements, adequate infrastructure, and strategies to alleviate novel ethno-religious tensions (Diprose, 2009). With a lack of sufficient planning at both central and local levels, Indonesia’s newly created local jurisdictions tended to suffer from weak institutions, fiscal mismanagement, and inconsistent policy implementation.

*Pemekaran* had ramifications not only for urban institutions but also for the very process of urban development. Indonesia’s urbanisation continued to occur at an incredibly rapid pace, while remaining highly oligopolistic. A handful of prominent conglomerates nurtured under Suharto’s New Order dominated the private sector – in specific, private property and real estate development in Indonesia’s sprawling urban areas. Albeit facing challenges due to Suharto’s fall and the 1997 Asian financial crisis, many conglomerates survived and remain a formidable force in Indonesia’s economy and politics. Moreover, the long-standing lineage of tight relationships between private property developers and bureaucrats weakened the power of formal institutions and marginalised

the public sphere from urban development (Kenichiro, 2015). Private–public partnerships in urban development have been negotiated and established through informal channels and personal connections ever since (Winarso and Firman, 2002), giving rise to a “shadow state” that orchestrates urban governance and development. In addition, Indonesia’s experiment with decentralisation has been criticised for its failure to improve living conditions for the poor despite its very intention to do so (Ito, 2011) as well as its role in localised corruption (Alfada, 2019). As such, administrative fragmentation and parochialism have hampered implementation of transparent and accountable governance. It has also made inter-local-governmental co-ordination difficult, posing an additional challenge for local governments faced with trans-local problems such as pollution and climate change.

To conclude, the consequences of decentralisation, most notably *pemekaran*, suggest that Indonesia’s urban hierarchy is characterised by: first, extreme administrative fragmentation, which entails haphazard policymaking and inefficient policy implementation and, second, regional parochialism, which prevents effective inter-urban co-operation in tackling trans-local issues commonly faced by local urban institutions. In this context, it would be reasonable to argue that the relative lack of satisfactory urban governance has emerged as a factor of public grievances in Indonesia, creating a thirst for good urban governance.

### *Jakarta-Centrism in Indonesian Media and Politics*

Jakarta has long been the centre of Indonesian society, politics, economy, and culture. Its past counterpart, Batavia, was cultivated as the capital of the Dutch East Indies, serving as the centre of governance and commerce since the seventeenth century. Jakarta’s dominance has even further increased in the modern era, due to the trend of urban-led national economic growth as previously delineated. Jakarta continues to be the primate city of Indonesia, as its population is more than twice as large as that of Surabaya, Indonesia’s second-largest city. In fact, since 1950, Jakarta’s population has always remained larger than that of the second, third, and fourth-largest city in Indonesia combined (Rukmana, 2008: 101).<sup>5</sup> This illustrates the extreme dominance of Jakarta in Indonesia’s urban hierarchy and the extent to which urban activities are concentrated in Jakarta. Given such a concentration of resources, infrastructure, and institutions in Jakarta, it is not difficult to imagine its socio-political importance.

On another note, existing analyses of Jakarta and other “world cities” in Asia such as Bangkok, Manila, and Seoul tend to see the growth of such cities through the trope of neoliberal urbanism. Historically, they have often been analysed from the standpoint of (international) political economy as some cities have grown so large as to become emblems of their respective countries or function as individual economic units in an era of worldwide inter-urban competition. Yet, Jakarta-centrism in Indonesia’s economic growth should not simply be understood as a build-up for Jakarta’s insertion into an international economic chain. It should also be understood as an important shift in how Indonesia, as a nation-state, is perceived by its citizens in relation to its capital and

worldly recognised city, Jakarta. For instance, how does the recent development of media and telecommunications shape the mentality of an increasingly urban Indonesian electorate? How are socio-political issues and events represented in Indonesian media? What gets represented? How might this affect public perceptions and electoral outcomes?

A scholar who has directly engaged with the above questions is Tapsell (2015). In his work, Tapsell (2015: 34) has stated that around 70 per cent of national news stations cover stories from Jakarta, with more than half of such stories coming from Jakarta. He expounds that data collection regarding audiences are based on a survey of only the top ten largest cities in Indonesia. This leads editors and news producers to view such ratings as an important indicator of their performance; there is thus an incentive for them to produce content relevant to Jakarta or, presumably, other big cities. We can see how the concentration of not only resources but also media coverage intensifies the centric position of Jakarta in Indonesia's urban hierarchy and in the minds of Indonesians. In short, Indonesia's current pattern of news production simultaneously reflects and reinforces Jakarta-centrism.

In addition to the mechanism of news production that amplifies the importance of Jakarta, Indonesia's incredible geographical diversity also contributes to Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media and politics. As the world's largest archipelago with a population of over 273 million as of 2020, Indonesia is an entity that defies clear understanding even for its own denizens. In a nation as large and diverse as Indonesia, citizens would inevitably rely on certain heuristics to make sense of the nation's daily workings and evaluate the status quo. Jakarta's historical prominence, in addition to the mechanism of Indonesian news production, makes Jakarta a powerful heuristic that Indonesians rely on when grasping socio-political realities of their nation. In other words, urban and socio-political processes observed in Jakarta receive national attention and are closely scrutinised. In this sense, the types of problems observed in Jakarta are perceived as imminent challenges that formal institutions must tackle. This signifies an important shift in the political decision-making of Indonesian voters. That is, we can expect Jakarta, as a national stage of politics, to influence public perceptions and evaluation of political leaders in one way or another.

## **An Urban Explanation of Jokowi's Rise**

The main ideas worked into my analytical framework are: first, regional inequalities and social stratification induced by Indonesia's urban-led economic growth have laid the foundations for inter-regional and inter-group contentions in Indonesia; second, decentralisation and administrative fragmentation have led to the formation of new types of grievances, creating a desire for good urban governance; and, third, we can expect the prominence of certain urban areas such as Jakarta in media and politics to shape public perceptions and evaluation of political leaders.

Building on these core ideas, I will now examine whether my analytical framework can be applied to the case of Jokowi's rise. To this end, I present and further analyse

existing empirical data and research findings that illustrate how different dimensions of Indonesia's urbanisation can be associated with Jokowi's rise. By doing so, I also put forth an urban explanation of Jokowi's rise, complementing existing explanations.

### *The Urban as a New Pathway to Power*

First and foremost, I will provide evidence for Jokowi's appeal to the urban middle class by presenting the voting data of the 2014 presidential election (Table 1) and data that indicate gross regional domestic product (GRDP) per capita and regional levels of urbanisation (Table 2).

As Table 2 shows, Jokowi won in seven of the nine provinces classified as the most urbanised provinces in Indonesia. It may lead one to wonder why Jokowi failed to earn stronger support in Jawa Barat (West Java) and Banten, the two provinces adjacent to Jakarta. This can be explained by the fact that both provinces were Prabowo's electoral strongholds due to their large Islamic majority. Especially in West Java, conservative Islam pledged robust support for Prabowo (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2014: 358–359), leading Jokowi to lose by a margin of 20 per cent in West Java and 15 per cent in Banten. This is in line with previous analyses that have confirmed the role of religious identity in Indonesia's elections (Miichi, 2014) and reflects the co-existence of existing and emerging cleavages in Indonesia's recent elections.

Another pattern that we can notice from Table 2 is that Jokowi won in every province that is classified as having a high GRDP per capita, suggesting a potentially strong link among regional economic performance, levels of urbanisation, and voter preferences for Jokowi. Here, it would be apt to acknowledge the findings of Aji and Dartanto (2018), who analysed village-level voting data of the 2014 presidential election to determine whether economic voting took place. In their work, they found the proportion of poor people, the level of access to the village economy (availability of banks), and infrastructure conditions (condition of paved roads and markets) as explaining their hypothesis that economic voting took place in the 2014 election (Aji and Dartanto, 2018: 134). They emphasise that their variables are more tangible and more easily observed by villagers, playing a significant role in the villagers' evaluation of the villages' economic situation and electoral choice. They conclude that the middle class tended to choose Jokowi because they positively evaluated their current economic situations and expected a Jokowi government to maintain the status quo. Combining their findings and my analysis of Table 2, it can be argued that urban-led national economic growth, which tends to lead to higher infrastructural development and economic growth in urban areas, explains how Jokowi appealed to the urban middle class.

At the same time, we must not forget that urban-led national economic growth has also led to negative consequences such as widening income inequality and inter-regional disparities. These issues have been exacerbated by Indonesia's extreme administrative fragmentation and the relative lack of effective urban planning and governance, aggravating existing inequalities and fuelling the creation of polarised class identities in Indonesia's urban areas. New socio-economic groups whose identities are powerfully

**Table 1.** Percentage of Valid Votes for the First Round of Presidential and Vice-Presidential Election in Indonesia, 2014 (By Province).

Province	Percentage of votes earned		Total
	Prabowo Subianto– Hatta Rajasa	Joko Widodo– Muhammad Jusuf Kalla	
Aceh	54.39	45.61	100.00
Sumatera Utara (North Sumatra)	44.76	55.24	100.00
Sumatera Barat (West Sumatra)	76.92	23.08	100.00
Riau	50.12	49.88	100.00
Kepulauan Riau (Riau Islands)	40.37	59.63	100.00
Jambi	49.25	50.75	100.00
Sumatera Selatan (South Sumatra)	51.26	48.74	100.00
Kepulauan Bangka Belitung (Bangka Belitung Islands)	32.74	67.26	100.00
Bengkulu	45.27	54.73	100.00
Lampung	46.93	53.07	100.00
Daerah Khusus Ibukota Jakarta (DKI Jakarta)	46.92	53.08	100.00
Jawa Barat (West Java)	59.78	40.22	100.00
Banten	57.10	42.90	100.00
Jawa Tengah (Central Java)	33.35	66.65	100.00
Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DI Yogyakarta)	44.19	55.81	100.00
Jawa Timur (East Java)	46.83	53.17	100.00
Bali	28.58	71.42	100.00
Nusa Tenggara Barat (West Nusa Tenggara)	72.45	27.55	100.00
Nusa Tenggara Timur (East Nusa Tenggara)	34.08	65.92	100.00
Kalimantan Barat (West Kalimantan)	39.62	60.38	100.00
Kalimantan Tengah (Central Kalimantan)	40.21	59.79	100.00
Kalimantan Selatan (South Kalimantan)	50.05	49.95	100.00
Kalimantan Timur (East Kalimantan)	36.62	63.38	100.00
Kalimantan Utara (North Kalimantan) <sup>a</sup>	-	-	100.00
Sulawesi Utara (North Sulawesi)	46.12	53.88	100.00
Gorontalo	63.10	36.90	100.00
Sulawesi Tengah (Central Sulawesi)	45.17	54.83	100.00
Sulawesi Selatan (South Sulawesi)	28.57	71.43	100.00
Sulawesi Barat (West Sulawesi)	26.63	73.37	100.00

(Continued)



**Table 1.** Continued

Province	Percentage of votes earned		Total
	Prabowo Subianto– Hatta Rajasa	Joko Widodo– Muhammad Jusuf Kalla	
Sulawesi Tenggara (Southeast Sulawesi)	45.10	54.90	100.00
Maluku	49.48	50.52	100.00
Maluku Utara (North Maluku)	54.45	45.55	100.00
Papua	32.37	67.63	100.00
Papua Barat (West Papua)	27.51	72.49	100.00
Luar Negeri/Overseas	46.26	53.74	100.00
Indonesia	46.85	53.15	100.00

Source: Statistics Indonesia (2014) Statistics Indonesia (2014).

Note: <sup>a</sup>The data were included in Kalimantan Timur province.

shaped by their place in urban areas are in turn shaping urban areas through political expressions of their desires and grievances. It is in this context that I argue that the emergence of new socio-economic groups provides room for local politicians to rise to power, even without direct ties to traditional sources of power. The increase in the absolute number of municipalities or districts that can be classified as urban and the expansion of the middle class signifies the surfacing of new desires and grievances in Indonesia's socio-political landscape. Jokowi's political career, which began at Solo, coincides with the period in which such changes were occurring. Put differently, Jokowi did not suddenly rise to prominence but had been rising to prominence, by climbing up the steps of Indonesia's urban hierarchy.

Jokowi grew up in the slums of Solo, ran a successful business there, and later served as mayor of Solo for seven years. He is part of a generation that witnessed the rise and fall of Suharto's New Order and the extraordinary growth of Indonesia's cities. His knowledge of the types of inequality and informality that characterise Indonesia's urban areas and his social proximity to the Indonesian people became a valuable asset for him. This greatly shaped how Jokowi approached urban planning and policymaking during his days as the mayor of Solo, and later as the governor of Jakarta. It can also be argued that Jokowi's personal experiences with Indonesia's urban hierarchy helped him establish a governance model that directly addressed public grievances towards existing institutions. Bunnell et al. (2013: 858) well delineate the feats that Jokowi established as the mayor of Solo: peaceful relocation of street vendors, expansion of public, green space, investment in traditional markets and small businesses, and encouragement of popular participation in urban planning. Such feats led to the impressive re-election of Jokowi as mayor of Solo in 2010; Jokowi collected 90 per cent of the votes in 2010, an incredible leap from a mere 37 per cent that he collected in 2005 (Bunnell et al., 2018).

**Table 2.** Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP) per capita and Levels of Urbanisation, 2010.

Level of urbanisation	GRDP per capita		
	High	Medium	Low
High (50%–70%, with the exception of Riau Islands, whose level lies between 80% and 90%)	<b>Jakarta<sup>a</sup></b> <b>Riau Islands</b> <b>East Kalimantan</b>	West Java Banten <b>Bali</b> <b>Yogyakarta</b>	
Medium (41%–50%)	<b>Riau</b> <b>Bangka Belitung Islands</b>	<b>North Sumatera</b> West Sumatera South Sumatera <b>Jawa Cetr</b> <b>East Jawa</b> <b>South Kalimantan</b> <b>South Sulawesi</b> <b>North Sulawesi</b>	West Nusa Tenggara <b>Maluku</b> <b>West Sulawesi</b>
Low (30%–40%)	<b>Jambi</b> <b>Papua</b> <b>West Papua</b>	Aceh <b>Lampung</b> West Kalimantan <b>Central Kalimantan</b> <b>South East Sulawesi</b>	<b>Bengkulu</b> <b>East Nusa Tenggara</b> Gorontalo North Maluku <b>Central Sulawesi</b>

Source: Adapted from Hassan and Pitoyo (2017).

Note: <sup>a</sup>Provinces in bold text are provinces in which Jokowi won more than 50 per cent of votes.

Furthermore, Jokowi’s rise also serves as evidence of the fact that the urban has come to assume an integral position in electoral politics. Jokowi is the first politician with direct ties to Indonesia’s urban areas. Previous presidents, including the democratic-minded Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, were all involved in national politics prior to their presidency, either by serving in office or being closely related to prominent figures like Sukarno or Suharto. It was Jokowi’s successful track record and popularity that caught the eye of PDI-P and resulted in Jokowi’s nomination for the governorship of Jakarta. Once again surprising the public by an unexpected victory, Jokowi focused on handling the most urgent issues such as housing, flooding, and traffic congestion. It is important to shed light on Jokowi’s political journey because it shows that Jokowi’s political career mattered and appealed to the public.

In a nutshell, Jokowi’s appeal to an urban electorate can be explained by, first, positive voter evaluations of current economic performance that were grounded on tangible factors such as the availability of certain infrastructures and, second, his political career and governance model that communicates his understanding of Indonesia’s urban hierarchy and demonstrates his capacity to address the most pressing grievances of an urban electorate. Jokowi’s rise to political power in an urbanising, economically developing,

and decentralised Indonesia may suggest that the urban has become a new pathway to power.

### *The Urban as a Political Stage*

Although Tapsell (2015) saw Jakarta-centrism in Indonesian media as an extension of oligarchic politics in Indonesia, it is also true that Jokowi greatly benefited from this mechanism of news production. The media played an essential role in amplifying and advertising Jokowi's political performance to a national audience. With no strong ties to existing networks of political elites, Jokowi needed an independent platform he could operate on to make himself known if he were to achieve national prominence. Jokowi achieved this in mainly two ways. First, the transformation of Solo was narrativised as a "model for urban learning" (Bunnell et al., 2018: 1070) both nationally and internationally, conferring "local legitimacy on his mayoral leadership" (Bunnell et al., 2018: 1065). His efforts in Solo were recognised as a practice of good governance, earning him a good reputation within and beyond Indonesia. This analysis of Jokowi's upward political mobility suggests that the rise of an international network of both big and relatively smaller cities has come to play a role in national politics. This can be interpreted as a sign that there are now "global" factors which shape local and national configurations of power and resources in Indonesia. Second, Jokowi's success in Solo was documented and understood as evidence of his ability to transform other cities in Indonesia. As Bunnell et al. (2018: 1066) aptly put it:

Jokowi's very electability as governor suggests a belief on the part of Jakarta's electorate that the(ir) city could benefit from his small town accomplishments – highly significant in a country where metropolitan Jakarta has long been imagined as the leading edge of national transformation.

In addition, Jokowi's pluralist and community-oriented leadership enjoyed extensive media coverage, serving as a crucial component of his appeal. Rather than making blanket statements about diversity and development, Jokowi demonstrated a real commitment to improving the living conditions of Indonesia's urban areas. Jokowi, in terms of administrative competence, had already built a high level of credibility among the Indonesian public. This had the unintended effect of his past policies and platform being interpreted in different ways by different constituencies. For instance, for the urban poor, Jokowi's *peaceful* relocation of street vendors and informal settlements was an assurance that their livelihoods would be protected. For the urban middle class, Jokowi's peaceful *relocation* of street vendors and informal settlements was a promise that the urban would be kept as a beautified and clean space, free of street vendors and informal settlements. Jokowi's engagement with issues such as traffic congestion and flooding had similar effects, as Jokowi was an administrator looking to improve the general living conditions of the people rather than a politician looking to improve his ratings among a specific constituency.

Among the urban middle class, the younger generation was also identified as more likely to support Jokowi than Prabowo, as Tapsell (2015) points to the existence of a host of pro-Jokowi social media users. Tapsell (2015: 39) describes the typical profile of the Indonesian “prod-user (a media user who produces content as well as consumes it)” as “largely an urban, middle-class Jakartan youth who is actively participating in the production of campaign material, and sharing alternative forms of locally produced political content on numerous social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Path”. In this sense, Jokowi was operating on a dual platform with the urban as his main source of power. Jokowi demonstrated good governance with Indonesia’s urban as his political stage, while his appeal to the urban youth provided him with a virtual platform that operated independently from existing political circles.

## **Conclusion**

Jokowi’s rise is a phenomenon that has already been widely studied. However, past scholarly treatments of it have limited our understanding of its implications for Indonesian society and politics. By applying a new, urban analytical framework to the case of Jokowi’s rise, I have shown that there is much more to Jokowi’s rise that requires further analysis. In particular, I have demonstrated that Jokowi’s rise was not only boosted by his own electability but also by Indonesia’s recent experience with urban-led national economic growth, decentralisation, and Jakarta-centrism in media and politics. This complements existing explanations of Jokowi’s rise by inquiring into the long-term conditions that allowed for Jokowi’s rise rather than reaffirming the role of short-term factors. If we understand electoral results as concentrated expressions of accumulated grievances and desires and ultimately as consequences of complex political decision-making, Jokowi’s rise and victory in the 2014 Indonesian presidential election indicates that urbanisation has come to play an integral role in Indonesian politics. As many others have already written, it is clear that urbanisation will continue to be an important factor in politics, as urban areas, however defined, continue to serve as centres of national and international socio-political processes. It is thus imperative that we pay further attention to urban processes and make an explicit effort to link them to socio-political processes.

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## Notes

1. In this article, I rely on Mudde's (2004: 543) notion of populism: a thin-centred ideology that separates society into two antagonistic blocs - the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite" - and argues that politics be an "expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people".
2. McGranahan and Satterthwaite (2014: 4) contend that urbanisation is best measured by the urban population share, referring to the rate at which the urban population share increases.
3. Ahok is the nickname of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, who served as the deputy governor of Jakarta from 2012 and later, as governor of Jakarta after Jokowi's election in 2014. Before becoming Jokowi's running mate, Ahok served as a legislator in the Indonesian People's Representative Council (DPR) and regent of East Belitung.
4. See Silver (2008) for a detailed overview of the history of *kampung* development in Indonesia.
5. See Rukmana (2008) for detailed figures.

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