

# President Subianto's Cabinet Appointments: The Role of Party Politics and Candidate Selection in Indonesia

*By Dr Garima Sarkar*

Indonesia's new Cabinet formation under President Prabowo Subianto highlights both the inclusiveness and challenges of coalition-led governance, revealing a political environment heavily influenced by elite networks and patronage in party politics. This piece explores how democratising candidate selection in parties might pave the way for a more responsive and accountable government, aligning political appointments more closely with the public interest.

Indonesia's political environment has long been characterised by coalition-building, a necessity given its multi-party system and proportional representation electoral framework. Party politics in this context is defined by a blend of cooperation and competition among parties, which often prioritise securing strategic positions within the executive branch. The recent swearing-in of President Prabowo Subianto's 109-member Cabinet marks a pivotal moment for Indonesia's political development, revealing not only the immediate political priorities of the new administration but also deeper dynamics within Indonesian party politics and candidate selection practices. President Subianto's Cabinet exemplifies this party politics dynamics, with key positions allocated to coalition partners as a means of reinforcing political loyalty and ensuring stability within the government. This pattern of coalition-led governance reflects a tendency among Indonesian leaders to prioritise stability and coalition coherence over ideological considerations, [a trend that has historical precedent](#).

The coalition supporting Subianto includes some of Indonesia's most influential parties, such as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), and the National Awakening Party (PKB).

Each of these parties brings distinct political agendas and constituencies, requiring a delicate balance in Cabinet appointments to maintain inter-party and intra-party harmony. The appointment of ministers from across these parties indicates a concerted effort by Subianto to foster a sense of inclusivity and mitigation of potential conflicts. Such arrangements, however, are not without trade-offs; distributing Cabinet posts among coalition members might also lead to a fragmented policy agenda as parties push for policies that align with their respective bases rather than a cohesive national strategy. Moreover, Subianto is widely recognised as a powerful figure due to his military background, nationalist rhetoric, and strong connections within Indonesian elite political circles.

A closer examination of intra-party candidate selection processes within Indonesia's major parties sheds light on the types of individuals appointed to Cabinet roles. Indonesian political parties generally follow [hierarchical and centralised selection methods](#), where party elites exert considerable influence over who is deemed "fit" for high-ranking positions, including ministerial roles. This selection process tends to favour candidates who are loyal to party leadership and who potentially can serve as reliable executors of the party's agenda within the Cabinet. In Gerindra, Subianto's own party candidate selection is notably centralised, with significant control held by the party's central executive board. This concentration of power in Gerindra reflects a broader trend within Indonesian parties toward elite-driven candidate selection, which can hinder diversity in representation and limit the pool of candidates to those with close ties to party leadership. In turn, this process might impact the effectiveness of governing by prioritising loyalty over expertise. Several appointments from Gerindra into Subianto's Cabinet are believed to reflect personal alliances rather than purely meritocratic considerations.

Furthermore, while Subianto is apparently not a "dynastic" politician in the traditional sense of inheriting a direct family political legacy, he has strong elite ties that function similarly to political dynasties. His father, Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, was a prominent economist and minister during the Suharto era, and his family is highly influential in both the political and business arenas. Prabowo Subianto's political career in electoral politics has also been shaped by his marriage (now divorced) to Titiek Suharto, one of the daughters of former President Suharto, Indonesia's longtime authoritarian leader. This association connected him to one of Indonesia's most influential political families, reinforcing his standing within the elite political coterie.

A defining feature of Indonesian politics is the role of oligarchic networks and political patronage in candidate selection, particularly for high-profile positions such as Cabinet appointments. The fusion of political power with business interests has led to the inclusion of ministers who possess strong connections to Indonesia's economic elites. This trend is visible in the current Cabinet, where several appointees have significant business backgrounds or are known for their economic influence. Such appointments emphasise the extent to which [political patronage shapes the composition of the Cabinet](#), as party leaders often leverage these networks to secure funding and resources for their political campaigns. While these appointees bring economic expertise that might support Indonesia's

developmental goals, the reliance on oligarchic networks raises concerns about potential conflicts of interest and accountability. This aspect of candidate selection reflects broader patterns within Indonesian party and electoral politics, where the intertwining of political and economic interests has the potential to skew policy priorities toward elite-driven agendas, potentially sidelining broader social or developmental issues.

The dynamics surrounding candidate selection and Cabinet appointments under Subianto's administration reflect both the strengths and limitations of Indonesia's democratic system. On the one hand, the multi-party system allows for broader representation and the inclusion of diverse perspectives within the executive branch. On the other, the reliance on coalition-building and patronage networks highlights the persistent challenges in achieving genuine political accountability and responsiveness to public needs. The Cabinet's composition suggests that, while Indonesian electoral democracy enables political participation and power-sharing among parties, it remains constrained by elite-driven politics that prioritise stability and resource consolidation over policy innovation and inclusivity.

The impact of these dynamics on the effectiveness of Subianto's administration will depend largely on the Cabinet's ability to navigate intra-party tensions and pursue a coherent policy agenda that addresses both elite and public interests. The Cabinet's composition reveals not only the immediate policy priorities of the new administration but also enduring institutional and cultural challenges within Indonesian party and electoral politics, such as elite dominance and political patronage. As Indonesia continues to navigate its democratic evolution, addressing these underlying challenges in candidate selection and intra-party dynamics will be crucial for fostering a more inclusive and accountable political system. By recognising the implications of these candidate selection processes on governance, my analysis indicates the need for reforms that prioritise transparency, merit, and public interest in political appointments.

In identifying these patterns, this analysis serves as a compelling call for reform within Indonesia's democratic framework and party politics. My discussion hints at the potential for more merit-based and transparent candidate selection processes within Indonesian political parties, which, if implemented, might democratise political appointments and better align them with public interests. My insight offers a constructive critique: while the current Cabinet formation might reflect Indonesia's political constraints, future reforms aimed at decentralising candidate selection and reducing oligarchic influence might pave the way for a more inclusive, responsive, and accountable government. In doing so, Indonesia might potentially strengthen its democratic institutions, moving closer to a model that genuinely reflects the diverse interests of Indonesian citizens.

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