

# Aristocratic elections in Yogyakarta

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If I had to select a single candidate out of 6,607 House of Representatives candidates and 945 Regional Representatives Council (DPD) candidates who had a 99.9 percent probability of being reelected, I would certainly choose Queen Hemas, a DPD candidate from Yogyakarta.

The queen of Yogyakarta has, undoubtedly, dominated DPD elections since their inception in 2004. She then secured more than 800,000 votes, more than all three legislators' votes combined. In 2009, she won by a landslide with more than 80 percent of the valid 940,000 votes. In 2014, she has set a target of winning the support of no less than 1 million out of the 1.7 million in the voters' list.

What explains this phenomenon? Does aristocratic status matter to voters? How well did aristocratic candidates do in the 2014 election? The recent election in Yogyakarta may shed some light on the aristocratic performance in politics.

In many parts of Indonesia, the aristocracy has a special place in people's hearts. Many local aristocrats have successfully transformed people's cultural support into political support since the fall of Soeharto. In Gianyar regency, Bali, for instance, the election has always pitted two royal houses, Puri Gianyar and Puri Ubud. In Ternate, North Maluku, both the sultan and his queen, Rita Susanti, received significant votes for the House and DPD seats.

This tendency has always been strongest in Yogyakarta, which received special status in 2012. Unlike any other provinces, the Yogyakarta governor and vice governor are privileged positions for two royal houses, the sultanate of Yogyakarta and the Pakualaman principality. In the 2014 election, high-ranking aristocrats competed for national and local legislative seats representing different parties in Yogyakarta.

The sultanate of Yogyakarta planned to have representatives in three different legislative levels. Queen Hemas is running for the DPD for the third time, her son-in-law Prince Wironegoro is running for the House representing the Gerindra Party and another son-in-law, Prince Purbaningrat, of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) is running for the Yogyakarta Legislative Council (DPRD).

Pakualaman runners are Roy Suryo Notodiprojo, the Democratic Party's candidate for the House and his wife Ismarindayani Priyanti for the DPD. In addition, middle- and low-level aristocrats are competing for seats in the provincial and five district legislatures in Yogyakarta.

However, the results show that depending solely on aristocratic status might not bear fruit. Prince Wironegoro lost in the polling station where he cast his vote against another Gerindra candidate, Andika Pandu Puragabaya, the son of former Indonesian Military (TNI) chief Gen. (ret) Djoko Santoso. Andika is likely to be one out of eight House representatives from Yogyakarta.

Other likely successful candidates would be Hanafi Rais, the defeated Yogyakarta mayoral candidate in 2012 and the son of National Mandate Party (PAN) founder, Amien Rais, and Idham Samawi, two-time former Bantul regent (1999-2010), who is running with the PDI-P.

The Democrats' Roy looks likely to regain his House seat, but his performance cannot be separated from his post as minister of youth and sport. His giant poster at Kridosono Stadium was not taken down during the cooling-off period (6-8 April). On polling day, he placed an advertorial in the biggest local newspaper *Kedaulatan Rakyat* in the form of four pictures showing him conferring bonuses on last year's Southeast Asian Games medalists.

Contrary to her husband's achievement, Ismarindayani's chances in the DPD race are slim. She is inferior compared to Queen Hemas and other incumbent senators looking for reelection, who include People's Consultative Assembly speaker Sidharto Danusubroto. Queen Hemas' victory is a combination of aristocratic status and, at the same time, her real contribution to society. Soon after she married Sultan Hamengkubuwono X in 1989, she was obliged to follow Javanese rules, traditions and customs. In her biography *GKR Hemas: Ratu di Hati Rakyat* (*GKR Hemas: The Queen in People's Hearts*), she explains her stressful transition from an urban girl living in Jakarta to Javanese queen living in the heart of Javanese culture. Her regal status has allowed her to build a relationship with the people of Yogyakarta through many social activities focusing on maternity, children and cancer.

The strongest influence of Queen Hemas on Yogyakarta people was shown during the 2010 Merapi eruption. She ordered that every unaffected household donate five rice packs per day to eruption victims, directly coordinated by her. People obeyed and there were no reports of starvation as hundreds of thousands of people were sheltered for two months in the aftermath of the disaster.

Second, Hemas' political career is quite impressive. She has served as a DPD deputy speaker and become the only woman in the House-DPD leadership. She rejected the controversial anti-pornography bill in 2009 and has been actively involved in the women's legislative caucus.

The unexpected defeat of Prince Purboningrat might not show a definitive aristocratic decline. He is not the first royal family member to fail in the race for public posts. In 2005, the sultan's stepbrother, Prince Yudhaningrat, lost in the Bantul election to Idham. During the election, the sultan unofficially supported Idham.

Aristocracy is not declining but it is centered, monopolized and owned privately by the sultan. Power is his monopoly and it is non-transferable to other aristocrats, including his brothers and sons-in-law.

People will obey his instructions but not necessarily those of other aristocrats. The sultan's charisma has been clearly shown in the direct elections for local leaders in all five districts in Yogyakarta.

In the 2014 election, he seems to have put himself above local politics in Yogyakarta after failing to secure support at the national level in the 2004 and 2009 presidential

race. For the first time since 1998, the sultan is missing from the short list of potential candidates for either the president or vice president. *The writer is a lecturer at Department of Politics and Government, Gadjah Mada University.*