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Don’t ask, don’t tell: academics and electoral politics in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT
Guided by the literature on public sociology and the entry of civil society actors into the state, this paper analyses the increasing role of Indonesian academics in electoral politics. We assess both the impacts of their involvement on democratic reform, measured via election and policy outcomes, and on the academic profession itself. Academics merit separate study because of their dual status in Indonesia, as both civil servants and civil society members. As civil servants, academics face legislative prohibitions against their involvement in electoral politics, leading them to become involved on a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ basis. These entry circumstances strongly shape their strategies to exert influence and also exacerbate the costs of their political involvement. Nevertheless, we find no compelling case against the entry into electoral politics. Indonesian academics can claim some success in shaping the outcome of the 2014 presidential election, without incurring commensurate negative effects.

KEYWORDS
Indonesia: elections; democratisation; civil society; civil service; state

Academics are playing an increasingly prominent role in Indonesia’s direct elections of mayors, governors and the president. Occasionally, academics run as candidates. More typically, they become expert advisors to candidates or political parties or informal members of candidates’ campaign teams. In the 2014 presidential elections, to provide the most prominent example, a so-called ‘Team of Eleven’ (Tim 11) composed primarily of academics from prominent state universities - advised the Indonesian Democratic Struggle Party (PDI-P) on its choice of presidential candidate. The team then became political and policy advisors for their recommended candidate, Joko Widodo (hereafter Jokowi), who was ultimately elected president. Another academic, Anies Baswedan, unsuccessfully sought to run for president in 2014, before becoming a campaign spokesperson for Jokowi. He would subsequently win office in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, Indonesia’s highest-profile sub-national election, in which academics advised all three candidates. Herein, we focus on the involvement of Indonesian academics in these two elections.

This paper seeks to understand why Indonesian academics have chosen and were able to enter electoral politics, and what the impact of their entry has been. Two bodies of

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literature could guide our inquiry. One option would be to analyse academics’ political involvement as an extension of their research practice, drawing on former president of the American Sociological Association Michael Burawoy’s concept of ‘public sociology’. Burawoy (2005, pp. 7–8) argues that a holistic role for the sociological profession should include sociological work done in conversation with external publics – so called public sociology – either through writing in newspapers on matters of public importance to reach mainstream audiences, or by working in dialogue with a (often marginalised) community or movement in a process of mutual education. Understood as public sociology (or, more often in the case of this paper, political science), we would ask of Indonesian academics’ political involvement: does it serve the interests of a public, and how does it impact on and inform their work as scholars?

A second option would be to analyse Indonesian academics’ political involvement as an example of civil society activists entering the political sphere and the state. Activists have made this choice in a range of countries, at times in despair at their inability to exert control on the workings of the state as external actors, and on occasion responding to state actors’ embrace of their movements (Dryzek, 1996; Kim, 2009). Scholars judge that politically involved activists’ influence in the political domain is often outweighed by the negative impact on civil society’s ability to police and influence the state (Dryzek, 1996; Kim, 2009). Dryzek (1996, p. 476), for example, recommends civil society actors enter the state only if their chosen goal aligns with an existing state imperative, lest the movement receive only symbolic rewards in exchange for ending its external pressure. In South Korea, Kim (2009) finds electoral integrity campaigns and partnerships with the government on policy exposed local NGOs to co-option and over-politicisation.

In Indonesia, too, activists have joined political parties, become policy advisors, and run for elected office over at least the past decade (McRae, 2009; Mietzner, 2013). Motivated by their frustration at the control of politics and the state by entrenched interests associated with the authoritarian regime, some of these Indonesian activists have achieved reformist policy outcomes in their area of focus, Mietzner (2013) observes, whereas oligarchic forces have co-opted others. Often, activists fail to gain full acceptance in either domain: ‘civil society activists often view their former colleagues as “traitors”, while career politicians belittle them as idealist and naïve beginners’ (Mietzner, 2013, p. 45).

In many ways then, a civil society lens suggests similar lines of inquiry to public sociology: have academics achieved public-minded goals through their political involvement, and how has their involvement impacted upon the academic profession? But Indonesian academics also differ from civil society activists in one key respect. Most academics at Indonesia’s prestigious public universities are civil servants (Hill & Kian Wie, 2012, p. 241), and so are bound by various prohibitions against members of the state bureaucracy becoming politically involved. Such prohibitions threaten prison sentences for civil servants joining presidential campaigns, require civil servants to resign to run for office, and prescribe dismissal for joining political parties, for example. A recent ministerial regulation goes further still, threatening disciplinary and/or moral penalties for political activity as innocuous as interaction with candidate photos on social media. Indonesia thus adopts what Braendle and Stutzer (2016, p. 699) term ‘ineligibility’ arrangements – meaning civil servants must resign prior to political
involvement—the strictest of four regulatory regimes they identify internationally for civil servants' involvement in politics.

At least according to the letter of the law, then, academics in Indonesia face much higher entry costs into politics than civil society activists, who risk only the opprobrium of their peers. In practice, prosecution of academics for political involvement is unheard of, be they senior or junior faculty members. But such restrictions provoke sufficient wariness that Indonesian academics have largely entered politics on a 'don't ask, don't tell' basis, refusing to publicly disclose their political affiliations, despite some media reportage of their role in campaigns.

Below, we start by charting how these unique entry circumstances arose for Indonesian academics, tracing the particular historical context of authoritarian co-optation of universities and the civil service to explain present-day prohibitions on Indonesian academics' political involvement. We then examine why academics became involved in the 2014 presidential elections and the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections, finding the opportunity to shape the direction of national politics to be the most compelling motivation. We then demonstrate that prohibitions on academics' political involvement have strongly shaped their strategies to exert influence. Academics' 'don't ask, don't tell' political involvement enables them to exert influence as ostensibly neutral public intellectuals even while they are working as insiders, but also limits their access to formal decision-making positions that might afford them more enduring influence. Finally, despite academics' unique entry circumstances into politics, we find impacts on democratic reform and the academic profession to be broadly in line with other civil society actors. The academics we study have had some success in their stated aim of helping good people enter politics, whereas the negative impacts on the authority of the academic profession have not yet generated widespread opposition from their scholarly peers.

This paper draws on research interviews conducted in 2017 and 2018 with academics involved in the campaigns of each of the candidate tickets across the two elections we studied, other campaigns actors and political observers.

**Academics and civil servants under authoritarianism**

Studies of academics political involvement and its regulation have been rare, both in Indonesia and abroad. This paper contributes to a better understanding of the profession's political role. Studies of civil servants are more numerous, and illustrate that Indonesia's restrictions on civil servants' involvement in electoral politics are not atypical internationally (Braendle & Stutzer, 2016; Neuhold, Vanhoonacker, & Verhey, 2013; Peters & Pierre, 2004). Many democratic political systems require neutral (i.e. non-partisan) competence from civil servants, to ensure the bureaucracy serves different political masters equally well, and does not discriminate against citizens based on their political views (Peters, 2013). The election of public servants to parliament creates an additional conflict of interest as these officials both supervise and implement public services. Consequently, various countries require some or all civil servants to resign prior to running for office (ineligibility regime), or to resign or have their position held in abeyance if they win office (incompatibility) (Braendle & Stutzer, 2016, pp. 697–699). Although Indonesia's restrictions are thus not unusual, the country's prohibitions on civil service political activity do derive from a particular history of mobilisation of the bureaucracy as partisan regime supporters of President Suharto's authoritarian rule.

Under Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime, public universities were administered as units within the state bureaucracy, meaning academics were employed as civil servants and were subject to the same political controls (Rosser, 2016, p. 118). As a corporatist regime, Suharto’s New Order incorporated most societal groups into pro-regime associations. Starting in the late 1960s, civil servants were heavily pressured to join the civil servants association KORPRI (Kорps Pegawai Republik Indonesia) and were expected to provide ‘monoloyalty’ to the regime party Golkar, of which KORPRI formed a part (Mackie & Macintyre, 1994, p. 13, 21, 27; Reeve, 1985, p. 324).

Admittedly, the Suharto regime did not always need to coerce academics to support it. Public universities and academics initially forged a close relationship with the New Order. Anti-communist student groups allied with the army to help oust founding president Sukarno, then partnered with the army and academics to lay the economic foundations of the New Order, in a so-called New Trace seminar in 1966. A group of University of Indonesia economists centred around Professor Sumitro Djojohadikusumo – known as the Berkeley Mafia – were also instrumental in the New Order’s transition to capitalist, foreign investment-oriented economic settings (Budiman, 1978, p. 617; Simpson, 2008, p. 20). Reflecting their role in the New Order’s emergence, many large campuses called themselves ‘Struggle Campuses’ (Kampus Perjuangan) (Rahman Tolleng, personal communication, August 13, 2018). The University of Indonesia, for example, dubbed itself ‘The New Order Struggle Campus’, a tag it shed only upon Suharto’s fall three decades later.

When Suharto’s increasing authoritarianism strained the regime’s relationship with campuses in the 1970s, the New Order was able to use universities’ position within the bureaucracy to control campus politics. In the wake of anti-regime student protests, campus authorities, ranging from lecturers to the chancellor, were positioned as regime representatives, required to ensure that students complied with new prohibitions of ‘practical politics’ on campus (Aspinall, 1995; HRW, 1998, p. 67). Advancement within universities came to be determined by closeness to state power rather than the quality of academic outputs, and academics were routinely recruited into the state bureaucracy as experts (Hadiz & Dhakidae, 2005, pp. 7–8). As Aspinall, Hadiz and Dhakidae (2005, p. 8) judge, the output of university social scientists ‘essentially helped to legitimize state development policy’. University campuses, including UI, were also moved to the periphery of major cities, to further limit their involvement in oppositional politics.

Apart from political strictures, their status as civil servants confined academics to low salaries. A 1988 survey of academics at four leading public universities showed that even at higher ranks they were earning less than a third of a salary they considered would provide adequate compensation for full-time work (Clark & Oey-Gardiner, 1991, pp. 133–134). Consequently, most academics were working at least 2–3 other jobs outside the university, leading Clark and Oey-Gardiner to observe, ‘The low pay of the civil service means that universities cannot compete for the time of their staff.’ (1988, pp. 138). The culture of moonlighting such circumstances entrenched is an important enabling context for present-day ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ arrangements.
The end of authoritarian rule in 1998 transformed the political outlook of universities, but did not end academics’ status as civil servants. In the final months prior to Suharto’s fall, student protesters covered the ‘The New Order Struggle Campus’ sign at UI’s Salemba campus (Kurniawan, 2011, p. 532). Once Suharto had gone, University of Indonesia’s medical faculty lecturers were among the first to symbolically remove their KORPRI uniforms. Academics also gained new freedoms to criticise the government and set their own research agenda (Rosser, 2016, p. 126). Changes to the bureaucratic status of universities were more modest. Universities were able to establish more democratic internal governance structures, and eleven of the largest state universities gained some autonomy to manage their own financial affairs (Hill & Kian Wie, 2012; Kurniawan, 2011, p. 544; Rosser, 2016, p. 125). These autonomous campuses were newly able to hire academics as direct employees of the university, but most of their senior academics continued to be engaged as civil servants. The practice of supplementing civil service income with off-campus work remains – Hill and Kian Wie (2012, p. 246) estimate academics at major universities often earn as much as three-quarters of their income through other jobs.

At the same time, the political outlook of the civil service also changed. The politics of neutrality and professionalism replaced KORPRI membership and mono-loyalty. New laws on elections and the civil service restricted political activities by civil servants (Table 1). These restrictions have tightened progressively over the course of two decades of democratic rule, in response to repeated instances of mayors and governors recruiting local bureaucracies to campaign for them.

Where does this leave academics? This new autonomy complicates prohibitions on academics’ political involvement. Academics at state universities employed as civil servants remain subject to the same restrictions as other civil servants. Those academics who are direct employees of the eleven autonomous state universities, and all private university

<p>| Table 1. Restrictions on political involvement of civil servants. |
|--------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Law (no.)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Elections covered</th>
<th>Restriction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential election law (42)</td>
<td>2008, (revised in 2017 to Presidential cover presidential and legislative elections)</td>
<td>• Campaign teams forbidden from involving civil servants (41(2)e) – makes formal involvement as campaign team members a criminal offence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil service law (5)</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>• Civil servants must not wear attributes at campaigns 41(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elections law (10)</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Mayoral, gubernatorial</td>
<td>• Civil servants forbidden from organising activities that ‘tend to side with a candidate’ (44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of administrative and bureaucratic reform circular (B/71/MSM.00.00)</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>• Neutrality as basis of civil service (2(2f))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Dismissal if join or become board member of political party (87(1))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Resign once confirmed as election candidate (119; 123(3))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Candidates prohibited from involving civil servants in campaign (76(1b))</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Threatens disciplinary action and/or moral sanctions for broad range of political activities, including social media interaction with candidate photos, attending candidate declarations, speaking at political party meetings, photos with candidates replicating their trademark hand signals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
employees, are limited only by campus codes of ethics from becoming involved in politics, not by legislative prohibitions.

**Academics in contemporary Indonesian politics**

To recap, our focus here is the involvement of academics in the 2014 Indonesian presidential elections and 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections. Academics were heavily involved only in the Jokowi ticket in the 2014 presidential election. The Team of Eleven's role was particularly notable. The team first advised PDI-P to select Jokowi as its presidential candidate, and then advised Jokowi during the campaign period. Most members were academics from the political and social science faculties of prominent public universities in Java, namely Cornelis Lay (Gadjah Mada University), Ari Dwipayana (Gadjah Mada University), Andi Widjajanto (Universitas Indonesia), Makmur Keliat (Universitas Indonesia), Haryadi (Airlangga University) and Muradi (Padjajaran University). Jaleswari Pramodhawardani, a scholar at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (LIPI) also subsequently joined. Jokowi also appointed a former university rector, Anies Baswedan, as a campaign spokesperson, and included another UI academic Andrinof Chaniago in the drafting of his written campaign statement.

Far fewer academics became involved in the camp of Jokowi's rival, Prabowo Subianto. Academics played little role in formulating programmes, drafting the written campaign statement, or in deciding campaign strategies. A Council of Experts chaired by Professor Burhanuddin Abdullah, a former governor of Indonesia's central bank, played a ceremonial role. The formal head of Prabowo's campaign team, Professor Dr. Mahfud M.D., was also a former lecturer, but is better known for his public roles, particularly as chief justice of the Indonesian Constitutional Court from 2008 to 2013 (Tribun Jogja, 2018).

Academics were not as influential in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial elections, but were involved in all three tickets. The incumbent governor, Basuki Tjahaya Purnama (Ahok), involved academics primarily through volunteer groups such as supported Jokowi's 2014 presidential campaign. Academics became involved primarily after an Open House event two months before the election. Those involved included Professor Saparinah Sadli, a former psychology professor at UI, and Professor Sulistyawati Irianto from the UI Law Faculty (Abdul Qodir, personal communication, 11 October 2018).

Ahok's main competitor was Anies Baswedan, who as mentioned above was a former academic, whom Jokowi sacked as Minister of Education in July 2016. Baswedan formed a Council of Experts, headed by Bambang Widjajanto, former chairperson of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) and a part-time lecturer at a private university. Several UI academics were members, and another UI academic, Eko Prasodjo, joined the ticket’s transition team after their electoral victory.

The third ticket featured the son of former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. This ticket engaged two separate teams of academics. A ‘Substance Team’ formulated Agus’s programmes, comprising academics from Bogor Agricultural Institute (IPB), a prestigious state university. Chaired by IPB lecturer Joyo Winoto, head of the National Land Council for most of the Yudhoyono administration, the team played the same role for his father’s presidential campaigns. A second group of academics and party activists were directly involved as informal advisors to Agus’s own campaign team, headed by businessperson Wishnu Wardhana. Members included Rocky Gerung,
Entry decision of academics: motivations and aims

Academics' aims and motivations to become politically-involved require special investigation, because they face high entry costs to politics as public-sector employees, and because they lack the self-evident aims of agenda-based activists. Below we canvass three explanations we repeatedly encountered from academics for their entry into politics.

In their cross-country study of civil servants who become political candidates, Braendle and Stutzer explain their chosen focus reflects a person-centred as opposed to an institutional approach to good governance. They assert 'individual characteristics of politicians matter for public policy choices and government outcomes', rather than institutions alone shaping these outcomes (Braendle & Stutzer, 2016, p. 709). Such a view is clearly reflected in the motivation that academics most commonly cited for their political involvement, namely to help good people enter politics as political candidates. Academics saw this as a more achievable goal – particularly in an era of social media and disorganised campaigns – than overall institutional reform. Interestingly, this motivation does not stem from a history of activism. Most politically-involved academics played little role in the protest movement that helped topple Suharto's regime in 1998, although several were involved in the design of early democratic reforms.

Academics who had been involved at various stages of Jokowi's political career were particularly likely to cite this good person motivation. Jokowi built an image as a new style of politician, owing to his background as a businessman emanating from outside the entrenched political class and reputed down-to-earth manner (McRae, 2013). Andrinof Chaniago, an UI academic who advocated for Jokowi to move to Jakarta politics in 2012 from small-town Solo, expressed his motivation to become involved with Jokowi as follows: 'we must change things with a person, who has a strong commitment, who doesn't owe a debt to political parties' (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, July 2017). Once Jokowi became president, another Team of 11 member similarly opined, 'We have to guard this regime, because Jokowi is a good person, and there are only a few good people' (Team of 11 member, personal communication, October 2017).

Some political parties interpret this desire to help good people enter politics as anti-party, causing tensions. One PDI-P politician said academics claimed to be professionals, but turned out to have a 'de-party-isation' agenda, as evidenced by their campaign to exclude party figures they alleged were corrupt from cabinet (PDI-P politician, personal communication, April 2018).

Politically-involved academics also described their entry to politics as an opportunity to apply their expertise. Expertise meant that academics were seen as authoritative, one politically-involved academic explained, enabling them to formulate policy, whereas civil society activists were valued chiefly for their broad networks (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, July 2017). Other political scientists worked as pollsters or consultants. Applying academic skills with integrity meant not just following a client's wishes, one academic explained, recounting an instance where he had lost a job midstream for advising his client to settle for a deputy mayoral candidature because polling indicated he was
insufficiently popular to be elected mayor. The candidate ignored his advice and lost the

In interpreting such responses focused on recruiting better candidates and helping
draft the policies and strategies for them to win elections, we should remain mindful of
the typical conduct of executive elections in Indonesia. Vote-buying and so-called black
campaigning are widespread, including religious, ethnic and gender-based smears. Candid-
ates also often become indebted to local large-scale business interests keen to maintain
or expand their political access. In a study of intellectuals and politics in East Java, Kusman
(2015, pp. 152–164) documents their involvement in the design of vote-buying strategies,
religious attacks on rival candidates, efforts to resist or discredit court judgments disadvan-
tageous to their candidate, and even manipulation of vote tallies. Although our informants
did not disclose their involvement in such practices, it would be naïve to imagine academ-
ics’ involvement in elections only improves their technical quality.

The material benefits of political involvement are clearly a third motivation. Indonesian
academics are notoriously poorly paid, and those who can typically supplement their
income through outside work (Rahmani & Siregar, 2016, p. 38). We found during our
study that most Indonesian interlocutors assumed politically-involved academics were
primarily motivated by personal enrichment. Kusman (2015, p. 163) similarly describes intel-
lectuals’ material dependence on elites as shaping their involvement in Indonesian
politics. Certainly, the material benefits of political involvement for academics are
-clear — and regarded by their peers as potentially corrupting. Academics are often paid
many multiples of their university salary for their political involvement, or use political
work to fund research centres. Some gain lucrative positions as commissioners of state-
owned enterprises or occasionally as ministers or other public officials.

We argue that such benefits are not the primary motivation for many politically-
involved academics, for several reasons. First, many academics we spoke to were uncertain
at the outset of their political work how much or even whether they would be paid. Some
said they refused payment when offered; others were ultimately paid less than anticipated.
Second, although paid political work is clearly more lucrative than an academic salary, aca-
demics who are able to access political work could typically also access other lucrative cons-
ultancies. Material motivations do not explain why these academics would choose the
uncertain rewards of political work over other more conventional paid employment. Aca-
demics who worked on the campaigns we studied told us they were motivated primarily
by the opportunity to shape the direction of national politics. — we find this convincing.

Politically-involved academics – partisans or professionals?

Studying the professionalisation of electoral campaigning, Stephen Mills asked Australian
political party national campaign directors whether they could run a rival party’s cam-
paign. He recounts Labor Party 2010 national campaign director Karl Blitar’s response,
‘You wouldn’t do it. But you could, because you are a professional at campaigning.’
Mills concludes that these campaign directors are partisan professionals, providing a
skilled service, but bound to serve the long-term interests of their political party (Mills,
2014, pp. 12–14). What of Indonesian academics?

We encountered a spectrum of views. Some academics had switched sides between
elections, or saw their role as impartial professionals able to assist any candidate or
party. One academic who had worked as a consultant for various candidates on different sides of politics saw his political flexibility as entirely legitimate, as long as he did not assist a corruptor or a thief to win office (Academic, personal communication, July 2017). Others were partisans with long-term connections to a particular political party or candidate prior to entering politics. Several Team of Eleven members had long-standing ties to PDI-P, for example. Andi Widjajanto’s father, Theo Syafei, headed PDI-P’s central leadership board as well as Megawati Soekarnoputri’s 2009 presidential election campaign team, and represented the party in parliament (Liputan 6, 2011). Cornelis Lay was an advisor to Megawati Soekarnoputri, PDI-P’s chairperson, during her presidency. He, Haryadi and Muradi had also joined the Indonesian National Student Movement (GMNI), a Sukarno-ist organisation that supplied more than a third of PDI-P parliamentarians in the early democratic era (Baswedan, 2004, p. 676). Several interviewees also said they became politically involved in 2014 because they saw Prabowo Subianto as a harbinger of authoritarianism. In the Jakarta gubernatorial elections, prior to working on Jusuf Yudhoyono’s campaign, Robertus Robet had worked for the campaign team of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s running mate in the 2009 presidential election, Boediono. Also part of this team was Agus’s campaign team head, businessperson Wishnu Wardhana. Robet was also a long-standing friend of the Demokrat party activists appointed to Agus’s team, Rachland Nashidik and Mone Thamrin.

Political party representatives, for their part, criticised academics who presented as professionals or switched sides, saying either that academics must share the party’s ideology or even be partisan supporters (Party representatives, personal communication, Jakarta, April 2018). Another politician criticised politically-involved academics for wanting ‘access to economic [rewards] and power, but [they] don’t want to lose their freedom’ (Golkar politician, personal communication, April 2018). Such comments are mildly surprising, given that there is little ideological distinction between most Indonesian political parties on many policy issues, and politicians not infrequently switch parties themselves.

Why involve academics?

Party and candidate motivations to involve academics proved hard to investigate directly. Several electoral candidates declined interview requests. Moreover, party politicians were dismissive of the role and influence of academics, stressing that parties ultimately made political decisions, regardless of inputs from academics. ‘Academics facilitate how to get there, the party determines what there is,’ one said (PDI-P politician, personal communication, April 2018). Another politician said polls and consultants were used simply to ‘justify and legitimise’ parties’ pre-existing preferences, and not to determine them (Golkar politician, personal communication, April 2018). Below we outline these criticisms, before offering our own interpretation of party motivations.

Such scepticism spanned the full range of political activities where academics saw themselves as influential. Representatives of three major political parties spanning different sides of both of our case study elections each doubted academics could influence candidate selection, for example. A PDI-P politician said political lobbying by a team of party insiders – and not the Team of Eleven’s academic inputs – convinced Megawati to nominate Jokowi as the party’s presidential candidate in 2014 (PDI-P politician, personal communication, April 2018). A Golkar politician concurred, speculating that
Megawati may have involved the Team of Eleven as a window-dressing exercise to soothe the feelings of disappointed party activists (Golkar politician, personal communication, April 2018). A Gerindra politician said his party did not form such teams to determine their candidates, simply making the decision directly (personal communication, April 2018).

Politicians also doubted academics’ influence on candidates’ programmatic campaign promises. The Golkar politician described academics either as resource persons or consultants, whereas the PDI-P politician claimed the party – and not academics – had set Jokowi’s campaign themes. These two politicians also downplayed the influence of Anies Baswedan’s Council of Experts in the Jakarta gubernatorial elections, saying it had done little more than justify Baswedan’s candidature. Even the Gerindra politician, as a member of Baswedan’s nominating coalition, characterised the Council’s role as merely supplying numbers to quote in the candidate debates.

Party figures also criticised academics’ performance as Jokowi administration ministers, when asked about the brief tenure of several academics who served in Jokowi’s early cabinets. Academics did not understand the political nature of the role of ministers, were unwilling to compromise, lacked the ability to execute policy, and without their own political base were easily cast aside in cabinet reshuffles, these politicians said.

These criticisms stand at odds with verifiable instances in which academics did influence personnel appointments and policy outcomes. As such, without discounting such commentary, we infer three further reasons form our interviews that help explain why candidates and parties involve academics.

First, bodies of academics such as Prabowo Subianto’s and Anies Baswedan’s Council of Experts enabled these candidates to appear technocratic or to have the endorsement of technocrats, a desirable trait if not a guarantee of electoral success (Gerindra politician, personal communication, April 2018; Yudhoyono camp member, personal communication, October 2018).

Second, parties recognise that they cannot win key elections solely through reliance on their own cadres and resources, and so involve academics to identify promising candidates and to draft policy documents.

Third, academics can provide candidates with autonomy from their parties. His access to the Team of Eleven meant Jokowi did not need to simply accept PDI-P’s draft of his written campaign statement, and enabled Jokowi to apply integrity criteria to exclude egregious party picks for his cabinet. Academics also helped Agus Yudhoyono to formulate his positions, and to smuggle his personal perspective into campaign materials prepared by others (Rocky Gerung, personal communication, April 2018).

**Strategies to exert influence**

Their dual status as civil servants and as political operators leads Indonesian academics at public universities mostly to play an informal advisory role in electoral politics on a ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ basis. These distinct entry circumstances also strongly shape the strategies politically-involved academics use to achieve influence. They seek simultaneously to play a public intellectual role promoting their candidate and their platform – all without disclosing their political affiliation – while providing direct input behind the scenes into candidate
selection and policy. Some have continued to play this dual role during the Jokowi administration, on some of the most contentious issues of his presidency.

As political insiders, academics are involved at all stages of the electoral cycle, starting with identification of promising candidates for parties, as well as suitable running mates for candidates. This role closely matches interviewee’s stated motivation of helping to elect good people. For academics working as consultants, finding the right candidate can be a ticket to further involvement in the election. The Team of Eleven probably could not have been as heavily involved in the 2014 election, if PDI-P had not opted for their recommended candidate, Jokowi.

Academics also often play a significant role in drafting the written campaign statement required in Indonesians elections. For Jokowi’s 2014 campaign, the Team of Eleven and a PDI-P team each prepared their own drafts of the document, causing friction between them. UI academic Andrinof Chaniago finalised a single text after Jokowi’s input (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, July 2017; Team of Eleven member, personal communication, April 2018). Agus Yudhoyono’s Substance Team in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election – consisting of academics from the Bogor Agricultural Institute – also helped draft the written campaign statement. The team had previously played the same role for Agus’s father Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. One team member described getting involved at this stage, prior to the election, as crucial to achieving policy influence (Academic, personal communication, October 2017).

Academics also play political roles during an election campaign. Apart from this substance team, Agus’s campaign also employed a small team including academics and party members to help Agus communicate effectively. The team reviewed campaign materials, coached Agus on his debate performance, and assessed the press reaction to the campaign. Team of Eleven members also played political roles in the presidential campaign. UI academic Andi Widjajanto served as campaign team secretary, a role that ought not to have been compatible with his employment status. Other team members were assigned one or several provinces, where they accompanied Jokowi to ensure he had local knowledge and fresh material for his campaign (Team of Eleven member, personal communication, April 2018).

Academics also featured heavily in the transition teams President Jokowi and Jakarta Governor Anies Baswedan formed to prepare their platforms prior to their inauguration. University of Indonesia academic Andrinof Chaniago, UGM rector Pratikno and his UGM colleague Cornelis Lay synchronised the outputs of Jokowi’s transition team, which also included various members of the Team of Eleven. Dean of the Administrative Science faculty at UI, Eko Prasodjo, was also recruited into Anies Baswedan’s transition team to draft the new governor’s grand design for bureaucratic reform. Prior to the election, Baswedan’s running mate Sandiaga Uno had initially offered for Prasodjo to be his running mate, although he then subsequently himself joined Baswedan’s ticket (Eko Prasodjo, personal communication, October 6, 2017).

While playing this insider role, politically-active academics in Indonesia continue to act as public intellectuals, but do not face the same norm of disclosure of affiliations when making public comment that would apply in many democracies. Instead, they can exploit their strong access to mainstream and online media to act as ostensibly neutral public intellectuals, even when providing partisan commentary. Their mainstream media access is especially broad when political party leaders or moguls who back their
chosen candidate own the media outlet, as is common in Indonesia. Despite such mainstream access, some academics see online media (including platforms like Facebook) as more influential. Their online posts are widely read and shared, and can shape mainstream media coverage (Ade Armando, personal communication, April 6, 2018).

Academics play this public intellectual role throughout the political cycle. Before a potential candidate secures a party ticket to contest an election, they may write opinion pieces to raise the candidate’s profile. UI academic Andrinof Chaniago wrote a publicly available Facebook post about then Solo mayor Jokowi in 2010, for example, in the midst of advocating within PDI-P for Jokowi to be the party’s candidate for Jakarta governor in 2012. In the post, Chaniago narrates in glowing terms ten hours he spent with Jokowi in Solo, calling it his ‘most impressive’ meeting with a public official, and judging that ‘if only a quarter of local government areas were led by people like Jokowi, Indonesia would advance’. Chaniago recalled the post had been shared and re-distributed on mailing lists thousands of times. He said the Republika newspaper’s editor-in-chief told him it had shaped their coverage of Jokowi (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, 2017, July 26). Republika (2015) subsequently anointed Jokowi as one of seven ‘Figures of Change in 2010’.

Politically involved academics also comment favourably on their candidate’s performance during the campaign, as well as in government. A Team of Eleven member, Makmur Keliat from Universitas Indonesia (UI), appeared alongside one of the authors on a Metro TV (2014) programme in 2014 to review the third presidential candidate debate, which focused on foreign policy, for example. The station, known for its pro-Jokowi bias, described Keliat only as an ‘observer of international political economy’. A long-standing regular columnist for national broadsheet Kompas, Keliat also wrote for the paper the day after the poll, under the by-line ‘Faculty of Political and Social Sciences lecturer, UI’. In the column, Keliat (2014) praise Jokowi as possessing ‘the credibility, grounding, and action-orientation’ to bring about a prosperous nation. Easing the way for the incoming government’s controversial plan to decrease energy subsidies, Keliat wrote that the government must popularise the idea that it was ‘re-allocating’ rather than ‘removing’ popular subsidies on fuel and electricity. He also praised PDI-P chairperson Megawati Soekarnoputri for her choice of Jokowi as candidate, a decision he had had a direct – if undisclosed – hand in. At the two year mark of the administration, Keliat (2016) again praised the administration’s performance under the same UI tagline, judging its political consolidation to be ‘impressive’ and its economic performance ‘extraordinary’.

Other Team of Eleven members have also been important ostensibly neutral commentators on contentious issues during Jokowi’s presidency. Jokowi’s first major controversy surrounded his nomination in January 2015 of Budi Gunawan as the sole candidate for national police chief, replacing General Sutarmi. The nomination appeared intended to mend relations with Megawati, who favoured Gunawan, and who felt Jokowi had not afforded PDI-P due deference during his first months in office. A political firestorm resulted, owing to Gunawan’s tainted track record. Just three months earlier, Jokowi had rejected Gunawan as a cabinet minister, because the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) had given him a black mark in a background check. The day after Jokowi announced Gunawan as his nominee, the KPK declared Gunawan a corruption suspect,
although he prevented a court trial via a successful pre-trial motion. Ultimately Jokowi withdrew the nomination – a move PDI-P opposed.

At the time, most Team of Eleven members occupied formal positions within the Jokowi administration: Andi Widjajanto was cabinet secretary; Makmur Keliat was special staff to the cabinet secretary; Jaleswari Pramodhawardani and Ari Dwipayana were each working in the president’s office. But another team member, Muradi, who did not occupy such a formal position, repeatedly commented on the controversy in the media, where he was quoted only as an expert from Padjajaran University in Bandung. Interestingly, as the administration’s position diverged from PDI-P, Muradi’s commentary accorded with the stance of PDI-P, the entity that first formed the Team of Eleven. Whereas the government ultimately dumped Gunawan, Muradi consistently advocated Gunawan’s appointment as police chief (Antara, 2015, January 15; Antara, 2015, April 6; Koran Tempo, 2015, February 16).

In the lead-up to the 2019 presidential elections, in which Jokowi again defeated Prabowo Subianto in a head-to-head contest, Muradi and fellow team of Eleven member Andi Widjajanto also provided commentary on electoral matters that was advantageous to the government without disclosing their political affiliation. Ahead of the elections, a political conflict occurred over an oppositional movement calling itself #2019gantipresiden (#ChangePresidentin2019). Although ostensibly independent, one of the movement’s initiators was a central leadership board chairperson of one of the parties backing Prabowo, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). The government sought to prevent #2019gantipresiden from holding protests, claiming that the movement aimed to overthrow the government, or that it violated Indonesia’s presidential campaign laws. Neither claim appeared justified (Power, 2018). In widely reported comments a fortnight after police had broken up the movement’s declaration in Surabaya, Muradi asserted that hardline Islamist elements opposed to parliamentary democracy were piggybacking on the #2019gantipresiden movement, and compared it to two organisations the Jokowi government had already banned, Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and the Islamic State (ISIS). Only Muradi’s university affiliation was disclosed.10 Similarly, former cabinet secretary and Team of Eleven member Widjajanto (2018) used only a thinktank byline to write in April 2018 in the Kompas daily refuting a statement by Prabowo Subianto that Indonesia would break up by 2030.

Not all commentary by politically-involved academics is explicitly partisan, however. Keliat has written numerous other columns in Kompas during the Jokowi administration that read primarily as commentaries on policy issues, although none are openly critical of the government’s position, and most frame policy challenges in a way that was compatible with the government’s approach. Others, such as thinktank scholar Rizal Sukma – now Indonesian ambassador in London – have written opinion pieces that are de facto explanations of government policy, without being framed explicitly in those terms. Nor do all academics choose non-disclosure: members of the various Councils of Experts openly leverage their public intellectual status to promote their candidates.

Impact

At the outset of this article, we identified two questions regarding the impact of Indonesian academics’ political involvement, common to both the public sociology and civil
society literatures. First, has their involvement served the public interest? We equate this to asking, has their involvement affected election results or policy outcomes in a way that furthers democratic reforms. Second, how has their political involvement impact on these academics’ research practice and the academic profession in Indonesia as a whole?

Election results are an important measure of academics’ actions in service of the public interest, because academics explain their political involvement primarily in terms of helping good people enter politics. Academics have a stronger claim to have influenced the outcome of the 2014 presidential election than the 2017 gubernatorial election. In 2014, academics contributed both to Jokowi being chosen as a presidential candidate, and to his electoral campaign’s trajectory. We can trace academics’ involvement to the early moments of Jokowi’s career in national politics, when UI academic Andrinof Chaniago lobbied for Jokowi to shift from small-town Solo to Jakarta, after which the Team of Eleven recommended to PDI-P chairperson Megawati that she give the party’s presidential nomination to Jokowi, and assisted with his election campaign. Suggestive of their influence, UI academics Chaniago and Widjajanto were appointed as ministers, along with fellow academics Pratikno, Anies Baswedan and Bambang Brodjonegoro. In 2017, by contrast, political bargaining shaped the composition of the three candidate tickets, and election result hinged on a racist, Islamist identity politics-laden campaign rather than the input of academic advisors (Hadiz, 2017).

One Jokowi was elected, academics were initially able to influence broad policy outlines and personal selection, before their influence waned over time. Prior to Jokowi’s inauguration and in the early period of his government, the various academics involved in the transition team claim to have shaped the blueprints for various policy areas. Andrinof Chaniago, as head of the National Development Planning Agency, similarly claims to have shaped the government’s overarching 2014–2019 Five Year National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN), and to have torpedoed a controversial plan to build a bridge from Java to Sumatra (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, July 2017). In this period, politically-involved academics also instituted selection criteria for cabinet appointees, including vetting by the KPK, eliminating some of the worst nominees.

Academics’ influence diminished when Jokowi’s decided to seek stronger accommodation with his political party backers in response to a series of political conflicts at the outset of his government, however. Within his first year in office, Jokowi dismissed all of the academic ministers who had been involved in his camp prior to his inauguration, except for Pratikno. Although Team of Eleven members remained in the presidential office and as special staff to Pratikno, few academics occupied decision-making roles to see that their blueprints were implemented. Team of Eleven members also found their input overruled on various senior appointments. One team member recalled he had advised against appointing party chief Sutiyoso as head of the State Intelligence Agency and Gatot Nurmantyo as head of the Armed Forces, only to see both installed (Team of Eleven member, personal communication, October 2018). Jokowi’s habit of requesting multiple versions of one item also diminished team members’ influence. One recalled preparing an unused draft of Jokowi’s inauguration speech, only to realise the president-elect had several versions on his desk. Another admitted academic efforts to influence Jokowi’s vice-presidential pick for 2019 would face the obstacle of Jokowi allowing various advisory teams to operate concurrently. Ultimately, Jokowi’s party backers overruled his pick.
These academics nevertheless maintain they have been able to influence the Jokowi administration when not confronting vested interests head on. One said he had been able to change policies when officials had a mistaken understanding, but cited a railway to serve coal extraction in Kalimantan as a project that could not be stopped because local elites supported it. Another cited Jokowi’s decision to opt for more expensive onshore processing in the Masela gas block as catering to predatory interests (Academics, personal communication, July 2017, April 2018). Jokowi has sought autonomy, this interviewee claimed, but could not displace cartels when they were represented by very senior administration members. Outside of resource extraction, another academic did claim success in campaigning against vested material interests. He cited continuing debate over a new broadcasting law as evidence that the Jokowi government remained open to academic and civil society input. Without the minister’s receptiveness to such input, Indonesian national MPs would have privatised digital broadcasting infrastructure to serve their sponsors’ interests, he said. Such a picture recurred across various Jokowi government ministries, this academic claimed (Academic, personal communication, April 2018).

Turning to the impact of political involvement on the academic profession, the public sociology and civil society literatures adopt different assumptions. The civil society literature anticipates a negative impact on a civil society movement when activists enter politics or the state, even if their entry helps further the movement’s goals (Dryzek, 1996, pp. 484–485). By contrast, public sociology sees public engagement as fundamental to maintaining the relevance of academic research and teaching, as long as such public engagement is built on rigorous academic research (Burr, 2013). Some politically-involved academics we spoke to did describe political involvement as enriching their research and teaching. But this connection appears less relevant in Indonesia, where politically-involved academics are often not especially prolific authors of research articles or particularly active teachers on campus. As such, we focus on the civil society literature below.

Civil society scholars identify two core risks associated with entry into politics or the state. Co-option is the first risk. Dryzek cautions that unless a civil society movement’s goals match an existing state imperative, the movement is likely to receive only symbolic rewards in exchange for ceasing to apply external pressure on the state (Dryzek, 1996, p. 476). In a study of South Korean NGOs, Kim similarly highlights two co-option scenarios: recruitment of activists into government positions may create a brain drain and constrain former colleagues from frank criticism; the public may perceive acceptance of government funding as compromising NGO independence or as a reward for past political support (Kim, 2009, pp. 888–892).

Over-politicisation is a second risk (Kim, 2009, pp. 886–888). South Korean NGOs violated community expectations of neutrality and non-partisanship by participating directly in electoral politics, Kim writes. NGO public information campaigns to blacklist problematic party candidates had a diminishing impact in successive South Korean elections, he argues, because the campaigns spurred perceptions that NGOs were partisan, weakening their overall credibility (Kim, 2009, pp. 886–888).

Both of these negative impacts have affected Indonesian academics. The recruitment of academics into advisory positions within the government, and as commissioners for state-owned enterprises, has at a minimum spurred a perception of co-option. Such co-option mostly pertains to the presidential election, as there is far broader scope to recruit
supporters into cabinet, advisory or commissioner positions at the national level than in sub-national politics. Even at the national level, the number of academics involved is small in absolute terms (see Table 2 below).

It would be absurd to suggest that so few appointments have rendered absent academic criticism or critical study of the Jokowi government. The opinion pages of Jakarta’s major newspapers remain filled with debate among scholars over various contentious policy issues. But the influence of these academics exceeds their meagre numbers, because they are influential figures in the politics and international relations departments of Indonesia’s most prestigious universities. Their departmental colleagues could foreseeably also be reluctant to openly criticise government policy because of their presence within the administration. Moreover, they are themselves influential voices in public

Table 2. Politically-involved academics in the first term Jokowi administration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name (Institution)</th>
<th>Political Role</th>
<th>Ministerial Role</th>
<th>Advisor/Expert Staff Role</th>
<th>Commissioner of State-Owned Enterprise</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andiinof Chaniago (UI)</td>
<td>Lobbied for Jokowi to enter Jakarta politics; worked on written campaign statement</td>
<td>State Development Minister/Head of Bappenas, 2014–2015</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Chief Commissioner, Angkasa Pura I (2015–2017); Chief Commissioner/Independent Commissioner, BRI (2017–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pratikno (UGM)</td>
<td>Transition team</td>
<td>State Secretary, 2014 – present Cabinet Secretary, 2014–2015</td>
<td>Informal advisor</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andi Widiwijanto (UI)</td>
<td>Team of 11; Secretary, Jokowi campaign team; Deputy, transition team</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ari Dwipayana (UGM)</td>
<td>Team of 11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Special staff to State Secretary (2014–2015); Presidential Communications (2015 – )</td>
<td>Commission ofes, Pt Perkebunan Nusantara V (unknown – 2016); Independent Commissioner, Pt Perkebunan Nusantara V (2016 – );</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haryadi (Airlangga)</td>
<td>Team of 11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Expert Panel for Local Elections, MOHA</td>
<td>Chief Commissioner/Independent Commissioner, Brantas Abipraya (2015 – )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaleswari Pramodhawardhani (UI)</td>
<td>Team of 11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Deputy V, Office of the President</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makmur Kelvin (UI)</td>
<td>Team of 11</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Special staff to Cabinet Secretary (2014–2015); Informal advisor</td>
<td>Independent Commissioner, Bank Mandiri (2017 – )</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anies Baswedan</td>
<td>Campaign Spokesperson</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Assembled from Indonesian media sources and state-owned enterprise websites. Other academics within the Jokowi administration, such as Bambang Brodjonegoro and Siti Ruhiaini Dzuhayatin, are not listed because we did not identify a political role played by them.
debate, who frequently write and comment on policy issues, but rarely criticise the go-

government position.13

These academics' appointment to commissioner positions are seen as particularly com-

promising, even among their peers. These commissioner positions in part provide a sub-

stitute salary for these academics' work as informal advisors, as few hold formal waged

positions within the administration (Team of 11 member, personal communication, 

Jakarta, October 2017). But they are also perceived as a reward for political services ren-

dered, just as Kim argues government funding of NGOs in Korea came to be perceived

as a reward for their past political support. Regarding Andrinof Chaniago's appointment

as a commissioner, one academic observed that Jokowi knew how to thank someone

who had rendered 'great service' to him, describing this as 'natural' and common practice

for Indonesian presidents (Hamdi Muluk, personal communication, Jakarta, July 2017). A

Gerindra party figure also described commissioner appointments as natural, given aca-

demics' role in the campaign, but maintained that the 'grooming' of academics had

made them less critical towards the government (Gerindra politician, personal commu-
nication, April 2018). Another interviewee said he could not accept a commissioner position,

despite supporting Jokowi during the campaign period, as he still wanted to criticise his

regime (Academic from FISIP UI, personal communication, Jakarta, April 2018).

Over-politicization nevertheless looms as the larger potential negative impact from aca-
demics' political involvement in Indonesia, particularly regarding national politics. The

United States provides the clearest comparative case, because the perceived political

bias in the academy has been more widely debated there. Scholars have used surveys

and voter registration data to demonstrate significantly greater support for the Demo-
cratic Party than for the Republicans at various campuses and in disciplinary professional

associations, sometimes by factors of as much as 8:1 (Cardiff & Klein, 2005; Klein & Stern,


37.5% of Americans considered 'political bias in the classroom' a serious problem. Party

preferences strongly shaped perceptions: a greater proportion of Republicans (48.5%) per-

ceived bias to be a serious problem than did Democrats (28.9%). Yair and Sulitzeanu-

Kenan (2018) similarly found respondents to be more sensitive to bias if it was in-group

harming rather than in-group aiding. In their study of reactions to political bias in Israel,

they found study participants perceived media bias as more serious and were more

likely to perceive corrective action to be necessary if the bias was directed against their

favoured political party or candidate.

Lop-sided political support also appears a feature of the Indonesian academy, at least

for the 2014 presidential election, in which many more academics supported Jokowi than

Prabowo. Although no US-style survey data is available to confirm this contention, a senior

leader of Prabowo's party Gerindra acknowledged this to be the case; only one of our

interviewees, described his campus as dominated by Prabowo supporters (Gerindra pol-
ician, personal communication, Jakarta, April 2018; Member of Team of 11, personal com-
munication, Jakarta, October 2018). This opens the possibility, particularly among Prabowo

supporters, for a perception to emerge that academics and their commentary are biased

against their candidate. Such bias would be unexceptional in an Indonesian context: many

media outlets were biased, often overtly, reflecting their owner's political preference

(Tapsell, 2015).
Indonesia stands out from comparative cases though because academics do not disclose their political affiliation in public commentary. This non-disclosure risks creating a perception that their commentary reflects hidden political affiliations and not academic expertise, eroding public intellectuals’ authority. Some academics did express a preference for an open declaration of support for a candidate (Andrinof Chaniago, personal communication, Jakarta, July 2018; Eko Prasodjo, personal communication, Jakarta, October 2018), although this would not be possible for civil servants under current legislation. A greater number of interviewees felt disclosure requirements would not be observed consistently, were inconsistent with the ‘back office’ role of academic advisors who should avoid the limelight, or were unnecessary, on the basis that everyone knew prominent academics’ political affiliations without them being disclosed. On the final point, one interviewee pointed to the opinion piece by the former cabinet secretary and Team of 11 member Andi Widjajanto in the national broadsheet *Kompas* in April 2018, in which he refuted a statement by Jokowi’s principal political opponent Prabowo Subianto but listed only a thinktank by-line. Certainly, most *Kompas* readers would be at least partially aware of Widjajanto’s affiliation. Many other media appearances by politically-involved academics reach less politically-engaged audiences, however. An abundance of studies show the general public’s political knowledge to be very low. It is likely many readers, listeners and viewers consume commentary by such academics without knowing their affiliation.

**Conclusion**

Guided by the literature on public sociology and the entry of civil society actors into the state, we have set out above the motivations, aims and impacts of Indonesian academics in entering into electoral politics over the past five years. We study academics separately from other Indonesian civil society actors because of their dual status as civil servants. This approach exposed the strong influence of academics’ distinct entry circumstances to politics on both their strategies to exert influence and the negative effects of their involvement in politics on their profession. We found most academics to be comfortable navigating the on-paper prohibitions on civil servants’ involvement to take on don’t ask, don’t tell informal roles. Such don’t ask don’t tell involvement facilitated their influence as public intellectuals, but restricted academics’ ability to run for office directly or to occupy decision-making positions when their candidate won office. Nevertheless, academics’ political influence has been sufficient to cause friction with political parties. In particular, they have had greater success than civil society activists in winning ministerial posts, and arguably also had a greater direct impact on the outcome of the 2014 elections through their influence on candidate selection and campaign strategies.

As well as restricting their political influence, academics’ don’t ask don’t tell political involvement also exacerbated the negative effects on their profession. In addition to co-option effects, we highlight in particular the longer term threat to academics’ authority as experts posed by public commentary made without disclosure of relevant political affiliations. But although the risks for the academic profession of their members’ involvement in politics are clear, they should not be overstated. They have not yet generated widespread opposition from their peers. Nor did we encounter any particular determination among interviewees to alter their terms of access to politics to ameliorate these risks.
How then does Indonesian academics’ entry into politics weigh up against the warnings of comparative scholars that the instrumental benefits civil society actors gain by entering the state may be outweighed by deleterious effects on their movement Dryzek (1996, pp. 484–485). In terms of this calculus, we find no compelling case against Indonesian academics’ political involvement. They have advanced democratic reform to a degree – although entrenched interests frequently trump them – without incurring decisively deleterious costs. In this sense, their track record resembles that of Indonesian civil society overall, whom Mietzner (2013) concludes to have fared better in achieving influence than in other international examples.

Might this calculus change? An unfavourable presidential election result appears the clearest factor that could increase the costs of political involvement. Asked why they felt prohibitions against academics’ political involvement had not been enforced to date, one observer offered the thought, ‘because Jokowi won’ in 2014. Had Prabowo won in 2014 or 2019, he may have taken a dimmer view of those who overstepped the bounds of the law. The prosecution of various Jokowi government critics during the 2019 elections illustrates the risk that a future presidential candidate who found much of Indonesian academia arrayed against them might seek legal retribution if they were victorious. Absent such a rupture, academics appear destined to continue to seek to shape Indonesian politics from within in a don’t ask, don’t tell capacity.

Notes
1. Disclosure: Robertus Robet, one of this paper’s authors, was an informal advisor to Agus Yudhoyono in this election.
2. The authors acknowledge Mietzner’s (2013) helpful review of the field as the original source of these citations.
3. Tolleng was a newspaper editor and activist, imprisoned by the Suharto government in the 1970s. He passed away in 2019.
4. Reportage has varied regarding other members of the team, but the authors understand these to have been the only academics involved.
5. On these groups, see Tomsa and Setijadi (2018).
6. On academics at Ahok’s Open House event, see (Berita Satu, 2018). Abdul Qodir, a lawyer, initially joined Ahok’s campaign as a legal consultant, before leaving midstream.
7. These were law lecturer Mustafa Fakhri and communications guest lecturer Eman Sulaeman, who was also a consultant to Baswedan’s eventual running mate Sandiaga Uno before the campaign. Only Eman Sulaeman appears in media accounts, but the authors confirmed in interviews that Fakhri was also a member.
8. On the political affiliations of media owners, see Tapsell (2015).
10. See, for example, (JPNN, 2018).
11. We do not assess the impact of academics on Anies Baswedan’s administration’s policies, as he had not been inaugurated as Jakarta governor when we commenced our fieldwork.
12. On these conflicts, see Muhtadi (2015).
13. Muradi’s criticism of the government over the Budi Gunawan affair is an exception.

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Disclosure statement

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# Don't ask, Don't tell: Academics and electoral politics in Indonesia

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