

## Lifestyle | Feature



Members of Indonesian dangdut band 'Soneta' performing Uno.



Indonesian supporters dancing as dangdut band 'Soneta' perform during a political campaign to support presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto and his running mate Sandiaga Uno in Depok, West Java. — AFP photos

## Music for the masses winning Indonesian voter's hearts

From Indonesia's hip-swivelling juggernaut dangdut to thumping rock bands and Islam-infused tunes, music could be the clincher for winning hearts-and votes-as the world's third-biggest democracy heads to the polls next week. Political platforms aside, candidates know it is entertainment that draws the crowds to campaign rallies in music-mad Indonesia. Just ask millennial voter Muhammad Ariel, who went to a concert where popular rock band Radja performed in support of president Joko Widodo, better known as Jokowi.

Screaming "where are Jokowi's fans", Radja's energetic show and thumbs-up for Indonesia's heavy-metal music loving leader resonates with young voters like Ariel, who make up almost one third of the electorate. Jokowi's camp has said that winning over millennial and first time voters was crucial. "I'm a Radja fan because their songs are great, but it's also because we're going to vote for the same candidate," Ariel said from the rally near the capital Jakarta. More than 190 million people are set to cast a ballot for thousands of candidates, from the president down to local legislators, in the Southeast Asian nation's biggest-ever election on April 17.

Music is essential in this nation of 260 million, where song-and-dance is a staple of television shows, sporting events, presidential debates and even the central bank's recent economic review. And it's a must-do at election time. "Music is meant to capture the interest of people on the lower rungs of society," said Hamdi Muluk, a University of Indonesia psychology professor who has a specialty in politics and voter behavior.

### 'Part of the lifestyle'

Jokowi's rival Prabowo Subianto is banking on capturing the attention of conservative voters in the world's biggest Muslim majority nation with concerts featuring Islam-inspired gambus music. The retired general's musical arsenal also includes Rhoma Irama, a geriatric-looking version of Elvis Presley who is famed as the King of Dangdut. The hugely popular style—which runs the gamut from religion-inspired lyrics to a raunchier version involving sensual dance moves similar to twerking—takes its cue from Hindustani and Arabic music.

Dangdut is infused with a hypnotic percussion beat backed by a multi-instrument band. Every Indonesian knows it, there



Indonesian dangdut singer Rhoma Irama and his band 'Soneta' performing during a political campaign to support presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto and his running mate Sandiaga Uno.

are television channels dedicated to it, and dangdut is performed everywhere from the smallest villages to bustling Jakarta—and the beat ramps up during election time.

The promise of a legendary crooner like Irama, clad in a white jumpsuit, is what got housewife Alima Kholil out to a huge rally for Subianto in vote-rich West Java, despite pouring rain. "I've never seen him before and I know that when he sings, he'll be singing about religion," the 44-year-old said of Irama's Islam-inspired tunes. For fan Jhon Kenedi, the King of Dangdut might have taken the country's top job if he had a decided to throw his hat in the ring against Jokowi and Subianto. "I'd choose him if he ran" for president, the 46-year-old taxi driver told AFP.

### 'Drill Dance'

Irama's dangdut style isn't the only one offer, though. Another version involving erotic dance and female performers



Indonesian dangdut singer Rhoma Irama (center) and his band 'Soneta' performing.

in skimpy clothing is hugely popular, despite opposition from some conservative Muslims. Dangdut star Intul Daratista made a career out of her signature "drill dance" in which moved her hips in a rapid circular motion like a drill—sparking a string of copycats. The throbbing style grabbed international headlines a few years ago when a female Dangdut singer died after being bitten by a cobra used in her boundary-busting act.

At a Jokowi rally in Soreang on Java island this week, throngs of mostly male fans did not appear to be thinking much about politics as they cheered on a voluptuous dangdut singer in skin-tight white pants. And even Indonesian rock legends Slank, who are supporting the president's re-election bid, incorporated some dangdut elements into a video made for Jokowi's campaign. "Music is just part of the lifestyle" here, said Bens Leo, an Indonesian music journalist. "And you can bet that a big majority of a band's loyal fans will vote for the candidate that their favorite stars pick." — AFP