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Indonesia's 2018 Regional Elections

The Generals' Election: More Officers in Politics, More Democracy?

By Keoni Marzuki and Dedi Dinarto

Synopsis

Several military and police generals have announced their candidacies for the 2018 simultaneous regional elections before they retire from active service. What induced these generals to enter politics and what does it portend for Indonesian democracy?

Commentary

FIVE ACTIVE military and police generals have announced their early retirement to contest in Indonesia's highly anticipated regional elections currently underway for governor or vice-governor. Their participation in the elections, taking place all at the same time known as *pilkada serentak*, is a significant development. Generals who enter politics usually do so after they fully retire.

The generals have aligned themselves to different political parties in these gubernatorial elections. These parties belong to either the ruling coalition of President Joko Widodo, such as PDI-P, Golkar, NasDem and PAN, or the opposition led by Prabowo Subianto, such as Gerindra and PKS. For the regional elections, however, the political alignments are more fluid as candidates may end up being backed by parties that do not support them at the national level.

Who Are The Generals?

The senior officers who retired prematurely include Lieutenant General Edy Rahmayadi (formerly Chief of Army Strategic Reserve Command/KOSTRAD); Brigadier General Edy Nasution (formerly Commander of Riau Military Resort Command); Inspector General Murad Ismail (formerly Chief of the Police's

Paramilitary Unit, the Mobile Brigade Corps/BRIMOB); Inspector General Safaruddin (formerly East Kalimantan Regional Police Chief); and Inspector General Anton Charliyan (formerly Deputy Head of the Police Education and Training Institute) who previously served as the West Java Regional Police Chief.

Gen Edy Rahmayadi, who currently serves as the Chairman of Indonesian Football Association (PSSI), is running as a candidate in North Sumatra province with endorsement from Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, PKS, and NasDem. Gen Edy Nasution runs as a vice-governor candidate for the Riau province with endorsement from Nasdem, PAN, and PKS. Gen Murad runs as a candidate in Maluku province with endorsement from eight political parties, including PDI-P and Gerindra.

Insp-Gen Safaruddin, on the other hand, runs as a vice-governor candidate in East Kalimantan province, whereas Gen Anton runs as vice-governor candidate in West Java. Both Safaruddin and Anton run on the PDIP ticket.

The Indonesian Constitution and election rules guarantee every citizen the ability to exercise their political rights, including running in an election, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, and profession. To maintain impartiality and professionalism of state institutions, police officers and military personnel are required to resign or retire from their institutions should they wish to enter politics.

Slippery Slope?

How these regulations operate was demonstrated recently by Agus Yudhoyono, a former major in the Indonesian Army, who retired early from the military to run in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017. Another case was Yoyok Riyo Sudibyo, formerly a major in the Indonesian Army, who retired early from the military to enter business, before running and getting elected as the Regent of Batang in 2012.

Retired military and police officers, on the other hand, are free to exercise their political rights given their having transitioned to civilian life. It is a contentious issue when military and police officers express, even if tacitly, their interest to exercise their political rights before they resign from their posts. This is because it could affect the professionalism of the respective institutions.

Given their extensive influence over the rank-and-file of the respective institutions they lead and the strategic offices they hold, it is feared their plan may lead to the abuse of authority, resulting in the politicising of both institutions, directly or indirectly.

Indeed, the abovementioned legislations restrict both military and police personnel from voting. Family members or close acquaintances, however, could be enticed, as the legislations do not bind them. Additionally, military personnel and police officers with patronage links to the candidates could be mobilised to influence the outcome of the election in various subtle ways.

On top of institutional influence, relations with societal groups and communities in a given region could be leveraged by the prospective candidates from the military to gain an edge over their competitors.

Push and Pull Factors

Push and pull factors play a key role in the generals' early transition to politics. Personal aspirations seem to be a common driver. Generals Edy Rahmayadi and Murad, for instance, had indicated their willingness to serve and to help develop their respective home provinces. Another critical push factor is the mandatory retirement age and the subsequent uncertainties that come with it.

By transitioning early to politics using the momentum of the regional elections, the generals could avoid the uncertainties of their own future. Finally, the backlog in career pathways due to the shortage of posts in the military is another compelling driver for military officers, not only generals but also mid-ranking officers, pushing them to find alternative career paths.

The inability of political parties to groom party figures with extensive political capital – i.e. financial resources, political networks and popularity, among others – is a critical pull factor. The simultaneity of regional elections means that parties would have to compete in numerous regions and at different levels of the elections, in turn increasing the demand for capable, tested and popular party cadres.

'Ready-made' Leaders?

Producing electable party-groomed cadres in numbers, however, is a time consuming and costly undertaking. Moreover, as party identification in Indonesia is low and individual figures feature more prominently in regional elections, there is little guarantee the investment parties make in grooming their cadres would yield pay off.

Military and police generals, therefore, are a logical group of potential leaders to be tapped considering that they possess ready-to-use political capital that could plug the chronic lack of leadership grooming among Indonesian political parties. These generals are also relatively well-known thanks to their military or police backgrounds, their capacity to bankroll their own campaigns, and the substantial personal networks forged during their time of service.

Even though their popularity and influence will slowly decline over time, retired senior military and police officers remain suitable candidates. More importantly, they can be recruited almost instantaneously without having to exhaust precious resources or time to groom and train them.

Implications for Indonesia's Democracy

What does this trend mean for Indonesia's democracy? First, it shows that political parties struggle to nurture electable party cadres. In the long run, such deficiency may result in dependency on stop-gap solutions, which reliance on military officers can lead to. The trend also shows that political parties are highly short term-oriented, prioritising practical gains over long term benefits.

Secondly, the trend may compromise both military and police professionalism,

particularly the need for both institutions to remain politically neutral during election campaigns.

Although the political participation of active military and police generals in elections may not directly contravene the existing laws and regulations, it may compromise their commitment to professional ethics and duties to safeguard the country and to uphold and enforce laws.

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