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Indonesian Presidential Election 2019

The Millennial Generation: Deciding Bloc?

By Syafiq Hasyim

Synopsis

Indonesian millennials will determine the direction of the Indonesian presidential election next year due to their significant population size (34%-50%). The presidential candidates who are able to think, absorb and accommodate their aspirations would probably be well placed to win.

Commentary

INDONESIA HAS taken the first step towards the 2019 presidential election by announcing the nominees for presidential and vice presidential candidates on 10 August 2018. The 2019 election is a re-run of the 2014 presidential election between Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. President Joko, also known as Jokowi, has appointed as his running mate Ma'ruf Amin, a conservative cleric from the Council of Indonesian Ulama (Majelis Ulama Indonesia, MUI) with a Nahdaltul Ulama background. On his part, Prabowo has chosen Sandiaga Uno, an entrepreneur and former vice governor of the capital city of Jakarta.

Although the presidential election will be held in April 2019, the supporters of the two candidates have since nomination day aggressively started to canvas for votes especially in social media. The millennial voters are potential targets due their significant numbers and their prolific use of the social media.

Internet-based Politics

The millennial population in Indonesia forms about 34.5% - 50% (ages 15-35). This is a very significant size and therefore a clear target group to win over. However, are both contenders aware and familiar with the aspirations of the millennial generation?

A strong characteristic of the millennials is their high literacy and engagement in the Internet. The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and University of Berkeley in their 2011 research *American Millennials: Deciphering the Enigma Generation* identify the strong face of American millennials as digital natives. Some 57% of American millennials are among the first group who try new technology. Their online activity in uploading and making contents whether photos, blog, micro-blog, and others is high: 60%, compared to the non-millennials at 29%.

Research done in 2016 by Indonesia's Alvara Research Centre indicates that Indonesian millennials have almost similar characteristics to their American counterparts. Indonesian millennials utilise digital sources to know and understand politics with a reliance on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and LINE-channels (instead of WhatsApp) shaping their perceptions on politics. Competing presidential candidates who practise textbook politics now need to get to grips with this new political phenomenon to achieve success

Pragmatic Concern

A perspective that Indonesian millennials embrace is whether or not politics are useful for their immediate needs, their innovative imagination and creativity. Idealism in politics, meaning a full commitment to political ideology whether it is leftist, Islamist or liberal, is not a common perspective among the politics of millennials. Millennials consider politics in terms of the concrete and direct impact for them.

The Indonesian media often portrays the country's millennial generation as pragmatic people, and less interested in political idealism, by presenting the image of young successful professionals with breakthrough and smart business innovation such as the founders of Gojek and Tokopedia. Young politicians are hardly covered in the media as the representatives of the millennial generation. However, despite their pragmatism, Indonesian millennials are not apolitical.

In fact, the Indonesian Muslim millennials are very critical of the current ruling administration as evident in their prominence in the *#2019GantiPresiden* (*#2019ChangePresident*) movement. They do join in the movement, although sometimes they join without thinking about what is the next precise agenda. Presidential candidates should recognise this trend and find ways to transform their political strategies.

Importance of Religion

The Pew Research Centre survey discovered that African-American millennials are more religious than their peers. This survey is interesting because it mirrors the general inclination of Indonesian millennials. Indonesian millennial Muslims preserve and have a deep commitment to their Islamic doctrines.

However, in studying religion, they draw materials from online sources rather than from authoritative institutions and experts knowledgeable in the study of religion. There is a tendency for them to be attracted to conservative groups of the Islamic congregation. Many newly established-Islamic congregations have a membership base dominated by the millennial generation.

This tendency is quite alarming for the future of moderation in Indonesian Islam, therefore, both Jokowi and Prabowo should approach these groups, not only to win their hearts and minds but also to steer Indonesian Islam on the path of moderation.

Expecting More Positive Role

There is an assumption that the millennials will not use their rights to vote in the 2019 presidential election due their apolitical attitudes. This assumption could not be used as a reason to ignore their significance. It will be a big loss for Indonesia if both Jokowi and Prabowo disregard the influence of the millennials in the 2019 presidential election. How can democracy be preserved in a situation in which the significant number of Indonesian citizens are politically indifferent?

How will the two presidential candidates shape their campaign strategies to reach out to the millennials for the legislative and presidential elections? The participation of the millennials in the coming elections – both in the legislative and presidential contests -- is needed to sustain democracy.

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