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Indonesia's Presidential Election 2019

Jokowi's Chances in West Sumatra: Why He is Likely to Lose

By Adri Wanto

SYNOPSIS

Joko Widodo is likely to lose the 2019 presidential election in West Sumatra. Jokowi's poor electoral prospects in the province are based primarily on his association with the PDI-P which has links to founding President Sukarno and his role in ending a rebellion in the province in the 1950s and 60s.

COMMENTARY

WEST SUMATRA is the only province in Indonesia where more than 50% of its population are consistently dissatisfied with the performance of the Joko Widodo ("Jokowi") government. This is based on data from various surveys since 2014. The data also predicted Jokowi to experience poor electoral prospects in the 2019 presidential election in the province.

According to a survey by Indikator Politik Indonesia and Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC), more than 60% of West Sumatran people, better-known as the Minangkabau ethnic community, are dissatisfied with Jokowi's performance. Both survey results were in line with the 2014 presidential election results, where the Jokowi-Kalla ticket only received 23.1% of the votes while their rival Prabowo-Hatta camp gained 76.9%.

Trend Not Favouring Jokowi

Since the fall of the Suharto regime in 1998, the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) has belaboured to gain political ground in the province of West Sumatra. In the 1999 national legislative elections, although the PDI-P gained a

national majority of seats in parliament, they only won two seats (out of 14) in West Sumatra province. In the 2004 and 2009 elections, the PDI-P failed to gain even a single seat in the province, only finally gaining back two seats in 2014.

Presidential candidates supported by the PDI-P have also fared poorly in the province. In the 2004 presidential election, Megawati Sukarnoputri only received 16% of the votes in West Sumatra, while her rival Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (running as a candidate from the Democrat Party) received 84% of the votes. This trend was repeated in the 2009 presidential election, when Megawati, backed again by the PDI-P, pulled in only 5.9% of the votes compared to SBY's 79.9% in the province.

The 2014 presidential election showed this trend was not just about individual candidates, but more broadly linked to party affiliation, when the PDI-P backed the Joko Widodo-Jusuf Kalla ticket. Even though Jusuf Kalla's wife was an indigenous member of the Minangkabau ethnic community, the ticket only garnered 23% of the votes compared to their rival Prabowo Subianto's 76.9%.

Sukarno's Painful Legacy in West Sumatra

Jokowi, nevertheless, has been more successful than Megawati in consolidating some support from Minangkabau elites. On 17 March 2018, a number of prominent Minangkabau leaders residing in Bandung expressed their support for the president. On 17 September, ten local government heads (two Mayors and eight Regents) in West Sumatra also declared their support for Jokowi in the 2019 presidential elections.

These supporters consider the development of infrastructure in Indonesia under the Jokowi administration to have improved significantly. They have also generally approved of his increased visibility in the region, having visited West Sumatra five times in the first four years of his term to foster development projects. This resulted in the creation of the hashtag #MinangPemilihJokowi ("Minang Vote Jokowi") in support of his candidacy.

However, while some local political leaders and Minang elites based in Java Island support the president, Jokowi must still contend with the controversial historical legacy of his political allies. The prevailing opinion of Jokowi among many Minangkabau people is that he is an 'employee' of the PDI-P and thus a tool of the party's leader Megawati.

The crackdown by the Sukarno government on the PRRI movement in Sumatra in the 1950s caused a deep and longstanding wound among the Minangkabaus' older generation. Therefore, any individual candidates and political parties associated with President Sukarno will not win major support from Minangkabau people.

Psychological Scars of PRRI Remain

After Indonesia declared independence in 1945, it went through a period of instability as it struggled with economic development, foreign debt and governance failures. This challenge was exacerbated by the fact that the newly-formed nation was composed of many diverse and fractious provinces and not all of them were satisfied with the Java-centric direction the country was taking under Sukarno.

As a result, from 1958-1961 several provinces in Sumatra declared their independence and attempted to separate from the new nation-state of Indonesia. Known as the Revolutionary Government of the Republic of Indonesia (PRRI), the movement was considered a rebellion against the central government and military forces were dispatched to Sumatra to suppress it.

The crackdown on the PRRI movement caused a deep and longstanding wound among the Minangkabaus' older generation. PRRI leaders were persuaded by the Sukarno government to negotiate but all of them were arrested and sent to prison. During the conflict, thousands of Minangkabau people were victims of the ferocity of the government army and many were displaced from Sumatra.

Jokowi's Current Policies on Islamist Groups Not Helping

Based on the Indonesia Programme's research in the province of West Sumatra at the end of November and the beginning of December 2018, this historically painful narrative still occupies a prominent place in the memories of some public figures and continues to generate resentment and distrust of anything associated with the ideology and legacy of Sukarno.

Furthermore, in general Minangkabau culture is quite conservative, adhering to a traditional philosophy of *adat bersandi syarak, syarak bersandi Kitabullah* ("traditions are built on religion and religion is built on Al-Quran").

Jokowi is generally viewed skeptically by hardline Islamic organisations and his dissolution of conservative groups like Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) and purported 'discrimination' toward militant clerics like Habbib Rizieq are considered harmful to Islam by some conservative Minangkabau people. This, coupled with his association with the PDI-P, Megawati and the toxic legacy of her father hurts Jokowi's electability in West Sumatra even as his developmental agenda gains popularity.

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