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Indonesian Presidential Election 2019

Politics at the Periphery: The 'Outer Island' Phenomenon

By Jonathan Chen

SYNOPSIS

West Kalimantan, despite being perceived as provincial, provides crucial insights into patterns of politics that lie outside the purview of Jakarta.

COMMENTARY

AFTER A contentious campaign that saw ethno-religious sentiments (SARA) being played out intermittently by ethnic-based interest groups and third party actors, the Sutarmidji-Norsan pair emerged as clear winners in the West Kalimantan gubernatorial election with a ten percent advantage over contending rivals Karolin-Gidot. While Sutarmidji had earlier stated that there was “no reason not to support Jokowi”, shifting sentiments on the ground in West Kalimantan do not all share his enthusiasm for the incumbent.

Chief among those elusive in their support is Cornelis, ex-governor and head of the Indonesia Democratic Party Struggle (PDIP) in West Kalimantan, who goes by one name and whose daughter Karolin conceded defeat to Sutarmidji, albeit reluctantly. Cornelis had since announced that he had recused himself from being the head of the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Regional Campaign Team (*Tim Kampanye Daerah*).

Political Opportunism

His position was replaced by Hildi Hamid, former Regent of Kayong Utara (North Kayong) from the People's Conscience Party (Hanura). Hildi is also a protégé of Pontianak billionaire and seasoned politician, Oesman Sapta Odang. Evidently still

bruising from the loss, Cornelis wields tremendous influence amongst Dayaks (comprising almost 35 percent of the population) especially those based in the strongholds of Landak and Bengkayang regencies.

Following the implementation of simultaneous legislative elections that run parallel with the presidential election in April 2019, political opportunism and rent-seeking remains a strong *raison d'être* in clinching support from the oligarchs. Cornelis is himself running for a seat at the People's Representative Council (DPR) while Oesman is running for a Regional Representative Council (DPD) seat representing West Kalimantan.

They are not the only prominent names running for seats in Jakarta. Others include Adrianus Asia Sidot (former regent of Landak), Milton Crosby (former regent of Sintang who also ran against Karolin in the gubernatorial race) and Lazarus (a DPR Member of Parliament with a strong following in the Dayak heartland).

Elites and Grassroots

The Pontianak royal family are also not united in their support of respective presidential candidates. The current Sultan of Pontianak, Mahmud Melvin Alkadrie, as well as part of the Alkadrie family who share close ties with controversial preacher Habib Rizieq and the local Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) organisation, are staunch supporters of Prabowo Subianto.

On the other hand, family members who derive from or are closely associated with the last reigning Sultan - Syarif Hamid Alkadrie II - before he was deposed in 1950 as a suspected federalist, are largely supportive of Jokowi and his policies. As West Kalimantan had historically been under the thumb of military-rule from Jakarta during the Suharto period, from 1966 to 1998, Prabowo's military background and his past links with intelligence were to them a representation of Indonesia's authoritarian New Order.

At the regency and mayoral level, many have announced their support for Jokowi as president. These include: Paolus Hadi (Regent of Sanggau), Tjhai Chui Mie (Mayor of Singkawang), Citra Duani (Regent of Kayong Utara), Antonius L Ain Pamero (Deputy Regent of Kapuas Hulu) and Hairiah (Deputy Regent of Sambas).

Nonetheless despite a strong following at the elite level for Jokowi, grassroots support appeared to be less certain. Support for either presidential candidate can be seen in the urban-rural divide. Generally, Malay-Muslims residing mainly in the coastal cities are critical of the Jokowi administration's ineptitude over the rising inflation in commodities (*sembako*).

On the other hand, rural inland populations - which are mainly Dayaks - had benefited from large-scale infrastructure projects such as the trans-border highway project connecting West, East, and North Kalimantan provinces - and are thus more predisposed towards support for Jokowi.

Centre-Periphery Politics

Politics at the nation's capital especially the 2 December 2016 Defending Islam protests (*Aksi Bela Islam 212*) had visible carry-over effects in the wake of regional elections in West Kalimantan. Tenuous ethnic tensions were politicised and provoked with the aim of garnering votes. While tensions de-escalated quickly in post-election West Kalimantan, antagonism over the electoral results and the incentives by some actors to play identity politics still exist at the ground level.

For instance, processions involving lion dances (*barongsai*) and parades (*pawai*) which were a quintessential feature of the annual *Cap Goh Meh* festival in Pontianak had garnered controversy in the wake of the 2018 gubernatorial elections.

The festival was opposed by mass organisations (*Organisasi Kemasyarakatan, Ormas*) such as the Association of Malay Youth Communication Forum (*Persatuan Forum Komunikasi Pemuda Melayu, PFKPM*) and the Pancasila Youth (*Pemuda Pancasila, PP*).

Firman Muntaco – the current PP leader in West Kalimantan – appealed to the local government not to allow these procession to take place come February 2019, citing sensitivities ahead of the coming legislative and presidential elections.

Partitioning as Political Inducement

These acts notwithstanding, perhaps the biggest prize in these political disputations, is the potential for West Kalimantan, a vast province, to be further partitioned into new administrative divisions (*Pemekaran*).

While the issue of administrative partitioning is still placed under a moratorium for an indefinite period of time, its potential for political bargaining remains strong in West Kalimantan. In his bid for governorship, Sutarmidji had pushed for partitioning with the intent of securing votes in particular areas that stand to benefit.

While administrative partitioning is widely desired across all constituencies in West Kalimantan, its boundaries and scope becomes issues for conflict that cuts across various interested parties and ethnicities. While Kapuas Raya regency and its environs have been prioritised as a potential new province to be partitioned, rival “provinces” had sprung up.

These include the “Borneo Raya” province which overlaps with parts of Kapuas Raya regency, “Tanjung Pura” province that will include most of Ketapang regency in the south and a “Sambas Raya/Darussalam” province that mirrors the now defunct Sambas Sultanate.

Quite clearly these administrative partitioning are not arbitrary – they map spaces that advantage certain beneficiaries. For example, “Borneo Raya” lies within Cornelis’ purview while “Kapuas Raya”, comprising a mix of Dayak and Malay strongholds, comes under Milton, a longtime political rival of Cornelis.

West Kalimantan, despite being perceived by many as on the periphery and provincial, provides crucial insights into patterns of political processes that lie outside the purview

of Jakarta. Its impact and importance upon national politics and the upcoming presidential election will grow in significance when votes outside of Java are taken into account.

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