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Indonesian Presidential Election 2019

Jokowi's Chances in Post-Kalla South Sulawesi

By Dedi Dinarto

SYNOPSIS

Jusuf Kalla's elusive support for Joko Widodo (Jokowi) along with strong backing from Islamist groups for Prabowo Subianto does not bode well for Jokowi's chances in South Sulawesi. Growing discontent towards old established elites as well as identity politics looks set to shape the state of affairs in the coming presidential election.

COMMENTARY

IT IS LIKELY that Joko Widodo (Jokowi) would encounter roadblocks in the form of a significant decline in popularity in South Sulawesi ahead of the 2019 presidential election. The latest survey by a local pollster firm Celebes Research and Consulting (CRC) noted that Jokowi gained only a slight edge over Prabowo Subianto with 46% for the former and 41% for the latter.

This meant that Jokowi's electoral prospect had plunged significantly compared to the 2014 presidential election five years ago where he secured a hefty 71% of votes from the province. There are two possible factors in this significant decrease in support for Jokowi in South Sulawesi: the former vice-president's Jusuf Kalla's elusive support for Jokowi; and Prabowo's strong popularity among conservative Muslims in the province. Jokowi's re-election prospects thus do not look good, at least from the perspective of the province of South Sulawesi.

Jusuf Kalla Only Mattered in 2014

Having Jusuf Kalla as his running mate in 2014 provided Jokowi with a 'coat-tail effect' which aided in his sweep of South Sulawesi during the presidential election that year. Kalla's networks and his stature certainly helped. Notably, Kalla – seen as a

representative leader of Eastern Indonesia – is not only a successful entrepreneur but also a pious Muslim.

Influential within the former ruling Golkar Party, Kalla's association provided Jokowi with significant grassroots support in 2014. Kalla is also a prominent national-level businessman, especially in South Sulawesi due to his late father's strong business networks.

In this year's presidential election, Kalla publicly endorsed Jokowi. Nonetheless, Kalla himself faces challenges, even in his home province. For instance, the mayoral candidate of his choice, Munafri Arifuddin, had quite dramatically lost out to a blank box during the last regional elections.

The reason behind this defeat is growing discontent towards figures affiliated to Kalla's old business and political cliques. A former mayor of Makassar is suspected of having benefitted from a corruption case in a water system installation project. The discontent towards local elites endorsed by Kalla meant that even Kalla could not be counted to help secure votes for Jokowi in South Sulawesi.

Conservative and Islamist Votes

Prabowo, on the other hand, had been receiving strong support from at least two constituencies: the Islamic groups and the grassroots of South Sulawesi. Based on interviews by RSIS' Indonesia Programme, Islamic organisations in South Sulawesi, including Muhammadiyah, the Nahdlatul Ulama-affiliated *Darud Da'wah wal Irsyad* (DDI), Wahdah Islamiyah, and *Darul Istiqamah*, focus particularly on the candidates' Islamic credentials.

They perceived that Prabowo had been less detrimental (*mudarat*) to society than Jokowi, blaming the president for the current inflation over goods and services due to his emphasis on infrastructure projects.

Jokowi is criticised as being a weak president and a 'puppet', easily influenced by his team. They use a common Arabic refrain to describe Jokowi: "If you want to judge someone, look at the friends around him." These Islamic groups were also unhappy over Ma'ruf Amin's appointment as Jokowi's vice-presidential candidate. They perceive Ma'ruf as credible solely for his political leverage to garner Muslim votes.

On the other hand, Prabowo is seen as a much more decisive leader due to his military background. He is also perceived to be a promising leader based on the recommendation of *Ijtima Ulama* I and II — two gatherings of conservative Muslim preachers and activists aligning themselves with Prabowo.

These Islamic groups were paramount in attracting mass support at the grassroots level during the #2019ChangePresident or #2019GantiPresiden movement in Makassar. Similar to what happened in Batam, Medan, and Solo, there had been a united front established amongst the #2019ChangePresident activists at both the national and local levels.

The rally was able to gather a considerable mass of supporters campaigning against

Jokowi — a leader perceived to be an enemy of conservative ulamas yet unable to curb inflation. Given the circumstances, identity politics is an important factor to look out for in South Sulawesi in the run-up to the 2019 presidential election.

How Should Jokowi Proceed?

Jokowi had already established an elite network in South Sulawesi to complement Kalla's support. Jokowi enjoys a close relationship with the newly elected South Sulawesi Governor Nurdin Abdullah. In addition, Syahrul Yasin Limpo, the former South Sulawesi governor, had also publicly endorsed Jokowi.

However, whether the presence of a handful of influential elite politicians can help tilt support in favour of Jokowi remains to be seen. For instance, Nurdin Abdullah, who had just commenced his governorship of South Sulawesi, risks declining popularity if he were to openly encourage supporters to vote for Jokowi.

It is due to a considerable number of conservative Islamic voters who support his running mate, Andi Sudirman Sulaiman, who had a strong Islamist background. Syahrul Yasin Limpo, Jokowi's ally, who had a bad track record due to failure in completing a few infrastructure projects during his term, is likely also to face rising discontent, making him less able to bring in political support for Jokowi.

Rather than relying on elite networks locally, Jokowi should step up political campaigning to improve his image in South Sulawesi. Well-coordinated political parties actively campaigning for him in South Sulawesi will provide Jokowi with a significant electoral boost at the grassroots level. Without their support, Jokowi will have a slim chance of securing a victory in South Sulawesi — the most important province in the entire Sulawesi.

It is the seventh most-populated province in the country with the largest number of voters in Eastern Indonesia. Given the circumstances, winning in South Sulawesi would provide political advantages for those who run for the presidency.

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