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Indonesian Presidential Election 2019

West Java: Tough Fight in Key Battleground

By Keoni Marzuki and Chaula R. Anindya

SYNOPSIS

Home to roughly 33 million eligible voters in the coming national elections, West Java is seeing both presidential candidates Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto clash in a tough fight for votes. How well they do in this province may be pivotal to their quest for the presidency.

COMMENTARY

PRESIDENT JOKO Widodo (“Jokowi”) certainly does not want to repeat the disastrous result of the 2014 presidential election in West Java; he lost decisively – with a margin of 4.6 million votes – to his contender Prabowo Subianto. Since taking office, President Jokowi has paid greater attention to West Java through various means. Primarily he prioritises several infrastructure projects in the province – the Kertajati Airport in Majalengka, which is three hours away by car from Bandung, and the Bogor-Ciawi-Sukabumi (Bocimi) toll road, among at least 30 other infrastructure projects in West Java under the National Strategic Project flagship.

Prabowo, on the other hand, has been focusing on Central Java – a primary stronghold of his party, PDIP, and the president’s home province. Nonetheless, Prabowo does have strong standing in West Java, thanks to his popularity in the province, as well as a loyal support base, devoted volunteer groups and his party Gerindra’s disciplined machinery.

West Java in the Bag for Jokowi?

Several internal polling by President Jokowi’s National Campaign Team (TKN) and

Regional Campaign Team (TKD) show that his electability rating in West Java has steadily risen to match Prabowo's since early-2018. A member of the president's campaign team even claimed that his electability rating in West Java has surpassed that of Prabowo.

A poll by Bravo-5, one of Jokowi's volunteer groups, indicated that his electability rating in West Java stands at 54.4 per cent. Polling by survey institutions such as Indikator Politik Indonesia and Alvara Research Centre in June and August 2018 respectively, seems to support this claim.

An exit poll taken by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) just after the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election, however, shows a different story. About 51.2 percent of West Java's electorate prefer Prabowo over Jokowi if the presidential election were held on the same day of the West Java regional elections.

Pressure on Jokowi

Moreover, slander about President Jokowi's anti-Islamic stance persists. This is exemplified by a recent video showing three women in Karawang (allegedly affiliated to one of Prabowo's volunteer groups) forewarning Jokowi's supposed anti-Islam and pro-LGBT policies. As professed by the president himself, the relentless disinformation campaign against him causes his electability rating in West Java to fluctuate.

The incessant black campaign also raises some questions regarding the benefit of having Ma'ruf Amin as Jokowi's running mate, whom the president picked to act mainly as a bulwark against this particular form of campaign. Additionally, Ma'ruf Amin's appeal to Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) constituents in West Java may not be as impactful as initially expected.

While NU constituents in West Java practise similar Islamic customs with those of NU in Central and East Java, they do not necessarily conform to the political leanings of its central board. NU West Java also suffers internal fragmentation whereby a number of regional leaders are affiliated with conservative movements.

An example would be the local NU leaders in the Tasikmalaya region who simultaneously serve as the head of the conservative Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Hizbut Tahrir Indonesia (HTI) in their respective regions.

Rerun of Prabowo's Domination?

If the surprising result of the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election is any indication, the Prabowo camp can be confident of their electoral chances. After all, the initially uncompetitive Sudrajat-Syaikhu ticket (endorsed by Prabowo's Gerindra and its allies PKS and PAN), managed to defy expectations and successfully beat one of the strong contenders in the race.

But whether they could replicate the surprising result of the 2018 West Java gubernatorial election and the 2014 presidential election is an open question, despite Prabowo's popularity and large numbers of his staunch supporters in the province.

PKS, one of Prabowo's coalition partners, has been plagued by internal strife due to sharp factionalism within the party leadership at the national level. Some disillusioned party members who left and/or booted out of the party form their own political movement called the Indonesia's New Direction Movement (GARBI). The movement naturally attracts like-minded individuals from PKS, which consequentially distract the party from the election.

PKS also has some issues at the regional level. Ahmad Heryawan, the former governor of West Java and one of the party's prominent functionaries, has been summoned by the Anti-Corruption Commission KPK in relation to a real estate development project.

Heryawan was one of the instrumental driving forces that helped mobilised support for the Sudrajat-Syaikhu pair in the gubernatorial election. Taken together, these issues have the potential to negatively affect the party's usually-potent campaign machinery and political networks in West Java.

Lessons from the 2018 West Java Gubernatorial Election

The 2018 West Java gubernatorial election hold several lessons for both presidential candidates. First, Islam remains a dominant political force in the province. Both camps are cognisant of the pivotal role of Islam in the region.

In October 2018, Prabowo's vice-presidential running mate Sandiaga Uno and the chairman of PAN Zulkifli Hasan visited Miftahul Huda II. This is an offshoot of the Miftahul Huda *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) in Tasikmalaya, where they praised the *pesantren*'s contribution to the 212 Movement that toppled the controversial Jakarta governor. The school has declared its support for Uno who is considered as a young and pious leader.

Similarly, both President Jokowi and his running mate Ma'ruf Amin visited a number of *pesantren* and paid respects to influential local clerics across the province. The Jokowi camp also approached Miftahul Huda and its vast alumni network with the assistance of the deputy governor of West Java who is a descendant of the madrasah's founder.

Influential clerics and madrasah have sway over the electorate as some voters look up to them for counsel.

Pivotal Endorsements from Local Figures

Second, endorsements from influential local notables are quite pivotal in shaping voters' preferences. These notables play the role of political power brokers called *ajengan* (which generally refer to renowned Islamic scholars) and *menak* (typically refer to the aristocracy, but in the context of modern West Java could also refer to highly respected political figures).

President Jokowi's TKN, for example, has been attracting endorsements and political support from local figures – such as Solihin GP, Ginandjar Kartasasmita, Agum

Gumelar, as well as candidates of the West Java gubernatorial election such as Ridwan Kamil, Deddy Mizwar and Dedi Mulyadi – to secure his victory.

Third, eleventh-hour electoral tactics, ranging from money politics to black campaigns disseminated through social media, can have impact on both candidates. As these tactics are generally delivered days, or even hours, before the election, they have the potency of changing voters' preferences.

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