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Indonesian Presidential Election 2019

After the Big Fight: Results and Implications

By Alexander R. Arifianto

SYNOPSIS

According to 'quick count' polling results, incumbent president Joko Widodo has apparently won his re-election bid. However, his rival Prabowo Subianto is also claiming victory and is expected to challenge the final results when released on 22 May 2019.

COMMENTARY

INDONESIA'S NATIONAL elections took place on 17 April 2019, after an eight-month political contest that was characterised by some as "the most polarised election campaign in Indonesian history". This was marked by populist rhetoric and identity politics largely attributed to supporters of Prabowo Subianto – who is challenging incumbent president Joko 'Jokowi' Widodo for the second time.

By the evening of 17 April, most independent polling agencies which conducted 'quick count' surveys to predict the presidential election winner was forecasting President Jokowi's re-election. His margin is predicted between 54 to 55 percent to Prabowo's 45 to 46 percent. If this prediction holds, it means Jokowi has slightly increased his margin compared to the 2014 presidential election, in which he prevailed over Prabowo with a margin of 53.2 to 46.9 percent.

Voter Turnout Key to Jokowi's Victory

Despite earlier concerns that the election results might be close, Jokowi managed to prevail over Prabowo once again thanks to the higher than expected turnout among Indonesian voters. Turnout was especially decisive among millennial voters between

the age of 17 to 35 years. Jakarta-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) estimated this year's voter turnout at approximately 80 percent of all eligible voters – approximately 154 million. This is a 10 percent jump from the number of Indonesians who voted in the last presidential election in 2014.

Much of Jokowi's support was gathered from Central and East Java provinces – where he also won with a significant margin in 2014. In addition, he won in provinces with a significant number of non-Muslim voters, including North Sumatra, West Kalimantan, North Sulawesi, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, Papua, and West Papua.

Meanwhile, Prabowo won in provinces where there is a growing trend of Islamic conservatism over the past decade or so, as a significant number of his supporters are members of religiously observant as well as conservative groups – many of them participated in the Defending Islam movement against former Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama in 2016 and 2017.

The provinces Prabowo is projected to have won in 2019 include West Java, Banten, West Sumatra, South Sumatra, South Kalimantan, and South Sulawesi – the latter was won by Jokowi in 2014 thanks to the help of outgoing vice president Jusuf Kalla.

Prabowo's Response to 'Quick Count' results

Prabowo's response to the apparent Jokowi victory is a repeat of his 2014 election playbook. He claimed to have won the election with a margin of 62 percent, even though no credible polling agencies were backing that claim. He also made allegations that the election was marred by significant numbers of irregularities and that polling agencies were showing fake quick count results because they were working as consultant for Jokowi's re-election campaign.

Like in 2014, these claims were not backed with hard evidence. However, Prabowo's supporters have begun to attack 'quick count' pollsters from survey companies like Indikator Politik, Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC), Charta Politika, and Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI) on social media, notwithstanding these companies' reputation for producing generally accurate 'quick count' results since 2004.

The final result of the presidential election is expected to be announced by the Indonesian Election Commission (KPU) on 22 May 2019. Prabowo is widely expected to make a legal challenge on this result. It will be up to the Indonesian Constitutional Court (MK) to arbitrate. Its ruling is expected to be issued within two weeks – approximately around 7 June 2019.

A New *Aliran* Politics?

Members of the 2 December 2016 movement ('Alumni 212') who supported Prabowo have issued a warning that they will stage mass protests against the election results in Jakarta and other cities for the next several weeks. However, last Friday's protest did not materialise.

This was due to warnings from Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) Chief of Staff Hari Tjahjanto that it will "crack down on all efforts that will disrupt public order and

unconstitutional actions that damage the democratic process”. Nevertheless, the group might try to stage the protests in the next few weeks.

Some observers have assessed that a new *aliran* ('stream') politics is emerging in Indonesia – similar to the divisions that emerged between nationalist, Islamic, and Marxist-leaning parties during the 1950s. However, what is different from the 1950s is that today's *aliran* politics seems to be based on regional and religious divisions.

The first group consists of Muslims belonging to pro-moderation movements like Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah who mainly live in Central and East Java, along with non-Muslims living in provinces outside of Java. The second group consists of conservative Muslims living primarily in the west coast of Java Island, Sumatra Island, South Kalimantan, South Sulawesi, and Maluku Island.

New Form of *Aliran* Politics Emerging?

While the 2019 Indonesian general election is now concluded, the contestation for the Indonesian presidency is not over yet, as Prabowo refuses to concede defeat and is likely to challenge the election results until a final ruling is obtained from the Constitutional Court.

In addition, the bitter polarisation between Jokowi and Prabowo supporters might continue through the remainder of Jokowi's second five-year term in office. If the elections result in a new form of *aliran* politics between different groups within Indonesian society, this could last for at least one generation, if not more.

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