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Indonesia's Presidential Election 2019

The Big Battle for Java: Key in Struggle for Power

By Irman G. Lanti

SYNOPSIS

Indonesia has just concluded the third direct presidential election in the country's history. Exit polls projected Jokowi's victory with an increased proportion of votes compared to 2014. Central to this victory were Central and East Java where Jokowi enjoyed a huge jump in vote proportion despite Prabowo making inroads in other provinces. Interestingly, this year's election mirrored the first Indonesian election in 1955.

COMMENTARY

INDONESIA'S SIMULTANEOUS elections to pick the country's president as well as legislators for the new term have just ended. While official results are not due until 22 May 2019, "quick count" projections by a number of pollsters have pointed to tentative results:

Incumbent president Joko Widodo ('Jokowi') was projected to win with a vote difference of between 8-10 percent. This is contrary to some predictions of a close fight, but it is equally inconsistent with some pre-election polls that put Jokowi winning by some 20 percent. Nonetheless, it is important to note that while pre-election polls were often off-the-mark, quick counts or exit polls have traditionally proven to be generally accurate.

Vote Jump in Central and East Java

The most decisive factor that gave Jokowi his projected victory was the huge increase in the proportion of votes he attained compared to the 2014 presidential election in

two major provinces: Central Java and East Java. In that last election in Central Java, Jokowi's home province, he enjoyed a comfortable margin with 67% of the votes over Prabowo's 33%.

For last week's election, the exit polls showed an increase in Jokowi's vote to around 77% compared with Prabowo's 23%. The difference between the two candidates is now 20% larger. With 28 million voters in Central Java, Jokowi can be said to have attained a big jump in additional votes in this province.

A similar picture can be seen in East Java. Here the two contenders only had a vote difference of around 6% in 2014 in favour of Jokowi. In last week's election, the difference jumped to around 33%, according to exit polls. As East Java has a register of 31 million voters, it means Jokowi has reaped a significant increase in votes in this province.

Return of the *Abangan* and Traditionalists?

What explains this vote jump for Jokowi in the two provinces of Java, Indonesia's most populous island? In recent years, Islamist groups seem to have made a lot of headway, dominating the discourse in the social media, and growing more assertive in politics. This is seen in the emergence of the *Aksi Bela Islam 212* (212 Defending Islam movement), spawned out of a massive gathering in Jakarta on 2 December 2016, and the election of Anies Baswedan as Governor of Jakarta, triggered by provocative statements by Basuki Tjahaja Purnama ('Ahok').

While the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU, the traditionalist Muslim organisation) seems to attempt a number of initiatives to stem the growth of the Islamists, the *abangan* (nominal Muslims that usually support the nationalist platform) seem to be silent.

So much so, Indonesianists like Robert Hefner, writing in his 2011 book on religion and politics in Indonesia, asked: "Where have all the *abangan* gone?" The *abangan's* heartland is located in much of Central Java and parts of East Java. The vote jump in Central and East Java for the nationalist Jokowi may partly provide the answer. Have the *abangan* returned? More thorough research is, however, needed to investigate if this hypothesis has basis.

At the same time, another factor may have been at play. In the past, the traditionalists have rarely voted as a block. Their votes were distributed among a number of political parties and candidates. In this year's election, this seemed to have changed. The traditionalists seemed to have been relatively unified in their voting. This is perhaps due to the growth of the Islamists, whom many traditionalist Muslims in Indonesia see as contrary to their approach to Islam.

Prabowo's Achievements

While Prabowo has not made inroads in the two Java provinces, he has actually been quite successful in the other regions, especially outside the key island. He was able to double the number of provinces in Sumatra where he won from just four to six out of 10 provinces in the island. He was also able to retain his comfortable lead in West Java and Banten which he also won in 2014. This is in spite of Jokowi's major

offensives in West Java and Banten, where, significantly, Ma'ruf Amin (Jokowi's VP running mate) hailed from.

The exit of Jusuf Kalla as vice-president has also hurt Jokowi in Sulawesi where Kalla comes from. In the south of that East Indonesian island, Jokowi received 71% of the votes in 2014, while Prabowo received only 29%. Prabowo was successful in turning this around. In last week's election, exit polls projected him to have almost doubled his share of the votes with 58% as opposed to 42% for Jokowi. A similar situation can also be seen in Southeast and West Sulawesi.

Despite these achievements, Prabowo could not defeat the tyranny of demographics in Indonesia. Most of the population of Indonesia reside in Java. The two provinces of Central and East Java combined have around 60 million registered voters, whereas the largest province in Sumatra – North Sumatra – only have around 10 million registered voters; South Sulawesi where Prabowo has made a huge inroad, has only six million registered voters. The largest province that Prabowo enjoyed support from is West Java with 33 million voters, but it did not seem sufficient to lift him up to overtake Jokowi.

What happened in Jakarta?

Another interesting phenomenon from last week's election is the electoral fight in Jakarta. The capital city is often called the "barometer" of Indonesia. The 212 demonstration and the election of Anies seemed to be widely regarded as marking a sea-change in Indonesian politics and signified a major progress of the Islamists in politics.

According to exit polls, Prabowo was able to increase the vote share by 2% from 2014 election in Jakarta. However, he was not able to retain the momentum secured from the election of Anies. In the gubernatorial election in 2017 Anies received 58% of the votes but last week, Prabowo, garnered only 49% of the votes.

The difference of 9% suggests that the proportion of Jakarta voters who voted for Anies in 2017 may not have voted for Prabowo this year. It would be very interesting to analyse the factors that caused this voter migration in Jakarta.

The Electoral Landscape: Back to the Future?

There is an unmistakable parallel between this year's presidential election and Indonesia's first election in 1955. Sixty-four years ago, the modernist Islamist party of Masyumi dominated West Java and the outer island (non-Java) provinces, except for the Christian-majority areas in Eastern Indonesia; the nationalist party PNI and the traditionalist NU gained most votes in Central and East Java.

This resulted in the PNI being the victor of that election, with Masyumi coming in second. This year's election seemed to have produced the same voting pattern, with Jokowi winning big in Central and East Java while Prabowo was victorious in West Java and Sumatra. Despite the 64 years, Indonesian politics seemed to have returned to its "natural" state, which sees the political *aliran* vie for power. Will this be the new political equilibrium in Indonesian politics?

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