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No. 075/2022 dated 7 December 2022

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election: A Growing Momentum for Anies Baswedan?

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SYNOPSIS

*Recent opinion surveys show Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan gaining support for his 2024 presidential bid. Growing voter unease over President Jokowi's handling of the Indonesian economy and uncertainty over the prospects of Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo's presidential candidacy are the reasons for Anies' rising popularity. However, **Alexander R. Arifianto** argues that Anies' path towards the presidency will be neither smooth nor assured.*

COMMENTARY

On 1 December 2022, Indikator Politik, one of Indonesia's reputable public opinion polling firms, released [its latest national survey](#) on the electability of prospective candidates for the 2024 presidential election. The survey revealed that in a hypothetical contest between three prospective candidates, Central Java governor Ganjar Pranowo would lead the pack, with 33.9% of survey respondents backing his candidacy. Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan placed second, favoured by 32.2% of respondents, while Defence Minister Lieutenant General (retired) Prabowo Subianto trailed far behind the two frontrunners, with 23.9%.



Anies Baswedan may be increasing his cache amongst Indonesian voters, but challenges and obstacles remain. *Photo from foto-infobiografi.blogspot.com.*

[In another survey](#), commissioned by Indonesia's Centre for Strategic and International Studies and released on 26 September 2022, Anies also placed second in a three-way race against the same two other candidates. He was supported by 27.5% of the respondents. Ganjar finished first, with 33.3% of respondents, while Prabowo came last with 25.7%. However, the same survey also revealed that in a two-way contest between Anies and Ganjar, 47.8% of the respondents favoured the former, with the latter polling 43.9%.

Factors behind Anies' Electability Surge

Taken together, the two surveys indicate that Anies' presidential candidacy is gaining momentum among prospective voters, while Ganjar's candidacy, which is backed by incumbent president Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, seems to be stalling. What explains this latest electoral trend?

First, Anies has enjoyed an increase in his electability because of growing discontent with President Jokowi's economic policy as Indonesians face an increase in the cost of living, attributed to [the Covid-19 pandemic](#) and [the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict](#). As inflation rises, concern also grows with regard to the financial viability of mega-development projects strongly endorsed by the Jokowi administration, such as the Nusantara [new capital project](#) and the Jakarta–Bandung [high speed railway](#) project. Both projects have been plagued by major cost overruns and delays, creating doubts about their financial sustainability.

Second, Anies' rising popularity may be due to the uncertainty surrounding the candidacy of Ganjar, his most formidable opponent. The uncertainty revolves around Ganjar's ability to win the nomination of any of the major political parties, including the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), with which he is affiliated. The leadership of the PDI-P [prefers to nominate as its presidential candidate Puan Maharani](#), speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) and daughter of party chair Megawati Soekarnoputri.

PDI-P controls a total of 128 out of 575 DPR seats — the largest party represented in the current parliament. However, the party’s leadership structure is [highly centralised](#), with the party chair holding ultimate decision-making authority. Megawati sees her daughter Puan [as her heir apparent](#) — a future PDI-P chair and eventually the third generation of the Soekarno family to occupy the presidential palace.

However, Puan’s electability rating in most opinion surveys has [remained in the single digits](#) — the newly released Indikator survey puts her support at 2.6%. Nonetheless, without any political compromise between Jokowi and Megawati, Ganjar’s presidential nomination appears to be deadlocked. This scenario might be in the minds of prospective voters, which explains the electability shift towards Anies seen in recent opinion surveys.

Support from Moderate Islamic Clerics

Anies was first elected as governor of Jakarta in May 2017, defeating former governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama after the latter encountered fierce opposition from a coalition of conservative Islamists united under the umbrella banner of [Action to Defend Islam](#). Anies was overwhelmingly endorsed by the group, and many experts believe conservative Islamists will form one of the crucial pillars of support for his presidential bid as well.

However, [as I noted in a recent article](#), Anies and his campaign team do not wish to rely on the support of conservative Islamist groups alone since they want to [bolster his image](#) as a moderate Muslim politician who will affirm Indonesia’s status as a state founded on secular–nationalist principles.

Hence, Anies is also seeking endorsement from the senior leaders and clerics of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah — Indonesia’s two largest Islamic organisations well known for their moderate Islamic visions.

On 1 December 2022, Anies received the endorsement of former Muhammadiyah chair [Din Syamsuddin](#), who stated that he considers the Jakarta governor a young Indonesian intellectual who has “high integrity, is capable and religiously devout”. Because of these characteristics, Din is confident that Anies will be supported by the majority of Muhammadiyah members.

In addition, former NU chair [Said Aqil Siradj](#) has praised Anies as being “an intellectual with a good vision and mission and [is] also a devout Muslim”. At the same time Said Aqil also [condemned](#) the country’s domination by an “oligarchic system which may destroy Indonesian democracy” — a veiled reference to President Jokowi’s political coalition.

While Said Aqil has not formally endorsed Anies’ presidential bid, he seems to have distanced himself from Jokowi. This is likely because last year [he lost his re-election bid as NU chair](#) to Yahya Cholil Staqf, a rival cleric who is closely connected to President Jokowi’s inner circle. Despite no longer being NU’s top leader, Said Aqil is widely considered to command sizeable influence within Indonesia’s largest Islamic organisation, given his close ties with senior NU clerics such as Vice-President [Ma’ruf](#)

[Amin](#) and [Muhammad Luthfi bin Yahya](#), a member of the president's Council of Presidential Advisers. An endorsement from these NU clerics will influence a considerable number of NU voters into supporting Anies if he manages to secure the presidential nomination.

Impact of Intra-elite Manoeuvring

Nonetheless, it is widely expected that Anies will not have a smooth path towards the 2024 presidential election. While he has secured initial endorsement from the National Democrat (Nasdem) Party and is likely to gain additional endorsement from the Democratic Party and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), he has not closed the deal with the latter two parties. The main sticking point between them is centred on the parties' demand that Anies appoint their preferred candidates — respectively Democratic Party chairman [Agus Yudhoyono](#) and a PKS senior politician, the former West Java governor [Ahmad Heryawan](#) — as his vice-presidential nominee.

So far Anies is not willing to commit to either candidate because he wants to balance his presidential ticket with a politician who has an impeccable nationalist background and is considered a close confidant of President Jokowi. Soon to retire chief of the Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) General [Andika Perkasa](#) is among those considered to have met both criteria. Anies' preference for someone like Andika instead of candidates from his prospective coalition partners has created a stumbling block for both the Democratic Party and PKS [to formally support his candidacy](#).

At the same time, Anies' rivals are seeking to dissuade the PKS from endorsing Anies by [offering ministerial positions for the party](#) in exchange for its commitment not to endorse Anies' presidential nomination. If this plot is successful, it would deal a serious blow to Anies' effort to secure the presidential nomination since he may not be able to meet the requirement of being endorsed by a party that holds at least 20% of seats in the DPR or of parties that collectively hold 20% of the seats. It would force him to look for another political party that controls a sizeable percentage of DPR seats — such as Prabowo's Gerindra party — to make up for the loss.

Conclusion

Anies Baswedan's strong polling numbers can be attributed to voters' mounting anxiety over the state of the Indonesian economy and their growing uncertainty over the viability of Ganjar Pranowo's presidential candidacy.

However, with the first round of voting in the presidential election still 14 months away, there are numerous political uncertainties, particularly as manoeuvring between political parties and the campaign team of each prospective candidate continues. Such manoeuvres might result in further backroom deals between these elites between now and August 2023, when all presidential candidates must officially declare their candidacies.

Hence, Anies' surge in recent opinion surveys, while noteworthy, does not predict his eventual electability. His prospects could improve if a deal between Ganjar and Puan's supporters eliminates the former as a presidential contender. Ultimately, the candidate

who can command endorsement from most of the political parties and a wide range of religious and civil society groups will be the best placed to win the presidency in 2024.

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