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PKS and the 2024 General Elections: West Java, Presidential Coattail Effect and Grassroots Strategy

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SYNOPSIS

*Indonesia's Prosperous and Justice Party (PKS) has pledged not to repeat its failure to be part of the winning camp in the past two presidential elections. The party aims to shore up its strong standing in the urban areas of West Java to boost its national electability. **ADHI PRIAMARIZKI** examines the PKS's electoral strategy that is designed to realise this ambition.*

COMMENTARY

Indonesia's Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (Prosperous and Justice Party, or PKS for short) has not been part of the government for two election cycles. Speaking at a post-Eid social gathering on 11 June organised by the Bogor city branch of the PKS, Dr Suswono, the head of the party's Central Consultation Assembly, pledged that his party would do its best to redress this situation by winning the 2024 presidential elections. Suswono said he believed that the appeal of Anies Baswedan, the candidate whom PKS has endorsed for the presidency, will have a positive impact on the party's prospects in the general election. PKS treats West Java as a critical electoral battleground that the party must win.

PKS in West Java: The Urban Party

The size of West Java's population makes it one of the most attractive voter bases that political parties seek to cultivate. That West Java is the seat of Indonesia's capital city, Jakarta, makes the province even more crucial in national politics. Added to this is the fact that several cities in the province, namely Depok, Bekasi and Bogor, are

satellite cities of Jakarta, making the province susceptible to the political dynamics in the capital. Moreover, Islam has been [a major influential element in the province](#), not only in politics but also daily life. It is no surprise then that West Java is often included among the top priorities of political parties, including the PKS, in canvassing for votes.

In the 2019 West Java legislative elections, PKS snatched 21 provincial parliamentary seats, four seats behind the Gerindra party (Great Indonesia Movement party), which won the largest number of seats. PKS's showing was even better than that of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the winner of the national legislative elections. Furthermore, PKS emerged victorious in some cities in West Java such as Bandung city, Bogor city, Depok city and West Bandung regency, or was in a draw with one other party, as in Bekasi city (same number of votes as PDIP) and Cimahi city (same number of votes as Gerindra). Here it is evident that areas with significant urban populations, primarily due to their proximity to Jakarta and Bandung (capital of West Java), constitute PKS's main voter base in West Java. PKS has thus positioned West Java as one of its primary vote sources.

Moreover, the party does not only aim to increase its votes, but also to increase voter participation in the province. [Voter participation in West Java](#) in the 2019 elections reached about 75%, 6% below [the national voter participation rate](#). PKS has been utilising its youth wing, PKS Muda, to reach out to young voters. PKS has also been campaigning to woo the female vote. However, recent [surveys](#) on Indonesian women's political party preferences show that the campaign has yet to achieve effect. Furthermore, the province's demographic affinity with PKS's typical voters, the Muslim middle class from the urban areas, has made West Java a paramount battleground for the party. However, PKS's presumed predominance in those areas failed to deliver victory in the West Java gubernatorial elections of 2018, which suggests the party is still far from being the *primus inter pares* political party in the province. The party thus has its work cut out for it.

PKS and the Anies Candidacy: A Marriage of Convenience

Pursuing the coattail effect from Anies Baswedan's presidential candidacy has been one of PKS's strategies to achieve its objective of winning the 2024 general election. PKS seems confident enough to benefit from the coattail effect of supporting Anies's presidential nomination. Back in 2019, PKS exploited [the anti-Jokowi sentiment](#) to boost the party's electability. But the candidate it backed at that time, Prabowo Subianto, was heavily associated with his own Gerindra party. Thus, it was difficult for PKS to derive any coattail effect from supporting Prabowo's nomination. Although the Nasdem (National Democrat) party was the first one to support Anies's presidential bid, Anies is not a member of the party. Therefore, PKS has pinned greater hope on benefiting from the coattail effect this time. It has been using the slogan "PKS wins, Anies president". In any event, PKS has no choice other than siding with Anies as there is no other popular candidate that it can support. The other candidates, Ganjar Pranowo and Prabowo Subianto, are affiliated with Joko Widodo, who keeps his distance from PKS.



Anies Baswedan at the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) Post-Eid Gathering in Bogor, 11 June 2023. PKS hopes to benefit from the coattail effect of supporting Anies's presidential nomination. *Image by author.*

Cultivating the Grassroots through Islam

PKS also aims to gain votes from the Muslim ground. It has been using its Islamic roots and frames its struggle to win the 2024 elections by drawing on Qur'anic verses. Suswono quoted *At Taubah* 9:20 to outline the party's electoral strategy. The verse states that triumph can only be achieved by those who believe (*bertakwa*), emigrate (*berhijrah*) and strive (*berjihad*) in the cause of Allah wholeheartedly. *Bertakwa* means that the belief in Islamic teachings must be one's core belief. *Berhijrah* effectively refers to the necessity of change, which is in line with Anies's campaign promoting change (*perubahan*). *Berhijrah* also means return to Islamic teachings to improve the quality of life. Lastly, *berjihad* indicates that it is imperative to go all out to ensure that the party emerges victorious.

The recent rift within PKS resulted in the departure of many of the party's top figures such as Annis Matta, Fahri Hamzah and Mahfuz Sidik, who formed the Gelora party (Wave of Indonesian People party). These former PKS figures were considered part of the so-called prosperous faction (*faksi kesejahteraan*), while those who remained behind are part of the justice faction (*faksi keadilan*). Members of the justice faction are perceived to be more ardent supporters of the application of Islamic teachings to society. Thus, the departure of the prosperous faction may result in the absence of moderation in the use of Islam in PKS's campaign strategy.

Given that voters in West Java are said to be more pious, the use of Islamic teachings as a strategy can certainly help to expand the PKS voter base in the province. PKS clearly needs West Java as other populous provinces in Java are dominated by parties such as PDIP, in Central Java province, and PDIP and the National Awakening Party (PKB), in East Java province.

However, PKS does not enjoy clear predominance in West Java, where Gerindra and PDIP are also among the frontrunners. PKS's predominance appears to be mainly in the urban areas of West Java, such as Bandung, Cimahi, Bekasi and Depok. Voters in the northern coast of the province are more inclined towards the nationalist parties such as PDIP. This means that other parts of West Java, such as the West Priangan area (Bogor, Sukabumi and Cianjur) and the East Priangan area (Garut, Tasikmalaya, Ciamis, Banjar and Pangadaran) remain open for fierce competition between the political parties.

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