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To What Extent Do VP Candidates Matter in Indonesia's 2024 Elections?

Jefferson Ng and Arya Fernandes

SYNOPSIS

*Although vice-presidents (VP) do not have a clearly defined institutional role in Indonesia, they are more than "spare tires" and can sometimes assert considerable influence in the elections. **JEFFERSON NG** and **ARYA FERNANDES** evaluate the electoral impact of past VP candidates and analyse who the likely VP candidates are for Indonesia's 2024 elections.*

COMMENTARY

There has been an intense flurry of political activity to shortlist and select the most suitable vice-presidential (VP) running mates for Indonesia's presidential candidates (Ganjar Pranowo, Prabowo Subianto, and Anies Baswedan) in recent weeks. Amidst the political manoeuvring, a pertinent question arises: to what extent do VP candidates matter in Indonesia's 2024 elections?

Under Indonesia's election laws, only a political party or a coalition of parties with 20% of parliamentary seats or 25% of the national vote can nominate a joint presidential-vice-presidential ticket. As VPs do not have a clearly defined institutional role, they are often seen as just "spare tires" (*ban serep*).

However, based on precedents, strong VP candidates have had demonstrable electoral impact, especially when they possess personal and institutional networks that can be brought to bear. For instance, in the 2004 and 2014 elections, both Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) and Joko Widodo (Jokowi) relied on their VP candidate

Jusuf Kalla, who owns the well-established Kalla Group based in Sulawesi, to garner votes in the eastern part of Indonesia.

Assessing the Role of VP Candidates in Indonesian Elections

We believe that VP candidates play three important roles in Indonesian elections – consolidating party support for a presidential ticket, helping presidential candidates burnish or project a certain image, and mobilising their personal and financial resources to boost the pair's electability.

First, due to the nomination threshold, VP candidates can help presidential candidates solidify the support of their coalition partners. Anies's choice of VP candidate has been an open question in Indonesia since he does not possess a party vehicle and the three constituent parties in the Coalition for Change are keen to have their own favourites as the VP candidate. A VP candidate who is publicly supported by all three parties will help consolidate Anies's coalition.

Similarly, Prabowo's VP pick remains uncertain. Although Prabowo's Gerindra party is allied with the National Awakening Party (PKB), Prabowo and PKB Chairman Muhaimin Iskandar continue to hold off the VP nomination to entice other parties to join their coalition.

For Ganjar, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) is the only party in Indonesia able to nominate a presidential-VP ticket without a party coalition. Multiple VP names are in discussion, but there is a good chance that party chairman Megawati will select a VP candidate from moderate Islamic organisation Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). This will revitalise the PDIP and NU alliance that was credited for Jokowi's strong performance in Central and East Java when current VP Maruf Amin was picked as Jokowi's VP candidate in 2019.



Current Vice-President and ex-Supreme Leader of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) Maruf Amin played a key role in President Jokowi's strong showing in East Java in the 2019 elections, a region commonly regarded by political analysts as the NU heartland. *Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

Second, VP candidates can help presidential candidates project a certain image and signal their support for certain groups and interests. For instance, in the 2019 elections, the Prabowo campaign was able to leverage Sandiaga Uno's VP candidacy to project a more youthful and business-friendly image to voters. Picking another VP

candidate with a business background could signal that a Prabowo administration will continue Jokowi era policies.

Third, VP candidates can mobilise their personal and financial resources for presidential campaigns. For instance, in 2019, Sandiaga reportedly spent almost [1 trillion rupiah](#) (S\$89.9 million) on his presidential campaign. There is also the element of personal popularity. According to [survey polls](#), the three most popular VP candidates are currently Minister of State-Owned Enterprises Erick Thohir, West Java Governor Ridwan Kamil, and Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy Sandiaga Uno.

Who Are the Likely VP Candidates?

The respective party coalitions are expected to select their VP candidates based on their electoral appeal, role in supporting coalition formation, and how they can burnish the image and credibility of the presidential candidates. In general, they are likely to be either party cadres or professionals affiliated with political parties. Potential VP candidates from political elites include The Party of Functional Groups (Golkar) Chairman Airlangga Hartarto and the Democratic Party (PD) Chairman Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY).

Currently, Airlangga and AHY are two party cadres being considered for VP. Although their electability is relatively low in election polls, they are possible VP candidates because of the leadership of their respective parties, which currently hold 14.7% (Golkar) and 9.4% (PD) of the seats in parliament. Picking either Airlangga or AHY as VP will solidify the support of their respective parties for the presidential candidates.

The two likely professional candidates are Erick Thohir and Sandiaga Uno. Erick served as chairman of the Jokowi-Amin campaign team in the 2019 elections. After Jokowi's re-election, he was appointed as the Minister of SOEs, playing a key role in the reorganisation and streamlining of Indonesia's SOEs. In recent months, his new role as Chairman of the Indonesian Football Association has thrust him into the limelight among Indonesia's football fans. His track record in government and ties with media and entertainment company Mahaka Group will likely support his VP bid.

Sandiaga Uno is another potential VP candidate with a strong following. He has more than 9 million followers on Instagram and has been successful in cultivating a youthful image that is likely to appeal to younger voters. As Sandiaga recently left the Gerindra party to join the United Development Party (PPP), a small Islamic party, PPP has declared its [support](#) for Sandiaga to run as Ganjar's VP candidate. His background as a self-made entrepreneur with a strong social media presence, his governing experience as Minister of Tourism and Creative Economy, coupled with his ability to mobilise significant financial resources for 2024, could position him as a strong VP pick.

Concluding Thoughts

To conclude, Indonesia's political parties will carefully scrutinise VP picks over the upcoming months for their likely impact on election strategy, coalition formation, and the presidential candidate's image and electability. The VP candidate's direct electoral

impact will be most evident if they possess strong regional networks and are involved in a close election where two presidential candidates are neck and neck. However, in most other cases, they are more likely to help consolidate the coalition of parties supporting a presidential candidate, help presidential candidates project a certain image, and mobilise their resources in support of the campaign.

Jefferson NG is an Associate Research Fellow at the Indonesia Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. **Arya FERNANDES** is the Head, Department of Politics and Social Change at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Indonesia.

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, NTU Singapore
Block S4, Level B3, 50 Nanyang Avenue, Singapore 639798
T: +65 6790 6982 | E: rsispublications@ntu.edu.sg | W: www.rsis.edu.sg