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Opportunities and Challenges for Ganjar Pranowo in the 2024 Indonesian Election

James Guild

SYNOPSIS

*Indonesian presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo is currently tied with Prabowo Subianto in a tight 2024 election race. **JAMES GUILD** discusses how Ganjar's record in office, his political network, and his ability to articulate a clear vision for Indonesia may impact his chances in 2024.*

COMMENTARY

Indonesian presidential hopeful Ganjar Pranowo is a leading candidate in the 2024 election, but several challenges remain. Ganjar is a charismatic figure with a solid record in office, and, as a member of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), he appears to be a natural successor to President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo. Yet, Ganjar has been unable to establish a dominant lead in the race so far. Polling shows he is currently tied with Prabowo Subianto and trails him in a head-to-head race.

One issue is that Ganjar is awkwardly hemmed in by both PDIP chair Megawati Sukarnoputri and Jokowi, which has made it hard for him to establish a clear vision and identity. On the one hand, Megawati seeks to assert PDIP's political role independently of Jokowi. On the other, Ganjar is still keen to associate himself with Jokowi and his popular legacy. This is making it difficult for Ganjar to develop a coherent policy platform and establish a distinctive public image based on his own record of achievements.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to assume the race is Prabowo's to lose. The PDIP has an extensive political and grassroots support network, especially in the

critical provinces of East and Central Java. Also, many PDIP loyalists occupy key government posts. Widening his coalition (especially through alliances with Islamic organisations like Nahdlatul Ulama, [NU], Indonesia's largest Islamic grassroots organisation), maximising the PDIP's support network and establishing a clear vision on policy issues will ensure that Ganjar remains a competitive candidate in the race.



Indonesian presidential candidate Ganjar Pranowo gave a National Lecture at the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences of the University of Indonesia, 18 September 2023. Given his solid record in office and as a member of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Ganjar may appear to be the natural successor to President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, but he will have to work on articulating a clear vision on policy issues if he is to remain a competitive candidate in the race. *Image from Wikimedia Commons.*

His Record

As governor of Central Java (2013–2023), Ganjar oversaw popular local initiatives, such as [establishing vocational schools](#) for low-income students, and strove to [improve public services](#) and make them more accountable. He was also tasked to support Jokowi's national-level initiatives, such as construction of the Trans-Java Toll Road (although these are considered central government projects, provincial governors are responsible for implementing key aspects such as land acquisition).

Other economic and social welfare indicators have been positive during Ganjar's time in office. Since 2013, the Central Java economy has [averaged 5% annual growth](#) (excluding the pandemic-hit year of 2020). Foreign investment increased, averaging US\$2 billion a year from 2016 to 2022, while the percentage of Central Javanese residents with [health insurance](#) rose from 47% in 2015 to over 70% in 2022. Controversial events, such as the land conflict related to dam construction [near the village of Wadas](#), do not appear to have hurt his popularity.

Ganjar's record in office, along with his ties to the PDIP and style of charismatic governance, make him a natural successor to Jokowi. He has referred to Jokowi [as his mentor](#), and campaign posters around Central Java often prominently feature Jokowi (sometimes with and sometimes without Megawati). Yet Jokowi's desire to

establish a power base and legacy independent of the PDIP has prevented him from fully endorsing Ganjar, making it difficult for the campaign to reach its full potential.

His Campaign Team

The composition of Ganjar's campaign team provides some insights into this dynamic. On the one hand, he has [brought in people](#) who are Jokowi allies and played key roles in the president's political career, such as Andi Widjajanto (head of the Lembaga Ketahanan Nasional or National Resilience Institute) and Benny Ramdani (director of the Jokowi–Ma'ruf campaign in 2019). On the other hand, it was clearly Megawati who [decided on](#) Mahfud MD as Ganjar's running mate, highlighting Ganjar's dependence on Megawati.

Mahfud is thought to be close to the PDIP chair. But he is also an experienced government official, having served in many different roles over the years, including key ministerial positions under Jokowi. Jokowi nearly tapped Mahfud to run as his vice president in 2019, and Mahfud is currently serving as coordinating minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs. All of this [contributes to confusion](#) over internal cohesion and strategy.

Is Ganjar the successor to Jokowi and the most likely candidate to carry on his policies, or is he beholden to the PDIP and furthering the interests of the party? The lack of a unified vision may be impairing Ganjar's ability to establish his own distinctive voice in the campaign, leaving voters questioning what he actually stands for.

His Network

Internal issues notwithstanding, the PDIP remains a powerful political force in Indonesia and Ganjar retains a solid base of support in the critical PDIP strongholds of East and Central Java. According to polling conducted by [Lembaga Survei Indonesia](#), 50% of respondents in Central Java and Yogyakarta (population 41 million) support Ganjar. In East Java (population 41.5 million), Ganjar is polling at 46%.

The PDIP network also extends to influential positions in government, such as in the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, which has been run by Basuki Hadimuljono for many years. According to PDIP Secretary General Hasto Kristiyanto, it was [Megawati who proposed](#) Basuki for the post at the beginning of Jokowi's first term. The ministry was [set to spend](#) 153.8 trillion rupiah (US\$9.7 billion) in 2023, a 21% increase compared with 2022. A big budget increase for a ministry with ties to the PDIP leadership is indicative of the systemic influence the party can wield in this election.

Despite these advantages, Ganjar will need to obtain support outside the PDIP in order to win in 2024. The only other parties that have officially joined his coalition are relatively small, such as the United Democratic Party (PPP), Perindo, and Hanura. Polls show that in a head-to-head race with Prabowo, Ganjar would lose if the election were held today. Many conservative groups supporting Anies Baswedan, such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), are likely to switch to Prabowo if Anies were no longer in the race.

The 2024 Election

Widening his support base and attracting voters who would not otherwise vote for him will be important for Ganjar in 2024. The choice of Mahfud, a one-time member of the NU-affiliated National Awakening Party (PKB), may have been intended to do just that. Mahfud served as minister of defence in the administration of Abdurrahman Wahid, who was a major figure in NU, PKB, and the moderate Islamic movement in Indonesia. The extent to which Mahfud can leverage these ties to bring new NU members, powerbrokers, and other Islamic voters into Ganjar's camp will be the true test of his value on the ticket.

Prabowo's decision to [choose Gibran Rakabuming](#), Jokowi's eldest son, as his vice presidential running mate adds another layer of complexity. While it means Jokowi is unlikely to fully support or endorse Ganjar, it will not necessarily change the race dramatically. Gibran lacks his own political network and the value he brings to Prabowo's ticket is dependent mainly on Jokowi's popularity. It is not clear that this popularity will automatically translate to his son and boost the Prabowo ticket. Gibran also cannot do much to help Prabowo gain ground in provinces where Ganjar is already leading, like East Java.

Despite trailing Prabowo in a head-to-head race, Ganjar remains a competitive candidate. He has a decade-long record of governance in an electorally important province and a strong political network supporting his candidacy. Although internal divisions within the PDIP are creating headwinds, Ganjar has begun articulating his vision for Indonesia through [official policy statements](#). How well this vision resonates with voters will be an important factor in whether Ganjar can close the current polling gap.

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