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The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election: Heading Towards a One Round Election?

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SYNOPSIS

*Recent polls show Prabowo Subianto has further consolidated his support for the first round of the Indonesian presidential election, which is to be held on 14 February 2024. **Alexander R. ARIFANTO** argues that Prabowo's two opponents – Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan – need clear strategies to deny the front runner the chance of winning the election outright in just one round.*

COMMENTARY

With less than two months to go before Indonesia's presidential election on 14 February 2024, frontrunner Prabowo Subianto has significantly widened his lead over his two opponents, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan.

A [December 2023 survey](#) by the Kompas Daily Research Institute (Litbang Kompas) shows that Prabowo was the candidate of choice for 39.7% of respondents, an 8% improvement from the previous survey conducted in August 2023. Ganjar stands at a distant second, with 18%, while Anies's support is at 17.4%. One key reason for this swing is that a large number of pro-Jokowi voters have [since shifted to support Prabowo](#) (a 17% shift).

With Prabowo's front runner status secure, the two most pressing questions moving forward are: (1) the likelihood that Prabowo will be able to win the election in one round, and (2) the identity of the runner-up who will face Prabowo in the second round of elections.

Prabowo: “One Round” Election Strategy

With this large gap in support between the front runner and his challengers, the Prabowo camp is now aiming to win the presidential race outright in one round. To win in one round, a candidate must fulfil two requirements – winning a majority of the national vote (50% + 1) and winning in more than half the provinces (at least 20 provinces).

Prabowo’s improving poll numbers have lent credence to such a possibility. Not only is the Prabowo campaign team extremely well resourced, Prabowo is also seen to have the endorsement of incumbent president Jokowi, [whose son Gibran](#) is Prabowo’s running mate.



With a robust campaign team behind him and the tacit endorsement of incumbent president Jokowi, Indonesian presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto has widened his lead over his two opponents, Ganjar Pranowo and Anies Baswedan, and may be well set to win the 14 February 2024 presidential election in one round.

Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Prabowo’s position is further reinforced by the fact that his team has cobbled together [a formidable coalition](#) of regional power brokers, religious leaders, and other local notables to mobilise their networks in support of him.

In addition, Prabowo and his team are utilising their significant campaign resources to convince power brokers and religious leaders currently backing Anies and Ganjar to switch allegiance to Prabowo instead. For instance, former Nadhlatul Ulama (NU) chairperson Said Aqil Siradj – who [was then supporting Anies’s candidacy](#) – was visited by Gibran on 10 December, most likely in an effort to lobby the senior cleric [to switch support](#) towards Prabowo–Gibran instead.

These factors explain why there is a good chance that team Prabowo–Gibran can win the election in one round. Alternatively, if the Prabowo–Gibran team fails to meet the majority and/or geographical requirements for the presidency, the pair will face off against the runner-up – either Anies or Ganjar – in the second round.

Anies: Seeking Endorsement of Religious Leaders

After languishing for many months in the polls, former Jakarta governor Anies Baswedan's candidacy has gained some momentum in recent weeks. First, his campaign is supported by two political parties with strong grassroots presence in Java. The National Awakening Party (PKB) is semi-officially affiliated with NU – Indonesia's largest Muslim organisation – and is strong in Central and East Java. In contrast, the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which has an extensive network of resolute supporters, is most active in West Java and Banten. This natural synergy means that the Anies campaign is logistically well equipped to reach out to voters across Java island.

Second, in the battleground province of East Java, Anies is relying on the network developed by his vice-presidential nominee, Muhaimin Iskandar, who is chairman of PKB. Muhaimin's influence among NU clerics stems from his long stint as [PKB party chair](#) since 2005. In addition, he commands loyalty by virtue of his lineage: he is the great-grandson of [NU's co-founder Bisri Syansuri](#), who is deeply revered by senior NU clerics in East Java. As a result, [Muhaimin has secured support](#) from dozens of senior clerics who lead large NU Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren besar*) throughout East Java.

Anies is also shoring up his support among voters affiliated with Muhammadiyah – Indonesia's second largest Muslim organisation. He has received endorsement from several Muhammadiyah leaders like [Anwar Abbas](#), a member of Muhammadiyah's national leadership board, and former Muhammadiyah chairmen [Amien Rais](#) and [Din Syamsuddin](#).

Lastly, Anies has received endorsement from popular Islamic preachers, most recently from [Ustadz Abdul Somad](#), who has [8.6 million Instagram followers](#). Anies hopes followers of these popular preachers – many of whom are under 40 years of age – will support him in the February 2024 election.

Ganjar: Central Java, NU, and the “Outer Island” Base

With Jokowi's son having been picked as Prabowo's running mate, pro-Jokowi voters are now split between Prabowo and Ganjar, the presidential candidate of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), of which Jokowi is still a member. Ganjar's path to victory rests heavily on his ability to retain control of the PDIP's stronghold in Central Java, where Ganjar himself was governor until two months ago, when he stepped aside to run for president. This is why he has been urging his Central Java team to engage in intense [door-to-door canvassing](#). Besides Central Java, Ganjar needs to retain traditional PDIP constituencies with large numbers of minorities and moderate Muslims, both in battleground provinces like East Java and in outer island provinces where the PDIP enjoys electoral strength, such as [West Kalimantan](#), [Lampung](#), and [East Nusa Tenggara](#).

Furthermore, both Ganjar and his vice-presidential candidate, Mahfud MD, are well regarded and respected by the NU community. Ganjar's wife is the daughter of an important cleric in the NU community, and Mahfud is a well-respected Islamic scholar

from NU's progressive wing and an experienced politician in his own right. The hope is that the pair will be able to win over large numbers of NU voters.

Ganjar and Mahfud have in recent weeks focused their attention on securing votes in the outer island provinces. For instance, Mahfud recently visited [West Sumatra](#), while Ganjar visited [Papua](#), West Nusa Tenggara, and East Nusa Tenggara. However, the vote share of these provinces is relatively insignificant compared with the populous Java island. With pro-Jokowi voters in Central Java now being split between Prabowo and Ganjar, the latter and his running mate will need to develop a strategy to win back some of these voters in the coming two months.

Concluding Thoughts

With most credible polls showing him having a commanding lead, Prabowo aims to win the presidential election in one round by capitalising on the support he has received from pro-Jokowi supporters. His lead leaves both Ganjar and Anies scrambling for enough votes to emerge in second place in the February 2024 election, while at the same time denying Prabowo the 50% plus 1 margin he needs to secure the presidency in the first round.

However, so far neither Ganjar nor Anies has been successful in significantly increasing his electoral support. The most significant barrier both face is the substantial manpower and financial resources the Prabowo campaign has been able to muster, bolstered by the fact that he has virtually become the designated successor of an incumbent president [who still enjoys widespread popularity in opinion polls](#). These resources will be utilised over the next two months to further consolidate support for the Prabowo campaign from among political and religious leaders in battleground provinces – including those who currently are backing Ganjar and Anies.

As they head into the final months of campaigning in January and early February 2024, both Ganjar and Anies will find it difficult to overcome Prabowo's resource advantage and the tacit support of the incumbent president that he enjoys. While both Ganjar and Anies are likely to continue attacking Prabowo's track record with a view to reducing his votes, it remains to be seen whether such a strategy will make any significant difference on polling day.

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