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Indonesia's 2018 Regional Elections

Regional Setback For Jokowi?

By Alexander R Arifianto

Synopsis

The 'quick count' results of the 2018 regional elections - Pilkada Serentak - show electoral setbacks for the ruling PDI-P and a strong organised campaign by the opposition Gerindra and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). There are potential implications for the 2019 Indonesian presidential election and for President Jokowi.

Commentary

INDONESIA'S REGIONAL elections this week have thrown up surprising results. "Quick count" outcomes of polls in several regions point to electoral trends that can have national repercussions, especially for President Joko Widodo ('Jokowi') and his governing coalition led by the Indonesian Democratic Party Struggle (PDI-P).

Regional executive elections, especially those that elect provincial governors, are increasingly being viewed as a barometer for the forthcoming 2019 general election. A number of Indonesian parties which opposed President Jokowi have vowed to use the 2018 *pilkada* as a referendum for his presidency and his political party, PDI-P.

PDI-P's electoral 'setback'

On 27 June 2018 more than 150 million voters across Indonesia casted their ballots to elect local executives in 17 provinces, 39 municipalities and 115 regencies throughout the Indonesian archipelago.

Unofficial results based on "quick count" predictions by a number of reputable Indonesian survey organisations, including the Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) and Kompas Daily, suggest an electoral setback for the PDI-P.

In the North Sumatra gubernatorial contest, Retired Lieutenant General Edy Rahmayadi – backed by a coalition of parties comprising Golkar, Gerindra and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), handily defeated former Jakarta Deputy Governor Djarot Saiful Hidayat, who was backed by PDI-P, with a margin of 59 to 41 percent. It was a similar vote margin by which Djarot's former boss, Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, was defeated in the Jakarta gubernatorial election last year.

In the West Java gubernatorial election, Ridwan Kamil, the Mayor of Bandung, who was backed by the National Democratic Party (Nasdem) and United Development Party (PPP) - won the election by about 32.5 percent of the vote. However, what was unexpected was a very strong showing by Retired General Sudrajat, the candidate of the Gerindra and PKS coalition.

With about 29.5 percent of the vote, he was placed second in the race, upstaging Dedi Mulyadi, the Golkar candidate who only received about 25 percent of the votes. PDIP-backed candidate Major General (Rtd) Tubagus Hasanuddin – finished last with only 12 percent of the votes.

Strong Showing by Opposition

Edy's landslide victory and the unexpected strong showing by Sudrajat, who only polled in a single digit in a number of previous opinion polls, seem to indicate the power of grassroots mobilisation by Gerindra and PKS cadres in both provinces. Edy's victory might also be attributable to appeal based on identity politics by his supporters - a strategy which was also effectively deployed against Purnama in last year's Jakarta gubernatorial election.

In East Java, Khofifah Indar Parawansa, backed by Golkar and the Democrat Party, managed to defeat her long-time rival Saifullah Yusuf, who is backed by a coalition of PDI-P, National Awakening Party (PKB), Gerindra and PKS, with a margin of 53.5 to 46.5 percent. Khofifah and her running mate Emil Dardak, use the appeal of professionalism and good governance, in contrast to the use of religion and family lineage by Saifullah and his running mate, Puti Guntur Soekarno, a granddaughter of Indonesia's late founding President Sukarno.

In West Kalimantan, Sutarmidji, who is supported by PPP and PKS, managed to prevail over his opponent Karolin Margret Natasa from PDI-P, with a margin of 56.7 percent versus 35 percent.

In West Nusa Tenggara, Zulkieflimansyah - a veteran PKS politician, won the gubernatorial election race with a vote of 30.6 percent, four percent higher than his closest opponent.

PDI-P Victories

Despite being defeated in key gubernatorial contests above, PDI-P candidates still managed to score a number of victories. Most significantly, it won handily in Central Java province, where incumbent governor Ganjar Pranowo managed to prevail over a strong challenge by Sudirman Said, who was backed by Gerindra and PKS, with a

margin of 58 to 42 percent. The fact that Central Java is both a stronghold of Jokowi and PDI-P largely contributes to Ganjar's victory over his challenger.

In South Sulawesi, Nurdin Abdullah, former regent of Bantaeng who is backed by a coalition of PDI-P and PKS, managed to win the race by 43 percent of votes, far ahead of his opponents Nurdin Halid who is backed by Golkar and Ichsan Yasin Limpo who was backed by Democrat and PPP. Nurdin is considered a highly successful local executive, who managed to transform Bantaeng from an unknown backwater into an investment-friendly regency backed by a strong tourist industry during his decade-old rule in the province.

Takeaway Points

The results of the 2018 *Pilkada Serentak* show significant setbacks for PDI-P, especially in North Sumatera, West Java, and West Kalimantan. Conservative Islamic groups have affiliated themselves with Gerindra and PKS cadres, to campaign against PDI-P candidates in these provinces. This coalition have either defeated them in a landslide – in North Sumatera, or at least have made very strong showings in West Java.

In East Java, there are unconfirmed reports from reliable sources that large numbers of Gerindra and PKS cadres switched their support for the Khofifah/Emil pair in order to embarrass Madam Puti - PDI-P's nominee for deputy governor - denying her and Saifullah Yusuf a victory in the race.

PDI-P's electoral setbacks in these races may force President Jokowi to rely more on his other coalition partners like Golkar and seek support from former President Yudhoyono's Democrat Party to secure his re-election in 2019, instead of aligning himself too closely with PDI-P, his own political party.

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