The Bull in a Dilemma: Stuck Between Ideology and Pragmatism in Jakarta Pilkada

The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) has long been known as a militant political force, specifically as a powerful opposition element during the era of President Soeharto and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). However, the unexpected departure of a central cadres, namely, Joko Widodo, has dramatically impacted party fortunes. A free-fall defeat in the 2024 presidential election was a consequence of this parting of ways, where PDIP unexpectedly lost the opportunity to directly influence the direction of national policy.

This separation also resulted in a decline in support from their traditional voter base and has disrupted the comfortable political coalition that had been long-established. The Party is now frankly facing a credibility crisis, leaving Party members feeling bewildered at the loss of political direction. It also faces challenges in restoring public trust and rebuilding their declining political power.

In an ever-shifting political dynamic, PDIP must now face a major challenge in deciding on candidates for the Jakarta gubernatorial election (Pilkada). Political unrest and protests that have shaken the Constitution have added to the complexity of the situation, and PDIP is thus scrambling to formulate a methodical strategy. Determining the correct gubernatorial candidate is not only important in terms of winning the election, but also for repairing the Party's damaged image and overcoming the negative impact of a resounding defeat in the 2024 presidential election.

Among the various factors that PDIP must consider are its candidate's ability to attract widespread support, to deal with local issues effectively and integrate the Party platform with the needs and aspirations of Jakartans. Discussions at an internal level must be more focused on how to choose a candidate who is competent, can face political challenges and is able to revitalize PDIP's standing in the Jakarta political arena.

The name Anies Baswedan has emerged as a potential candidate for Jakarta Pilkada, particularly after his visit to the PDIP office, which many suspected was intended to cement cooperation between the two. However, an intriguing question arose about the rationale for selecting Anies Baswedan. This decision could be logically understood, because based on the latest survey by Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) on August 25, 2024, Anies Baswedan consistently topped the list of candidates, with around 37 percent support.

This figure depicts a considerable level of popularity and support from the public, making it a strategic choice for PDIP, to optimize its chances of winning Jakarta Pilkada. However, as a party known for its toughness and activist ideology, PDIP needs more than simply popularity. Also, one must remember that Anies Baswedan is not a PDIP cadre, meaning that by nominating him, the Party must consider potential challenges in unifying its vision and mission and integrating an external candidate into the Party's structure and established culture.

Not long afterward, there emerged a report that Anies Baswedan would not in fact be running, and was to be replaced by Pramono Anung, a senior PDIP cadre who has a comprehensive political career and is in tune with the Party's vision, mission and goals. As an internal figure who has long been involved in politics, Pramono Anung offers stability and experience that align with PDIP's character. This choice seems safer and in concordance with Party ideology, ensuring that the candidate nominated thoroughly understands and is committed to the Party's vision. In any case, the decision raises inevitable strategic implications.

Amid this decision, however, a fundamental question arises: Will PDIP adhere to its pure idealism? As a party known for its toughness and ideology, the decision to choose an internal cadre like Pramono Anung reflects a commitment to its principles. However, to be able to rule, politics requires not only idealism but also victory. After a humiliating defeat in the recent presidential election, PDIP has arrived at a critical point, one where maintaining idealism without calculating the chances of winning could pose a major risk. Will PDIP remain steadfast to the values that have become the Party's identity, or will they compromise and adjust their strategy to achieve a more realistic, and more likely guaranteed victory?

On August 27, 2024, PDIP officially announced their nomination of Pramono Anung and Rano Karno as the gubernatorial and vice-gubernatorial candidates for the upcoming Pilkada. This decision was made despite the uncertainty of coalition support and the probability of winning in an increasingly intense competition. PDIP's move can be seen as a steadfast commitment to maintain the Party's idealism while continuing to prioritize their own cadres, even though they may succumb to defeat. Then again, this decision also raises the question: Is this a form of a steadfast and consistent idealism, or an overoptimistic and poorly-measured idealism in facing current political realities?



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