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JAKARTA - INDONESIA

207961848
IO-33307-MPB

WEEKLY | NO.333/ VOL.07, SINGLE COPY PRICE Rp. 9.500,- | BALI & NUSA TENGGARA Rp. 11.500,-

INDEPENDENT OBSERVER
9 772598 103005

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 6-12, 2024
www.observerid.com

"A prolonged war finally destroys the victors too"

- Paulo Coelho

Paulo Coelho, born August 1947, is a Brazilian author who has written at least 17 books and dozens of short stories. Coelho is most well-known for The Alchemist, which was published in 1988 and has been translated into more than 80 languages.

ECONOMY BUSINESS
Sri Mulyani: high economic growth will increase Indonesia's HDI [p.09]

SOCIAL CULTURE
Error – a Ukrainian- Indonesian production at Taman Ismail Marzuki [p.12]

The Race To Lead Jakarta

The question of who deserves to be Governor holds immense significance due to its impact on national politics and the city's pivotal role in Indonesia's economic landscape

By Felia Primaresti

The Jakarta gubernatorial election has always been an intense and dramatic race, because it is a struggle for the top financial and commercial hub of Indonesia, even after losing its status as the nation's capital. Additionally, the results often reflect the direction of national political policy. As a barometer of Indonesian politics, whoever wins the governor's seat in Jakarta will almost always be a figure to be reckoned with in the national political arena, as can be seen in the political journeys of Joko "Jokowi" Widodo and Anies Baswedan. In the 2012 election, Jokowi became Jakarta governor after defeating the incumbent Fauzi Bowo. His victory was not only surprising, but *momentous* in his political career, as it opened up a pathway for him to contest the 2014 presidential election. Likewise, Anies Baswedan, who won the 2017 election, was nominated as a candidate in the 2024 presidential election. This shows how strategic the position is in the national political constellation.

In the run-up to the 2024 regional election, the battle has become increasingly interesting and crucial. Three candidate pairs have emerged from the political twists and turns lately, namely, Pramono Anung-Rano Karno, Ridwan Kamil-Suswono and Dharma Pongrekun-Kun Wardana. This reflects the complex dynamics of an unpredictable landscape. The candidates need to not only win the hearts of Jakartans, but also offer concrete solutions to the city's various persistent problems.

Classic issues faced by Jakarta are governance, transportation, congestion, pollution, crime, social inequality and food security. They feature in practically every Jakarta election. However, this time the event will have a somewhat *different* nuance because, as mentioned before, Jakarta is no longer to be Indonesia's capital. The relocation of the capital city to East Kalimantan presents a new challenge for gubernatorial candidates in redefining Jakarta's role on the national scene, as it affects budget allocation, development policies, and of course the city's political status.

So who will have a better chance of winning? First, we need to analyze each candidate's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the political powers behind them. Each candidate brings a different vision, and is backed by different political parties (or coalition of parties). The ultimate victory will depend on how they are able to capitalize on this support and respond to existing challenges plaguing the city. More than just a local contest, the results will have far-reaching implications on national politics, as it will shape the political map for the 2029 elections. Thus, every step and strategy taken by the candidates is not only seen by Jakartans, but all the Indonesian people, as their potential future leaders. In this sense, Jakarta has once again become a big stage for national political dynamics, one that will foreshadow the future directions of Indonesian politics.

Reflection of political dynamics

The political constellation in Jakarta is always interesting to watch, especially when it comes to the two figures who have left a strong mark on the capital's political history – Basuki Tjahaja "Ahok" Purnama and Anies Baswedan. The fierce clash between the two in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election highlighted the stark differences in political views, leadership styles, and social support that are deeply rooted in Jakarta society. Although the competition left deep "scars" on the national psyche, Ahok and Anies remain the two most popular and influential figures in Jakarta's political landscape to this day.

The survey by Litbang Kompas in August placed Anies Baswedan at the top of electability chart, with 29.8 percent, trailed by Ahok with 20 percent. Interestingly, a survey by Katadata Insight Center (KIC) found Ahok outpaced Anies 33.2 percent to 25 percent. This shows that the two men have almost equal appeal in the eyes of Jakartans. One major factor that explains the continued popularity of Ahok and Anies is their leadership styles. Ahok is known for his firmness, quick thinking, decisiveness, and uncompromising attitude towards corruption. Meanwhile, Anies is better known for his persuasive rhetoric, inclusive approach, and populist policies – such as development of informal settlements and other social programs, as well as the Mikrotrans public transportation improvement initiative.

It is not surprising that the level of public satisfaction with these two figures is still high, even though they are no longer in office. Litbang Kompas on July 16 noted their persistently high electability, with a resistance level of only 17 percent. This shows that Ahok and Anies are still considered worthy and reliable candidates to lead Jakarta in the future.

Islamist party PKS took the initiative by declaring its support for Anies Baswedan-Sohibul Iman. It was considered a bold move, because Anies is a non-affiliated politician, so there is no guarantee that PKS can get additional political support from other parties. This could also prove risky, especially if Anies fails to gain broader support outside his traditional voter base.

But in the later development, PKS – known as a party with a strong ideological position – surprised everyone when it did an about-face, by joining the Onward Indonesia Coalition (KIM) Plus, which supports Ridwan Kamil-Suswono. The PKS decision understandably aroused great disappointment among its loyal supporters, especially as it has cultivated a reputation as an opposition party and one that upholds the spirit of struggle. PKS' maneuver reflects the very fluid and complex and unpredictable political landscape ahead of the Jakarta gubernatorial election, one thick with political intrigue.

The political drama did not end there. Speculation was rife that Anies Baswedan would be nominated by PDI-P, with former Banten governor and actor Rano Karno as his running mate, especially after Anies paid a visit to the Jakarta branch of PDI-P on August 24. This certainly surprised many parties, considering that PDI-P has been Anies' biggest critic, due to the raw politicization of race and religion in the 2017 Jakarta election, that led to the defeat of Ahok. In addition, nationalistic PDI-P has a different ideological base from Anies, who is widely seen as the champion of conservative Muslims. However, it did not pan out, as PDI-P eventually nominated Pramono Anung-Rano Karno.

Amid the political maneuvering, a pair of little-known independent candidates – Dharma Pongrekun and Kun Wardana – declared their intent to contest. But they were suddenly thrust into the spotlight for the wrong reasons: an allegation of identity fraud. Many residents were shocked to discover that their IDs had been co-opted, misused to support the pair's candidacy *without their express consent*. Amid rising political awareness among the public, this is no small matter, as it



AGUNG WAHYUDI/IO

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Officer stands guard outside the General Elections Commission's (KPU) office, Jakarta.

constitutes a serious violation of citizens' rights. If the allegation is proven to be true, the pair will not only have to face the legal consequences, but will also lose an important asset in political contest: public trust.

Despite eventually passing a factual verification stage and being allowed to officially register their candidacy, Dharma-Kun still face formidable challenges to win the election. Their popularity rating is still low. Without the support of a political party, they will have to work hard to convince voters who are known to be critical and engaged.

In addition, if the identity fraud allegation remains unresolved, their political opponents will certainly leverage the issue, to destroy their credibility in the eyes of the voters. In the world of politics, reputation is everything. Once it is tarnished, it is very difficult to restore, especially in a short period of time during an intense election campaign.

Amid the political hustle and bustle of Jakarta politics, the candidate pair that has the clear edge is definitely Ridwan Kamil and Suswono, who are supported by an "obese" yet solid coalition of 12 political parties. This represents a massive political backing, with a well-oiled political machine at the grassroots level to canvass for votes.

Ridwan Kamil, who previously served as the governor of West Java, is no stranger to the national political scene. His approval rating in West Java, at more than 80 percent, is a clear evidence that he has succeeded in creating policies that are perceived to have benefited the community. With this background, Ridwan Kamil is a formidable candidate, one with ample political capital in the Jakarta gubernatorial election.

However, our Jakarta political landscape is not the same as that of West Java. This means that his high approval rating in West Java may not automatically transfer to Jakarta. His challenge will be to effectively wield the support of his big coalition to garner as many votes as possible, without falling into the trap of transactional politics, often the curse of a large coalition.

A large coalition does provide advantages in terms of political power and resources, but it can also backfire, if not managed properly. Ridwan Kamil and Suswono must be able to strike a balance between the interests of the parties backing him and the need to formulate concrete and effective policies and solutions for Jakarta residents. If this coalition focuses too much on power sharing, they could lose the trust of voters who want real change.

In addition, Ridwan Kamil needs to prove that his success in West Java can be replicated in Jakarta. Although he is known as an innovative leader, Jakarta is a much more complex region, one with more diverse challenges, ranging from transportation management, social inequality to acute environmental problems. Jakartans will judge whether Ridwan Kamil has a clear vision and effective solutions to address these issues, or whether he will simply count on his erstwhile popularity.

Shifting political landscape

On paper, Ridwan Kamil and Suswono appear to have a greater chance of winning the election for the reasons mentioned above. However, in the world of politics, victory is not only determined by facts and figures, but also by the dynamics and political maneuvers that occur behind the scenes.

On the other hand, PDIP's move in nominating Pramono Anung and Rano Karno adds another layer of complexity to the battle. Pramono Anung is a senior politician who has long been active behind the scenes at the Presidential Palace, with extensive experience and deep connections in the corridors of power. Rano Karno, a seasoned actor of ethnic Betawi origin, also has strong executive experience, as the former governor of Banten – and popularity to match. This combination offers something different for Jakarta voters, especially for those seeking stability and leadership experience.

Even though he does not choose to run, Ahok has an influential presence in PDI-P, and this needs to be taken into account. The former governor of Jakarta still has a strong support base, thanks to his firm and reformist track record, no-nonsense approach, and innovative solutions in tackling Jakarta's perennial problems during his tenure. In addition, his significant electability provides an additional boost to the PDI-P candidate pair, especially after his appointment as a senior member of the campaign team.

However, the biggest challenge may come from PKS' shift in support for Anies Baswedan. Known for its militant and loyal supporters, PKS' decision to join KIM Plus certainly surprised many parties and gave rise to disappointment among its supporters, who expected it to nominate Anies. This disillusionment and anger could potentially shift the votes of Anies' staunch supporters to Pramono Anung-Rano Karno, which in turn threatens Ridwan Kamil-Suswono's chances.

It was rumored that PDI-P initially considered to pair Anies with Rano. Many analysts would consider this a smart move: marrying Anies' popularity with PDI-P's political power. Anies, who has been known as an independent politician, seemed to be an odd but strategic choice for PDI-P. However, when the plan faltered, many speculated that Anies' bid for the Jakarta governorship was thwarted by the powerful individuals within the Palace. This rumor has sparked litany of wild conjectures among the public, especially on social media, where accusations of political interference were rife.

This phenomenon can potentially galvanize sympathy and support for PDI-P, as the victim of arbitrary power politics. PDI-P's oppositional stance, refusing to "swim with the current", may also earn it some kudos in the eyes of its supporters and a portion of the public.

However, PDI-P's move in nominating its own cadres also needs to be appreciated amid the pervading political convenience or expediency which only cares about electoral victory, instead of core values or principles (ideology). The dynamics in politics and political parties in Indonesia also demonstrate the importance of institutional reform within political parties, to not only provide a clear political career pathway for their cadres, but also improve democratization, including in terms of cadre system and candidate nomination or endorsement in elections.

Ridwan Kamil's success in leading the most populous province in Indonesia, his popularity and social media savviness as well as his calm and cordial demeanor make him a favored candidate to win the race. His running mate Suswono, a PKS politician who formerly served as the agriculture minister (2009-14), is also a well-connected figure.

Ridwan Kamil and Suswono, known by the portmanteau "Rido" as part of their campaign branding, must also assure the voters that they remain committed to the principles of democracy and justice, even though they are supported by a grand coalition which recently drew public flak.

PKS' decision to join KIM Plus is also confounding. PKS has not been part of the ruling coalition, during Jokowi's two terms in office. In the 2024 presidential election, together with NasDem and PKB, it formed a Change Coalition, one that supported Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin "Cak Imin" Iskandar. By joining KIM Plus, it has to re-consolidate its loyal grassroot supporters, although in the dynamism of Indonesian politics this is not at all surprising.

Moreover, in the regional elections (*Pilkada*), the political landscape tends to be more fluid and not necessarily tied to the coalition at the center. In this case, PKS managed to win the most votes in Jakarta in the 2024 Legislative Election, which gave it the legitimacy to place its cadres in strategic positions. It is understandable that it does not want to miss out on the opportunity to join KIM Plus and propel its cadre Suswono to a strategic position, which will allow it to influence local policies.

Jakarta's political labyrinth

Several recent surveys (as of July) reveal how Pramono Anung and Dharma Pongrekun were barely known to most Jakartans. We have to wait for the new electability survey to analyze the chances of each candidate. However, political dynamics and voting opinions must be continuously monitored, because they can deliver a surprise and influence election strategies, especially in the context of Jakarta, with its diverse, critical, rational, and educated and politically literate population.

Moreover, our political landscape today is often framed in black and white, good parties versus bad parties. This mindset is important to understand, especially in the context of Jakarta's demography. According to Statistics Indonesia (2023), the majority of Jakarta's population has a relatively high level of education, which means they tend to be critical and rational in viewing political issues. As a result, they are not easily enticed by campaign promises alone, especially ones that sound exaggerated or bombastic claims that too good to be true (not based on facts and logic). They are capable of evaluating an issue from various aspects before making a decision, including a candidate's integrity and political track record. In the case of Dharma-Kun, it is hard to imagine them winning, especially considering the various controversies surrounding their candidacy. Allegations that they are a "dummy" candidate pair have at least undercut their credibility in the eyes of the Jakarta public.

In an increasingly complex and intriguing political scene, Jakartans seem more interested in candidates who are able to offer real and long-term solutions, not just empty promises or political gimmicks. Dharma-Kun, with all the controversies surrounding them, face an uphill battle in convincing Jakarta voters that they are the right choice. Without a clear strategy and transparency, especially since they are independent candidates, it is unlikely that they will be able to win the hearts of smart and critical voters.

Furthermore, the Dharma-Kun case is a reflection of how Jakartans demand more than just candidates who have political ambitions. They want to see integrity, capability, and a clear commitment to the betterment of their city. In this case, the Dharma-Kun must work hard to prove that they are able to meet voters' expectations and address issues that are their primary concern.

In addition, more sophisticated urban communities generally demand more in terms of quality of life, including access to good public facilities, sound healthcare services, quality education, and a safe and comfortable environment. Thus, they tend to be more rational in their voting behavior. They tend to support candidates who can offer concrete and realistic solutions to improve their quality of life, not just lip service. This prompt them to prioritize competency over political grandstanding. The diverse population of Jakarta also makes the gubernatorial race more complex, as candidates must think strategically to win the hearts and minds of voters, the majority of them young people.

Moreover, in an era where information is easily accessible and disseminated, voters are increasingly sensitive to manipulation and propaganda efforts, and can discover more about the track records of candidates from social media. For instance, Ridwan Kamil and Pramono Anung recently drew flak for old and reputedly "unrestrained" tweets. Therefore, candidates who fail to maintain their reputation or are involved in questionable controversies will tend to have difficulty in gaining and maintaining broader support.

Judging from the ongoing dynamics and context, as of this writing, the Jakarta gubernatorial race will be intensely competitive. The real battle will take place between Pramono Anung-Rano Karno and Ridwan Kamil-Suswono. Both pairs bring concrete visions and strategies, backed by a major political party and a grand coalition, although this factor is open to further consideration. However, amid the tight competition between the two, the final say remains in the hands of Jakartans who will decide who will be more capable in taking the nation's largest urban center towards a better future for all. Their decisions will determine the direction of public policies and development of Jakarta for the next five years. IO



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