

Indonesia's core holds, decisively, in elections

While many observers have underlined that last April's presidential election showed a greater divide in the Indonesian electorate, one stark outcome seems to have been overlooked.

Deeper polarization has arisen between two Indonesian communities in their choice of leaders. On one side, more conservative Muslim communities supported Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno. On the other, more diverse Indonesian communities — in terms of ethnicity and religion — voted for Joko "Jokowi" Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin.

Those diverse communities brought forth a significant lead for the latter pair, primarily because of coalescing support in Indonesia's core. This core consists of the Javanese heartland that encompasses three provinces: Central and East Java and Yogyakarta. The largest electorate block, it entails a third of the nation's ballot at almost 50 million votes.

Compare that to the second largest block in western part of Java, home of the Sundanese, which is at a quarter of the national tally. Sumatra, at third, and eastern Indonesia, at 22 percent, round up the numbers.

In this election, while the outcome from Sumatra showed strong support for Prabowo, the eastern islands leaned decisively to Jokowi. This resulted in a narrow lead for Jokowi, at around 2.6 million votes.

As in the 2014 presidential election, the western part of Java — Banten, Jakarta and West Java — once again went for Prabowo. Although the incumbent President nudged a small lead in Jakarta, in this region he lost by some 6.6 million votes.

That left the rest of Java to decide the national outcome, and it decided decisively. More than



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70 percent of voters in the three provinces chose Jokowi, a Surakarta native, and Ma'ruf, a leader of Javanese-dominated Muslim group Nahdlatul Ulama (NU). Like in 2014, this region was the heart of Jokowi's support.

With such decisiveness, Jokowi-Ma'ruf cleared an almost 17 million margin over their rivals nationally. Acknowledging this importance, it is critical to examine how the people in the core have changed their voting pattern from the 2014 presidential election to this time around.

As occurred in other areas across the country, there were movements in the electorate that shaped the vote: One was a decrease in support for one candidate in a region, and two was an increase for the other because of an increase in participation and a swing from one candidate to the other.

Considering its electoral magnitude, to win in this election Prabowo had to win or at least score a draw in Indonesia's core. That was a tall order given that he was far behind in 2014. But instead, he lost major ground — at a rate of more than 20 percent or more than 3.6 million votes — from his 2014 level of support.

Contrast that with Jokowi's achievement. In this core region, people solidified their support to the tune of 34.7 million votes, almost 9 million votes larger than what he received in 2014. This increase was gathered from higher participation with close to 5.2 million more people vot-

ing than in 2014. Also, the votes that Prabowo lost in this election seemed to have swung to the incumbent.

As was the case in 2014 in his home province of Central Java, Jokowi won in all regencies and municipalities and he expanded his base in those localities. He obtained 16.8 million votes, from which he widened his lead by more than 83 percent to 11.8 million. This provincial tally was the highest total for him of all provinces in the country.

Most of this expansion came from a higher voter turnout — at about 12 percent — to almost 21.8 million. While the rest — of about 1.5 million — was gained from the voters who shifted their support from Prabowo.

Prabowo underperformed in 2014 by 24 percentage points. He only obtained 5 million votes in 2019 compared to almost 6.5 million five years earlier. The negative sentiment occurred in almost all localities.

With such a huge margin, had East Java been an even contest, Jokowi would still have won the election, as this gap is far above Prabowo's lead in western Java.

Instead, East Java dramatically moved to the Jokowi-Ma'ruf's column. A more than five time jump in 2014's number — to almost 8 million votes — separated the two tickets. There were an increase in participation and most of them — some 2.7 million — went for Jokowi.

Moreover, Jokowi expanded his voter base in all regencies that he led in 2014 and flipped seven regencies from his opponent. In all, he added almost 40 percent more votes than in 2014.

With more than 16.2 million voting for Jokowi, East Java was the second largest supporter after Central Java. The margin in East Java alone is bigger than what Prabowo had secured in the West

Java-Banten cluster.

On the other hand, Prabowo suffered an 18 percent drop in his support in East Java, and it seemed to swing to Jokowi's number. This is around 1.8 million voters. In 2014, Prabowo won in a third of the regencies, but only maintained a lead in six regencies this year.

A similar story emerged from Yogyakarta. Prabowo garnered less votes than five years ago, and they seemed to have switched side to Jokowi. Additionally, higher participation benefited the incumbent.

This Javanese region has solidified its preference for one candidate over the other, overwhelmingly. In their heartland, the Javanese reacted and defended their representatives against an aggressive opponent.

More critically, the coalescence occurred despite their own societal cleavages — as described by the doyen of Indonesian studies, Clifford Geertz.

The syncretically inclined *priyayi* (aristocrats) and *abangan* (nominal Muslims) and more Islamic *santri* (Islamic boarding school students) banded together in ensuring their leadership role. In this thrust, the people in these provinces have proved to be the nation's core.

For the nation, this core has been the reassuring magnet for diverse communities in other areas, particularly those in the minorities, such as North Sumatra, Bali, East Nusa Tenggara, North Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua. With rising exclusivism in many parts of Indonesian society, embracing inclusiveness is what the nation needs.

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