

OPINION **ACADEMIA**

How Anies and Prabowo could divide their voters

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Energetic -- Gerindra Party chairman Prabowo Subianto (center) attends the campaign event of Jakarta gubernatorial candidate pair Anies Baswedan-Sandiaga Uno at Banteng Square, Central Jakarta, on Jan.5, 2017. (Antara/M.Agung Rajasa)

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PREMIUM

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Anies Baswedan has just ended his first term as Jakarta governor. Rather than seeking reelection, he aspires to contest the presidency in February 2024. By declaring him its presidential candidate, the NasDem Party paves the way for Anies to fulfill his ambitions to succeed President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo.

However, NasDem would need a coalition to make Anies eligible to contest, which is why the two are courting the Democratic Party and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) to round up the required seats. The Democratic Party has welcomed the approach and apparently proposed Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono (AHY) as running mate in return.

NasDem's declaration of Anies' candidacy follows an official announcement by the Gerindra Party for its chairman, Prabowo Subianto, to run for president for the third time in a row.

Akin to NasDem's situation, Gerindra must form a coalition to formally enter the race. In this regard, Prabowo seems to have heeded Jokowi's suggestion and learned from the two races that he lost, that he would need support from Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) followers to cross the finish line first.

Prabowo has engaged with the National Awakening Party (PKB), the de facto political vehicle of the NU. The overture has been welcomed by the PKB's chair, Muhaimin Iskandar.

Given the current political landscape, there are potentially two more sets of candidates that could join the race. One by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and the other by the alliance of the Golkar Party, National Mandate Party (PAN) and the United Development Party (PPP). These two camps have yet to announce their candidates.

Regardless, one could examine the past electoral performances of Anies and Prabowo to see where their constituency could come from. To allow for a comparison, the presidential election in Jakarta in 2014 and 2019, where Prabowo was a candidate, and the two-round gubernatorial election in the city in 2017, where Anies ran, offer valuable insights.

The outcomes of those elections indicate that their voting blocs are strongly correlated, down to the size and spatial distribution of their respective voters. In the first round of the 2017 election, Anies secured Prabowo's 2014 votes. Meanwhile, Prabowo in 2019 maintained most of Anies' support from the 2017 run-off voting. These suggest that their coalition of voters is almost identical and attracted by comparable narratives put forth by the two.

Anies, though, expanded the ground in the 2017 run-off against Basuki "Ahok" Tjahaja Purnama – billed as Jokowi's protégé. The lesson from this expansion could be pivotal for Anies and AHY in the 2024 presidential election.

In the first round of the 2017 gubernatorial race, while Anies secured Prabowo's supporters, AHY, who finished third, managed to bite into Jokowi's support in the 2014 presidential election. Some 17 percent of the electorate did not vote for Ahok, but rather went for AHY. What was devastating for Ahok was how those voters shifted to Anies' column in the run-off, giving the latter a convincing win.

In the 2019 presidential race in Jakarta, Prabowo managed to accumulate these Anies voters, although at a slightly short level. Had he managed to gather all Anies' votes, he would have come ahead in the capital. Jokowi came into the election from behind (*The Jakarta Post*, April 11, 2019), but he seemed to gain new voters to pass the 50 percent mark. Prabowo, though, retained the subdistricts where Anies was ahead in 2017, extenuating the political and geographical divide in Jakarta between the pluralist-cosmopolitans and the religious conservatives.

Moreover, in Jakarta's satellite cities of Bogor, Depok, Tangerang and Bekasi the support for Prabowo markedly increased in 2019. This suggests that the capital and its surroundings were more receptive to messages and narratives espoused by both Prabowo and Anies, particularly on identity politics.

With such an intertwined nature of their voters, how could either Anies or Prabowo get ahead in the 2024 presidential election?

With the 2019 presidential election as the baseline, both could look at the high watermark Prabowo reached. He was ahead in most of Sumatra, relatively even in Kalimantan and Sulawesi and was behind in the rest of Eastern Indonesia. In the west of Java, he was

comfortably in the lead but was devastated in Central and East Java. As to his voting blocs, they are predisposed toward religious conservatism. If it were not for the Javanese, Indonesia would have marched toward a more Islamist state (the *Post*, July 15, 2019).

Prabowo and Anies must then look at this baseline and determine how to gather the most from the same source of votes. To examine this further, we can then apply the political algorithm of the presidential election (the *Post*, Feb. 18, 2022) that defined a successful candidacy from their character, content and constituency.

The two depict markedly different figures. Prabowo projects a strongman from decades of military experience serving an authoritarian ruler, but in the years of democratization has instead pursue politics through electoral means, relentlessly. He has a longstanding intellectual foundation and a wealthy background that are well-recognized.

Anies, on the other hand, rose in academia and turned to public life by riding the conservative tide offered by the political landscape of the mid-2010s. A political scientist by trade, he is of a middle-class background.

These differences could be more accentuated as each candidate seeks similar voting blocs.

More similarities can be gleaned from the content of their messages. Emphasizing a more exclusive and superior identity and conservative values, while branding their opponents in a black-and-white manner. The 2014, 2017 and 2019 elections saw the most contentious times in the recent political period.

Prabowo could retain some of his 2019 constituency, perhaps those more attuned to his nationalistic rhetoric and strongman persona, and as someone who already has national popularity. But he could lose those who look for more authentic Muslim credentials, ones that Anies could well fill. But both need to expand their constituencies from those who were not yet eligible to vote the last time around, the number of which is not many but could be crucial. Or a more uphill challenge is to work into Jokowi's electoral territory.

On that latter note, AHY's experience in 2017 could reveal insight, as he took away some of Jokowi's 2014 voters from Ahok. There were perhaps those who reminisced about former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's (SBY) time. If in 2024 the candidate that Jokowi favors was somehow deemed lesser by those SBY supporters that voted for Jokowi in 2014 and 2019, they could land where AHY is – which is closer to Anies.

Meanwhile, Prabowo, who now serves as Jokowi's defense minister, could go to the President's strongholds and say that he assumes Jokowi's political mantle. However, this could be met with skepticism due to the divisive experience of past election cycles.

Their battle for this similar constituency will ensue in the coming months and may include attempts to sway Jokowi's 2019 blocs. But other camps are yet to enter the contest, and if they could agree on a pair of candidates that could emulate Jokowi's winning formula, both Anies and Prabowo could fight only for a better chunk of the minority.

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