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## Localizing National Issue as a Campaign Strategy in West Java Governor Election 2018

## Lokalisasi Isu Nasional sebagai Strategi Kampanye pada Pemilihan Gubernur Jawa Barat 2018

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#### **Abstract**

West Java becomes one of central attention in the governor election in 2018. This article attempts to depict how the strategy of the governor candidate pair Sudrajat-Akhmad Syaikhu (henceforth ASYIK) in gaining the votes in the local leader election. This study used a documentation method with a type of descriptive analysis. The data were taken from online media including Liputan6.com, Detik.com, Pikiran-Rakyat.com, and Republika.com. It was found that the ASYIK candidate pair used campaign strategy by localizing national issues so that it could increase the electability and gain a large number of votes on election day. Unexpectedly, by using this strategy, they could get second place with the most votes. Whereas, previously, from the findings of several survey institutions, the ASYIK pair was predicted to be in the third position with a large gap of electability and popularity behind the top two pairs. But, after final counting and recapitulation of the election that was held on 27th June 2018, ASYIK ranked in the top two after overtaking the pair of Dedy Mizwar – Dedy Mulyadi.

**Keywords:** national issue; campaign strategy; governor election; West Java; Sudrajat-Akhmad Syaikhu

#### **Abstrak**

Jawa Barat menjadi salah satu pusat perhatian pada Pilgub 2018. Artikel ini mencoba menggambarkan bagaimana strategi pasangan calon gubernur Sudrahat-Akhmad Syaikhu (selanjutnya ASYIK) dalam meraih suara dalam pemilihan kepala daerah. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode dokumentasi dengan jenis analisis deskriptif. Data diambil dari media online antara lain Liputan6.com, Detik.com, Pikiran-Rakyat.com, dan Republika.com. Ditemukan bahwa pasangan calon ASYIK menggunakan strategi kampanye dengan melokalisasi isu-isu nasional sehingga dapat meningkatkan elektabilitas dan memperoleh suara yang besar pada hari pemilihan. Tak disangka, dengan menggunakan strategi ini, mereka bisa mendapatkan posisi kedua dengan suara terbanyak. Padahal, sebelumnya dari temuan beberapa lembaga survei, pasangan ASYIK diprediksi berada di posisi ketiga dengan gap elektabilitas dan popularitas yang besar di



belakang dua pasangan teratas. Namun, setelah penghitungan akhir dan rekapitulasi pemilu yang digelar pada 27 Juni 2018 lalu, ASYIK menduduki peringkat dua besar setelah menyalip pasangan Dedy Mizwar – Dedy Mulyadi.

**Kata kunci:** isu nasional; strategi kampanye; pemilihan gubernur; Jawa Barat; Sudrajat – Syaikhu

#### Introduction

In the 2018 simultaneous election of a local leader, 171 regions had done election. From 34 provinces in Indonesia, 17 provinces had done local election, was followed by 39 cities and 115 districts (www.otda.kemendagri.go.id). Seventeen regions that held the local election were Riau, North Sumatera, South Sumatera, Lampung, West Java, Central Java, East Java, Bali, West Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, East Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi, Southeast Sulawesi, Maluku and North Maluku. The simultaneous election in 2018 was considered a very important election because it was said to be the determinant of the political landscape for the 2019 presidential election. One of the reasons is because of the large number of voters that gave votes at that time. The data showed that the number of voters who participated in the 2018 simultaneous election was 85% of the voters who participated in the next election that was in 2019 (Kemendagri, 2018).

From those several areas, West Java was considered as one of the regions that were the most interesting in the 2018 simultaneous election. Regarding this Province has the highest number of potential voters that is around 31, 7 million voters. The victory in West Java was considered as an electoral advantage in a national election that is the next presidential election (www.eurasiareview.com). According to the demographical condition, West Java seems to be the focus of all political power that wanted to play in the Presidential election. West Java seems to be the experimental moment of power to determine the attitude of each side that had been issued to compete in the 2019 presidential election. In another discussion, Ngenget & Saily (2020) stated that the 2018 election in West Java was the semi-final round to the 2019 election.

As it is known that at that time, there was three-axis that are predicted to compete in the 2019 presidential election, were PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan) axis with Jokowi, Gerindra (Gerakan Indonesia Raya) axis with Prabowo, and Demokrat (Democratic party) axis with AHY (Tempo, 2018). The three Ax powers had conducted trials in West Java by promoting their respective candidate pairs: PDI-P (Jokowi) promoted TB Hasanuddin-Anton Charliyan (HASANNAH), Prabowo promoted Sudradjat – Syaikhu (ASYIK) and AHY promoted Dedi Mizwar – Dedy Mulyadi (2DM). Thus it was not exaggerating to state that West Java became the benchmark and main determining factor in the 2019 presidential election (BBC, 2018). Moreover, in a more clear explanation, Firman Manan (Academics and Political observer of Diponegoro University) delivered that the West Java election was a moment of warm-up for the 2019 presidential election (BBC, 2018).

From those candidate pairs, there was a candidate pair that is quite interesting to receive the attention that was the candidate pair of Sudrajat – Akhmad Syaikhu (ASYIK). Initially, this pair did not take to account since their popularity level has a huge gap under the candidate pair of Dedy Mizwar – Dedi Mulyadi (2DM)and the candidate pair of Ridwan Kamil – Uu Ruzhanul Ulum (RINDU).

This was evidenced by the survey results that had been done by several credible survey institutions as follows:

**Table 1** The list of survey results from several institutions

Institution	RINDU	HANNAH	ASYIK	2DM
Indo Barometer	36,9 %	5 %	6,1 %	30,1 %
SMRC	43,1 %	6,5 %	7,9 %	34,1 %
LSI	38,0 %	7,7 %	8,2 %	36,6 %
Poltracking Indonesia	42 %	5,5 %	10,7 %	35,8 %
Instrat	38,17 %	8,67 %	8,5 %	33,92 %

Table source: www.liputan6.com (26th June 2018) was accessed on 02nd September 2021

The survey results above, shows that the dominance of the votes is only between the candidate pair of RINDU and 2DM. Meanwhile, the candidate pair of ASYIK is far below the other two candidates. Yet, after the election that was conducted on 27th June 2018, the result of vote recapitulation by KPU (General Elections Commission) showed a very different result. The recapitulation result of KPU (General Elections Commission) showed data as follows:

**Table 2** The recapitulation result of KPU (General Elections Commission)

No	The Candidate Pair	The Votes
1	Ridwan Kamil – Uu	32,88 %
2	TB Hasanuddin – Anton	12,62 %
3	Sudrajat – Syaikhu	28,78 %
4	Deddy – Dedy	25,77 %

Source: www.liputan6.com (08th July 2018) was accessed on 01st September 2021

This result then created astonishments among the political observers. The academics from Paramadina University, Hendro Satrio said that the victory of RINDU was not surprising since it had been predicted previously. The surprising result was the votes of the ASYIK pair. This number 3 candidate managed to overtake the candidate pair of 2DM and was in the second position with a very thin percentage compared to Ridwan Kamil's (www.Republika.co.id).

Based on the facts above, it is not surprising that many researchers are interested in studying the 2018 West Java elections. From the many studies on the 2018 West Java regional elections, we divide these studies into four categories. The first is research that looks at the perspective of communication (Besman et al., 2019; Naufal & Nurrahmawati, 2019; Srisadono, 2018; Wijaya, 2019). Second, research that looks at the linguistic aspects used by the candidates (Hanifah, 2019; Sudaryanto & Wijayanti, 2019). Third, research that examines identity politics (Iqbal & Alfirdaus, 2018; Marzuki & R., 2020; Slamet, 2019). Fourth, a study that uses a political/campaign strategy point of view (Ardipandanto, 2018; Djuyandi et al., 2019; Hassina, 2019; Ngenget & Saily, 2020; Rahmawati & Djuyandi, 2019; Saraswati & Nureni, 2019). Of the four categories, we would like to enrich our study of the 2018 West Java Pilkada from the point of view of political strategy. In contrast to previous studies of political strategy, we see something interesting, namely when there was a pair of candidates who lowered the context of

national issues to the local realm. This strategy is interesting to explore further. Because even though this issue is not programmatic, it can produce a significant voice for Sudradjat - Syaikhu. This was even acknowledged by Dedi Mulyadi who was one of the candidates who lost during the contest at that time (Tempo.co, 2018a). Therefore, this study seeks to analyze the use of national issues as a winning strategy at the local level. This research will at least answer the question of how the issue of national leadership succession is used as a campaign material so that it can lead to very significant vote gains for the Sudradjat - Syaiku pair.

#### Method

This research used a desk research method with descriptive analysis. The primary data were obtained from online media such as Liputan6.com, Detik.com, Pikiran-Rakyat.com, and Republika.com. This research was intended to carry out a careful understanding of social phenomenon based on the symptoms. The reason why the writers chose that because those media are mainstream and mostly accessed by people in Indonesia. Then, those media provide a lot of news dealing with West Java governor election in 2018. In supporting the main data, the secondary data were used namely YouTube video containing candidacy debate. In transcribing the video, the writers used sonix.ai before being checked manually to improve the reliability of the data. The data were analysed by using Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) model of qualitative data analysis.

#### **Result and Discussion**

### The profile of Sudrajad – Akhmad Syaikhu (ASYIK) pair

The figure of Sudrajat that was chosen by Gerindra is not a newbie in the political world of West Java and Indonesia. His carrier is classified as brilliant in the military world besides in political parties. Moreover, before joining Gerindra, he was a former chairman of the regional leadership council of Nasdem Party in West Java. Sudrajat was appointed as the ambassador in China and completed his mission in 2019. When he back from China, he was actively involved in various kinds of organizations that promoted the relationship between China and Indonesia. At this moment, he was even positioned as the chairman of the LIC (The Institute for Economic, Social and Cultural Cooperation between Indonesia and China). He retired from the Ministry of Defense of the Indonesian Republic in 2005, and his last position was as Director-General of Defense Strategy (http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com).

Akhmad Syaikhu, the compatriot of Sudrajat, started his carrier as an auditor in State Development Audit Agency represented South Sumatera in 1986 before he became politician. He had occupied legislative positions and executive as well. His political work began in 2004 as he was selected as a Regional Assembly member of Bekasi city from Prosperous Justice Party (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera or PKS). Not even five years positioning on the board chair, he nominated himself to be the Mayor of Bekasi in the 2008 local election, but he lost by Mochtar Mohammad-Rahmat Effendi pair. After one year, he again held the status of house representative in the West Java DPRD for the 2009-2013 periods. Even though he lost, he nominated himself again as the leader of Bekasi city in 2013 and served as Vice Mayor. He accompanied Rahmat Efendi that incidentally was his rival in the previous local election. They won with 43, 87% votes. The success of Syaikhu, either in legislative or executive, made him trusted by his party to

reach the top position. He was the Chairman of the Regional Leadership Council of West Java Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in 2015 (<a href="http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com">http://www.pikiran-rakyat.com</a>).

#### The 2018 Local Election in the Shadow of the 2019 Presidential Election

Since the middle of Jokowi's term of office, the political dynamics that happened in Indonesia were very tight. The competition between coalition and opposition started to be seen openly in public. The attack towards the incumbent emerged from various lines, starting from policy issues until old issues that are brought up again such as identity issues. That tight competition then aroused the public perception that made the condition as if the choices of political direction in 2019 only had two options; they were Jokowi or change the president. From some of the available information, change the president issue (#2019GantiPresiden) was firstly announced by Mardani Ali Sera who was a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR-RI) from PKS through a talk show in one private television station. Then, this issue caused the dichotomy of perception amid community.

This issue became a hot issue that is discussed seriously among the public. It seemed that this issue was raised on purpose approaching the 2018 simultaneous election was done. With the spread of this issue, then the community made this issue one of the indicators of political decisions at the local election. Then, a perception aroused that the political decision at the local election would be implicated very well on the constellation of contestation in the 2019 presidential election.

In various regions, people only made assumptions toward the candidate pairs that were competing. If choosing this candidate pair, then the consequences would lead to a victory for this presidential candidate pair. If voting for that candidate pair, then it would lead to a victory for that candidate pair. This was the public's perception that aroused in several areas. The consideration was only because associating the supporting parties of the candidate who competed. If this candidate pair was supported by this party, then obviously they would be the supporters of that president. If that candidate pair was supported by that party, then that candidate would support that president. This was like the description of the public's perception when the election of a local leader was held. The West Java local election experienced different things since the ASYIK pair openly made a declaration to the public regarding their support direction on the 2019 presidential election.

To prove this argument, we try to gather good views from parties/politicians, observers, and the government. From the various sources that we have collected, we managed to find the conclusion that the simultaneous regional elections in 2018 are in the shadow of the 2019 presidential election. As we quoted from the results of interviews conducted by DetikNews (2018) to Gun Gun Heryanto as a political observer (Tuesday 26 June 2018). Heryanto said that the 2018 simultaneous regional elections did have a strategic meaning for the political constellation ahead of the 2019 presidential election. He provides some reasons that the 2018 simultaneous regional elections were a preliminary battle for political parties in the regional elections. Because, with this fight, political parties can calculate the potential of their constituents. As stated in the news published by Kabar24.bisnis.com, (2018), Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the chairman of the Democratic Party (2018), said that "the 2018 Simultaneous Elections could have an effect on the 2019 Presidential Election" and Daniel Johan as the Deputy Secretary-General of the National Awakening Party (PKB). ) also said that "the results of the Pilkada

will affect the presidential election map for all parties, including the PKB party". Finally, from the government side, Tjahjo Kumolo as the Minister of Home Affairs at the time said that "even though he chose a regional head, the smell was already the smell of the legislative and presidential elections" (Tempo.co, 2018b). From the opinions expressed by the three elements, it can be concluded that there are strong indications regarding the use of the 2018 Pilkada as an arena to pit power towards the 2019 Presidential Election.

This indication is even more evident when there are candidates who openly reveal in public that when they win in the Pilkada, in the 2019 Presidential Election there will be a change of president. The moment occurred when the West Java General Election Commission held a candidate debate at the University of Indonesia (UI), Depok, on May 14, 2018. This can be seen at 2:38:42 on the CNN Youtube Channel, (2018), at that time Sudrajat said, "My brothers and sisters, choose number three - ASYIK, if ASYIK wins, God willing, 2019 we will replace the president". This speech was then accompanied by the raising of a shirt made by Syaikhu with the words "2018 Asyik Menang 2019 Ganti Presiden" as seen in the image below:



Figure 1. Screenshot from CNN YouTube Channel of West Java Governor Candidacy Debat

From the discussion above, we consider that there are at least three reasons why the 2018 regional election is very thick with the shadows of the 2019 Presidential Election. First, the 2018 regional election is used by political parties as a testing ground for the water to see a simulation of the vote map in the 2019 Presidential Election. Second, after knowing the map simulation, votes for the 2019 Presidential Election, then political parties will get consideration to determine the direction of the coalition for the 2019 Presidential Election. Finally, winning a regional head means opening up a big opportunity to get a winning machine for the regional presidential election. This is a very reasonable reason because if the winning regional head is part of a coalition then the regional head will be very helpful in conditioning the votes in the region, at least by mobilizing the civil servant.

## The Campaign Strategy of Sudrajat – Akhmad Syaikhu (ASYIK)

According to several survey results that had been explained previously, it could be seen that the ASYIK pair was left far behind. With this condition, the strategy to increase the votes was needed. Then, what was the strategy used by the ASYIK pair? Chapman Rockaway of *Fort Hays State University* expressed the findings of Sigelman & Buell (2003) who state that the campaign chose to use an attacking strategy when they fell behind in polling. When a ticket caused one side to outperform the other side, then the side that is left behind probably would continue attacking (Ishiyama & Breuning, 2013).

Based on the theory, the most appropriate way to be done by the pair who missed the electability in the survey should do an attacking strategy. But, if Siegelman and Buell declare in the terms of the program by carrying out attacks such as negative campaigns to reduce people's interest in the opponent (incumbent), then the strategy that was done by the ASYIK pair is different. This pair carried out an attack towards the incumbent on the national level that is President Jokowi. Whereas, this was irrelevant since the issue that was carried out by the ASYIK pair was an issue that had a different level. The ASYIK pair should attack the level that was being competed namely, Governor level.

Based on this phenomenon, it could be seen how strong the shadow of the 2019 presidential election was on the West Java legislative election. The ASYIK pair took advantage of this moment by declaring the tagline 2018ASYIKwin, 2019changethepresident during the second public debate of the West Java regional election at University of Indonesia Depok Hall (14/5/2018). This strategy caused a reaction in the community especially the supporters of the other candidates.

Minister of domestic affairs gave a response and said that was irrelevant:

"I reminded that local election is about choosing a trustworthy leader. In the debate campaign, I stated that I am willing to be Governor. I am willing to be a regent, a Mayor. Strict. Do not campaign for regional election but the topic is about changing the President. How the local leader could be ridden like this" (www.liputan6.com).

There were still many other responses that were full of criticism toward the attitude of the ASYIK pair. If we jumped to the conclusion, almost all of the responses stated that what the ASYIK pair had done was beyond the regional context. But, even so, the community turned out to get a certain attitude by seeing that declaration. Again, the issue of the 2019 presidential election shadowed the dynamic of the legislative election in West Java.

Interestingly – still quoted from Chapman's article – the strategy that had performed by the ASYIK pair was very suitable with the theory presented by (Gronke, Koch, & Wilson, 2003) that stated that the public's approval of the president is important for congressional candidates, yet the main determinant of candidate success from point of view of presidential support is voting records of their own. Public support of a candidate for the president would determine the attitude of the public towards the candidates who are supported by the president. As the consequence, the support of Congress members for the presidential position is important to attract support from constituents in their district. It is just that Gronke, Koch & Wilson talked in the context of the congress election (in Indonesia it is called the legislative election). But the main point is still the same that is the public's approval of the presidency determined the support direction.

The party managers that suggested the candidate pair of ASYIK also admitted that the Tagline strategy of 2019changethepresident was a determinant factor that caused the soar of ASYIK's votes.

As expressed by Mardani Ali Sera:

"Firstly, of course, the degradation of Mr.Prabowo and Kang Aher is full at the end. It was also followed by the surprise of ASYIK when the second debate campaign strictly made the t-shirt of 2018ASYIKmenang, 2019gantipresiden. This differentiation is really strong and it was done by us on D-10" (news.detik.com).

Based on the information and data that we have described above, Sudrajat – Syaikhu (ASYIK) pair has played several strategies including: first, as a challenger candidate and has a low electability level, they chose the strategy attack. Second, identify yourself as a candidate who represents an Islamic group. This can be proven by the religious narratives they brought during the campaign. Third, identify yourself as an opposition national leader (President Jokowi). This strategy was chosen to gain Prabowo's ballot pocket because Probowo won the West Java area in the 2014 presidential election and at that time Prabowo always appeared as the opposition who wanted to run again as a presidential candidate. Fourth, take advantage of the issue and the hashtag #2019Ganti Presiden by publicly declaring it in public during candidate debates

This is a strategy that was performed by the ASYIK pair thereby gaining the public's supports drastically. The phenomenon showed a unique way of the campaign, that is when the candidate pair proposed a national issue for their campaign to the public and gained unpredictable supports. ASYIK pair, not only attacked horizontally against other candidates but also attacked vertically to the center by representing themselves as the opposition to the incumbent president (Jokowi). The phenomenon is called the strategy of localizing national by the writer that is when the national issue was used to get the public's supports in the election.

#### Conclusion

The candidate pair of ASYIK did not win the competition in the simultaneous election of a local leader in West Java. But the voting result that they got was a surprise for the academics. That very high increase of votes made it important to be studied in more depth. The campaign strategy that played a national issue in gaining votes in the local even was a new thing. In reality, the ASYIK pair is competing with the rival on the same level at the Provincial level that was the pair of Rindu, Hasannah, and 2DM. but, the utilized the moment when the situation of public perception was being discussed by the issue of 2019changethepresident. Then, the effort was proven to give a significant impact on the voting results. This phenomenon could be called a form of strategy by localizing the national issues for the sake of voting support. This study has limitation since it only deals with Governor election in West Java. Further studies are suggested to explore the local issue used in other provinces or even for smaller scale such as Regent and Mayor election in Indonesia. Then, further studies are encouraged to explore the polarization happened in local election due to the effect of #2019GantiPresiden and #2019TetapJokowi hastags.

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