

Incumbent Jakarta governor defeated in bitter electoral contest

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Unofficial but normally accurate “quick counts” by Indonesian polling organisations have given yesterday’s election for the governor of the capital province of Jakarta to Anies Baswedan. According to these figures, he clearly defeated incumbent governor Basuki Thahaja Purnama, who had the support of Indonesian President Joko Widodo and his Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P)-led coalition government.

Late in the day the *Jakarta Post* put the figures at 58 percent of the vote for Anies and his running mate for deputy governor, Sandiaga Uno, and 42 percent for the Basuki and Djarot Syaiful Hidayat ticket. Basuki conceded defeat last night, congratulating his rivals, even though official results will not be finalised until the first week of May.

Reflecting ruling class concerns about the social tensions reflected in the election campaign and result, Basuki urged his supporters to remain calm and maintain “harmony” in the capital.

Over seven million people were entitled to vote in the sprawling capital’s more than 13,000 polling stations. The campaign was marked by a virulent chauvinist campaign directed by right-wing Islamist organisations against Basuki, based on his Christian and ethnic Chinese background.

While preying on the religious beliefs of the most oppressed layers, this was a means of diverting the rising unrest generated by the widening social inequality produced by the pro-business “free market” program that Basuki shares with Widodo, his predecessor as governor.

Anies and Sandiaga, one of Indonesia’s richest men, cynically posed as champions of the poor, claiming they would create jobs, impose price controls, fund clean water projects and end the evictions of slum

dwellers to clear land for corporate developments.

The Islamist campaign, led by organisations such as the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and Muslim People’s Forum (FUI), declared that as an “infidel” Basuki was unfit to rule the Muslim majority population. Basuki, popularly known as Ahok, is currently on trial under reactionary pro-clerical laws on a frame-up charge of “blasphemy” and faces up to five years jail. The FPI and other groups concocted a complaint over a remark Basuki made in an election meeting in September which referred to a verse in the Muslim Quran.

Behind the religious bigotry and anti-Chinese racism lie definite political and class interests. The leaders of the Islamist groups have close connections with various sections of the ruling elite. The campaign against Basuki is also directed at Widodo. Anies is the front man for Prabowo Subianto, an ex-general from the era of the Suharto dictatorship, and Widodo’s opponent at the 2014 presidential election.

Anies and Prabowo exploited the Islamist campaign, which in November and December attracted hundreds of thousands to Jakarta protest rallies, in order to capitalise on the mass discontent of some of the poorest sections of the population with all the political parties of the ruling elite.

Since the fall of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998, various governments, including those of ex-President Megawati Sukarnoputri’s PDI-P and the major Muslim-based parties, have imposed pro-corporate policies that have seen the bottom 80 percent of the population go backwards economically while the elites have enriched themselves.

Social inequality has reached new heights. A World Bank report showed 1 percent of the population owns half of all property and financial assets, while almost

100 million people live below, or just above, the official poverty line.

In 2014, Widodo's incoming government won praise from the global financial institutions for slashing fuel subsidies, but the resulting impact on living conditions provoked hostility among working-class people and the most impoverished layers.

Anies packaged himself as the defender of Jakarta's "marginalised residents," a reference to the 16,000 impoverished families evicted by Basuki as the city administration carried out infrastructure projects demanded by big business and foreign capital. Anies, along with Prabowo and the Islamist groups, spent much of his time in impoverished areas of the city affected by Basuki's projects.

Meanwhile, the Islamists supporting Anies worked local mosques. Election officials pointed to clerics refusing to pray over the dead of families who intended to vote for Basuki. Islamist groups planned to intimidate voters by monitoring all polling booths.

Prabowo, who represents a section of the ruling elite tilted more towards economic nationalism, tries to present himself as a maverick outside the establishment secular and Muslim parties.

Basuki was supported by a pro-business coalition that included Widodo's party, the PDI-P, as well as Golkar, the political instrument of the former Suharto dictatorship, NasDem, the party of media mogul Surya Palof, and Hanura, the party of Suharto-era general Wiranto.

The Basuki campaign appealed to more affluent layers that have benefitted from the Widodo coalition's pro-market restructuring. According to the *Jakarta Post*, polling research showed the Basuki ticket won support from people with at least a high school diploma and an income above the regional minimum wage.

PDI-P chief Megawati personally directed the considerable resources of the PDI-P throughout Jakarta, allocating PDI-P politicians to cover all areas of the city. Megawati was determined to head off a victory by the Prabowo camp as it would weaken the PDI-P's dominance in the national government and affect the 2019 presidential election.

So tense was the political situation that 64,000 police and military personnel were deployed for the poll among fears in the ruling elite and state apparatus that the Islamist groups might mobilise supporters inside

and outside the city. National Police Chief General Tito Karnavian ordered that buses coming into Jakarta be searched.

The combination of sectarianism and popular discontent, seen above all in the size of the November and December rallies, has put Widodo under pressure. His response, and that of Megawati, has been to denounce the Islamist campaign as a threat to national unity. Police and military leaders have echoed this position.

Police moved against the Islamist campaign before a rally held in Jakarta on March 31. Five organisers, including FUI leader Muhammad al-Khathtath, were arrested and charged with treason. Police claimed those detained had met twice to plan mass rallies in five cities from April 20 to May 26 with the aim of toppling Widodo's government.

On April 4, Widodo called a meeting of 20 Muslim clerics from across the country in an attempt to hose down the tensions in Jakarta, watering down his earlier call for the separation of politics and religion. He received support from the two largest Muslim organisations, Nahdlatul and Muhammadiyah.

The election result will do nothing to lessen the impoverishment and exploitation of millions of working people in Jakarta and across the archipelago. At the same time, it is likely to exacerbate the conflicts in the ruling class.



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