



A note for the second presidential debate

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Amid the growing excitement among the public, the General Elections Commission (KPU) will hold the second televised presidential debate on Sunday night.

A central topic is infrastructure, which has been at the heart of President Joko "Jokowi" Widodo's first term agenda. Unlike the previous debate, the KPU will not brief the candidates on the list of possible questions in the hope of bringing more spontaneity and ingenuity to the show.

With neither cheat sheets nor their VP nominees on stage, Jokowi and Prabowo Subianto will have to address the questions based on their personal experience and knowledge. This article provides unsolicited advice about what they should focus on regarding infrastructure so that a meaningful discussion can take place, unlike the last debate, which felt rehearsed and bland.

Jokowi should begin with a simple question: What would Prabowo do differently if elected as president? It is not easy to point out the downsides of Jokowi's infrastructure policy and offer some plausible alternatives. In four years, Jokowi has built 947 kilometers of toll roads, 3,432 km of regular roads, 39.8 km of bridges, 10 new airports, 19 ports and 17 dams. His ability to get things done is undeniable and the outcomes of his work are tangible.

Hence, one cannot simply undermine Jokowi's achievement on the infrastructure front. On the other hand, if Prabowo intends to simply continue to build on the projects that began during



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Jokowi's administration, this implies an acknowledgment of his success — Jokowi's voters would be over the moon to know that.

If in any way Prabowo is able to steer the debate and begin to sell his own infrastructure plan, Jokowi should maneuver into the details and operational aspects of policymaking. As President, he knows exactly what regulations are in place and what barriers are hindering progress.

Jokowi needs to challenge Prabowo on which regulations he would specifically revise or take down to support his alternative plan. He should further question Prabowo on how he would overcome some of the ongoing problems that Jokowi himself found on the ground, such as pushbacks to land acquisition and incoherence among key stakeholders across government levels.

If there is a chance, Jokowi must pressure Prabowo on his stance on foreign investment when it comes to building infrastructure. Despite Prabowo's global acquaintance, he often expresses concern about the country's reliance on foreign powers. But for building infrastructure, Indonesia cannot be a solitary player. The country would benefit much by exploring new technology, talents and financing sources from more advanced countries.

According to the National De-

velopment Planning Ministry, of the total Rp 4.79 quadrillion (US\$359 billion) required to support infrastructure development from 2014 to 2019, only 41 percent could be financed from the state and local government budgets. The remaining has required the government to tap into additional resources, including, but not limited to, foreign sources. Prabowo would need to reveal how his nationalist stance is positioned against pragmatism for prioritized program implementation.

On the other side, Prabowo can start strong by exposing Jokowi's failure to meet some of the promises he made during his first-term presidential campaign in 2014. Jokowi's ambitious 35,000 megawatt electricity program was launched in 2015 and was expected to be completed by 2019, but to date the progress is nowhere near the target.

In early 2018, Jokowi also agreed to drop 14 infrastructure projects worth Rp 264 trillion from the National Strategic Project list as they did not meet the requirements to begin construction according to plan. It would be hard for Jokowi to deflect or even justify criticism that presents hard facts. Prabowo must connect the findings with the difficulties that the working class and poor people must face as key projects are left neglected. No matter how small, Jokowi's failure to keep his political promise would cost votes.

It is obvious that Jokowi is determined to push forward his agenda to speed up infrastructure development. To counter this, Prabowo should highlight the other side of Jokowi's mag-

num opus — that is, the losers of his current infrastructure policy. There are marginalized people who have much to lose because of the development of new airports or toll roads across Indonesia.

In Kulon Progo, Yogyakarta, a group of locals have been forced to give up their main livelihoods as their land is turned into runways and airport facilities. Across Java, newly built toll roads would increase mobility and reduce distribution costs.

But apparently some truck drivers that transport supplies, who should have been the key beneficiaries of the public facility, find the toll fees too expensive. Potentially, small-medium enterprises along the old roads in Java and Sumatra will also be forced to quit the market as passersby switch to the new toll roads.

These are real cases where people are indifferent, or even worse off, despite the massive infrastructure projects under Jokowi's presidency. If Prabowo is able to leverage these untold human interests behind Jokowi's infrastructure, voters might at least learn something new.

Finally, both candidates have to come up with questions that will either gain additional votes or cost their opponent votes. The last thing Jokowi and Prabowo want is to call it a night without having any significant electoral effects.

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