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ABSTRACT: Six turbulent years after the fall of Suharto's authoritarian regime, Indonesia has successfully held full nationwide elections for president and parliament. But has democracy been consolidated? **Meidyatama Suryodiningrat** emphasizes the importance of economic performance in keeping democracy relevant to ordinary Indonesians. The return of "benevolent" authoritarianism—a pseudo-democratic regime propped up by the military—is one possible scenario for the next 10–15 years. **Muhammad Qodari** contends that the elections went more smoothly than many expected, while noting that administrative glitches did occur. He maintains that voters are turning from major parties to relatively small ones, and explains similarities and differences among the "darlings of the electorate." **Jim Della-Giacoma** draws upon focus-group research to demonstrate an increase in political engagement among ordinary Indonesians. He shows how trends among voters—weakening group affiliation, for example—are affecting their candidate choice. In general, the contributors express cautious optimism about Indonesia's democratic future, while warning against complacency. No matter which candidate wins September's presidential runoff, governing Indonesia will prove no easy task.

Introduction

Amy McCreedy

The sheer size and complexity of Indonesia's elections indicate the challenge of democratic transition. With 150 million eligible voters stretched across 14,000 islands and three time zones, more than half a million polling stations were required for both parliamentary elections (requiring four separate ballots) and the country's first-ever direct presidential election. And, at the time of this writing, the voting is not yet over. No presidential candidate has won a majority, so Indonesians will turn out again for a September 2004 runoff, which will pit the incumbent Megawati Sukarnoputri against recent political upstart Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.

The massive election effort resulted in some administrative problems—ballots accidentally punched twice, for example—but overall was fair and free from violence, according to the authors in this Special Report. The smoothness

of the process is an achievement for Indonesia, which emerged from authoritarian rule only six years ago. The authors in this Report warn against complacency, however; it will be many years before democracy is consolidated in Indonesia. "So far, so good" seems to be the consensus.

Of the three contributors, **Meidyatama Suryodiningrat**, managing editor of the *Jakarta Post*, seems most skeptical of Indonesia's pluralistic future. Democracy is not "the only game in town"—that is, it has not reached the point of being unquestionable the way Islam and certain social institutions are unquestionable. Economic performance is crucial to successful democratic transition—if the new system does not "pay off" tangibly, the public will begin to question its relevance to their lives.

Meidyatama suggests that expectations are running high, especially for the president, whom Indonesians want to regard as the "cure to all that has gone amiss since the *reformasi* (reform) movement began." The reality is that the president may not be able to accomplish



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much, facing a powerful but fractious parliament in which no single party occupies even a quarter of the seats (Yudhoyono's party holds less than 8 percent). Reversion to "benevolent" authoritarianism—a pseudo-democratic regime propped up by the military—is thus an all-too-likely scenario in the next decade or so, Meidyatama contends. He points out that the government has introduced two bills that would keep the door ajar for the military to return to politics. It is true that one of these bills has already foundered because of public outcry, but Indonesians may eventually weary of government incompetence and permit some sort of military comeback.

The paradox, according to Meidyatama, is that we must look to individuals connected to vestiges of the fallen regime to transform the system. Having weathered the storm of political transition, they are the ones with the power, connections and practical know-how to effect real change. Meidyatama calls these individuals "embedded elites," as opposed to "free-floating elites" (e.g., pro-democracy activists like Amien Rais) who produce attractive rhetoric but lack *realpolitik* skills. If Indonesia had a strong, politically conscious middle class, perhaps the embedded elites' power would not be so pronounced, Meidyatama contends.

Meidyatama strikes a personal note by describing an at-the-polls family photo, at which his father scolded his embarrassed family by declaring, "Don't take it for granted, you never know what can happen." Having lived through Indonesia's declaration of independence, the Guided Democracy, the 30-year rule of strongman Suharto and six turbulent years since, his father had a right to his photos,

Meidyatama decided. It may take as long as 15 years to know if democracy's roots have stuck.

Muhammad Qodari, director of research at the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI), agrees that Indonesia must wait to find out if democracy will last—at least one or two more elections. He points out that voters are becoming increasingly sophisticated, rejecting parties that have (in their view) performed unsatisfactorily. They are also displaying more independence by not necessarily voting according to group affiliation. For example, Golkar's political machine may have secured the highest number of legislative seats, but it could not make the presidential runoff. According to LSI, only 10 percent of people consider military background or affiliation to a religious or ethnic organization the most important factor in determining their vote. More important are economic "competence," the ability to stamp out corruption, and character.

In April's legislative elections, the big gainers were the Democratic Party (DP) and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). Both these "darlings of the electorate" are small and rising quickly—DP did not even exist until two years ago. Both parties, Qodari points out, symbolize hope and change to voters who are dissatisfied with major parties' performance. In spite of such similarities, the two parties differ in how they garner voter support. DP depends on the charisma of its leader, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, a former member of the Megawati cabinet. PKS is a "collaborative effort" among members and supporters, and wins support through its promotion of clean government, Qodari explains.

If voters are becoming more sophisticated, what can we expect of the leaders? Like Meidyatama, Qodari addresses the question of whether Indonesia might "slip back" to less democratic government, even if no democratic meltdown is imminent in the short term. Qodari suggests that the government may try to "simplify the current pluralistic situation" by raising the threshold for parties to participate in the 2009 elections, thereby limiting the number of parties. But he is a little more optimistic than Meidyatama that there will be no radical action to curtail political pluralism.

Jim Della-Giacoma, senior advisor for Citizen Participation Programs with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), draws on focus group research to describe new trends in Indonesian public political conscious-

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ness. Like Qodari, he draws attention to a “pattern of voting that is departing from historical traditions and group allegiances” and emphasizes the importance of character and competence (not religion, notably) in voters’ preferences. He contends that Yudhoyono will strongly benefit from these trends. In voters’ minds, at least, the DP leader is “straightforward” and “decisive” compared to incumbent Megawati. One interesting research finding is that Yudhoyono tends to be voters’ second choice when he is not their first. This pattern suggests that he will do well in the runoff, now that many people’s first choices have been eliminated.

Beyond such implications for September’s runoff, the NDI research reveals important trends in Indonesian democratization. According to Della-Giacoma, the focus group is an excellent qualitative research device not just for collecting opinions, but for observing the degree of conviction, as well as overall interest in important topics. He finds that Indonesians are eager and willing to discuss politics and extremely mentally and psychologically involved in the electoral process. The difficulties of the Suharto years “in coaxing Indonesians to talk politics have evaporated,” he writes. His impression is that Indonesian people are addressing their democratic responsibilities in “a thoughtful and considered manner.”

Of all measures of democratic transition, the most important in the average citizen’s mind is legitimacy. Not only unfair elections, but economic corruption can alienate ordinary voters. According to the research cited by Della-Giacoma, KKN (the widely used acronym for “corruption, collusion and nepotism”) is the issue that came up continually in focus-group discussions. This emphasis on corruption runs counter to an Asia Foundation report of 2003, when only 9 percent of Indonesians considered corruption to be their country’s biggest problem, although seven in ten called it “commonplace.”¹ Perhaps awareness of corruption has risen sharply during the election year; according to Della-Giacoma, the elections have deepened the population’s awareness of Indonesia’s many challenges as well as their own democratic responsibilities. Even between the first round of focus groups in December 2003 and the second round in May 2004, participants seemed better informed and more engaged, he writes.

Karl Jackson of the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns

Hopkins University, who served as commentator during the July 13 Wilson Center event that originated this Report, joined the three participants in hailing the “remarkable achievement” of Indonesia’s election. More than any of them, however, he emphasized the obstacle of a weak judiciary that can be “rented” if not bought. In addition, he warned that personality politics—the dependence of parties on charismatic individuals—is one of Indonesia’s most serious political problems. He pointed out that personality politics plagues other countries, such as the Philippines, with far greater democratic experience.

As the writers in this Report point out, Indonesian democracy could take many forms if consolidation continues. The secular/Islamic split seems to create a natural political duality that does not exist in, for example, the Philippines—yet, how Islam will translate into a cohesive political platform is far from clear. Islamic politics is fractured, too.

How many political parties are right for a healthy democracy? Qodari suggests that too many strong parties may lead to pork-barrel politics and obstruct good governance. Indonesian voters’ increasing independence (lack of obedience to political machines and other organizational groups) is a positive development, but will it lead to anything more than personality politics? According to the Asia Foundation survey, most swing voters cannot distinguish differences among parties.² Will Indonesia find itself electing outsiders—or what Meidyatama calls “free floating elites”—who cannot get anything done?

In spite of all the pitfalls and dire possibilities, the contributors to this Report have not lost sight of the magnificent accomplishment of Indonesia. Of all democracies, only India has had to deal with a similarly daunting combination of population, poverty and isolation of communities. Democracy may not yet be “the only game in town,” but the fact that these essays, six chaotic years after the strongman’s fall, are more optimistic than otherwise is heartening.

ENDNOTES

1. “Democracy in Indonesia: A Survey of the Indonesian Electorate” (Asia Foundation, 2003), 43.

2. *Ibid.*, 100.

Flirting with Democracy: Will Indonesia Go Forward or Back?

MEIDYATAMA SURYODININGRAT

Election year 2004 has offered hope and encouragement to Indonesians, who had little experience of egalitarianism before 1999. With much ado the country has installed the infrastructure necessary, at least in theory, for healthy democracy. Within three years Indonesians have debated, changed, and implemented every fundamental aspect of the state. The country has a new constitution, parliament, and election system; five new political laws; and has redressed of the system of checks and balances.

Chief among the novel changes are: direct elections of president and vice president; a fully elected 550-member parliament; a Provincial Representatives Council, elected to the Upper House; an independent General Election Commission (KPU); and a new Constitutional Court

These new institutions are imperfect, as is the system as a whole. But they provide a solid foundation on which to build a truly democratic state.

Nevertheless, despite successful elections and overhaul of state institutions, democracy remains fragile. To say otherwise would be hasty and even negligent. Elections are necessary, but insufficient, for solid democracy. Democratic consolidation has occurred when process and institutions become “the only game in town”—and this is not the case as long as powerbrokers enhance their positions through extra-constitutional means. While the concept of democracy has imbued the national psyche, it has yet to prevail as Indonesia’s predominant culture. In short, it has not become the defining national experience.

Democracy, thus far, has prospered because it is an alternative to the bad latter years under Suharto. It has not reached the point of being unquestionable—as, for example, Islam and respect for community elders are unquestionable.

CULT OF PERSONALITY

Javanese folklore is seeped in the myth of a benevolent savior, Ratu Adil—the divine leader sent by



providence to bring the nation justice and glory. Many cling to this illusion, giving rise to personality cults that eventually lead to demagoguery and modern day authoritarianism.

After more than six years of post-Suharto disorder, many are once again looking for a quick fix, this time in the form of institutional changes and a more democratic electoral system. Elections are perceived as ends in themselves, instead of part of a process. Indonesians look to a democratically elected president as the cure to all that has gone amiss since the *reformasi* (reform) movement began.

But Indonesia’s history has twice—in Sukarno and Suharto—shown that the birth of a new (self) righteous regime/leader is more a placebo than a panacea for democracy’s ills.

People neglect that idealism and benevolence cannot transform society without addressing structural obstacles, and that the political process is defined by inherent characteristics beyond any single person’s control. Despite its newly installed systems, Indonesia is glutted with obstacles to smooth democratic transition. Consequently, expectations for seismic changes following the 2004 elections should be tempered proportionally to the seriousness of the challenges before us.

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Crucial to any country's transition is the level of economic growth. Democratization, by its very nature, implies fundamental social and economic change. Economic growth determines not only whether a nation crosses over the line to "democracy," but how well the transition permeates all levels of society. More often than not, it is the middle class that propels social change. A transition built on the interests of a politically conscious and prosperous middle class is more stable than one prompted by short-term political gain.

Without robust economic growth, a democratic transition is likely to be shallower, more cosmetic. Without growth, fundamental change does not occur—transformation is driven by seasonal discontent with a decaying regime more than by a new equation in the national polity.

What of Indonesia's transition? It is too early to tell, but signs are not encouraging. A country of Indonesia's size needs more than 3-4 percent growth that is driven by consumer spending. If the economic outlook continues bleak, the fallout could be disastrous for further democratic consolidation.

People increasingly blame "democracy" for the economic downturn; some have given up on the system. Succumbing to transition fatigue, they are becoming apprehensive of further change. If apathy continues to grow, people may perceive democracy as irrelevant to their lives. How, they will ask, does the fractious politicking of elites influence public welfare? What is the connection between democratic politics and public policy? In the end, they may regard "democracy" as a mere slogan, not an effective vehicle for furthering public aspirations.

Another obstacle to democratic consolidation is the persistence of patronage politics. A true democracy regulates, distributes, and transfers power through established institutional means, e.g., democratic elections. But not so in Indonesia, where the patronage system perpetuates an asymmetrical exercise of power, and authority is not generated through formal processes or institutions. Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency demonstrated these frailties inherent in the Indonesian political system. Despite a mandate from the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), Wahid did not inherit the intrinsic powers associated with his office. In the end he was forced to compromise in order to build a new power base within the Presidential Palace's confines.

One of the key drivers of this predicament is the persistent strength of "embedded elites" vis-à-vis "free-floating elites." The levers of change remain in the hands of the former.

Embedded elites are individuals and organizations connected to vestiges of the fallen regime. While they were disgraced and, perhaps, politically wounded during the transition's preliminary phase, they weathered the initial storm. Their networks and resources allowed them to quickly regain their privileged role in high politics. General (ret.) Wiranto and others in the Golkar Party, with supposed links to the New Order, are examples of embedded elites.

Unfortunately, pro-democracy advocates such as Amien Rais, Nurcholish Madjid and Sjahrir, have little impact in terms of *realpolitik*, though they churn out attractive rhetoric. These "free-floating" elites have neither savvy nor constituency to enforce themselves in the practical world. In the end they resort to jargonistic platforms and abstract slogans on democracy which are unappealing to the public. Their naiveté does little to propel the consolidation process, as it neither makes state institutions more democratic nor even helps to fortify pro-democracy ideals.

Democracy, thus far, has prospered because it is an alternative to the bad latter years under Suharto. It has not reached the point of being unquestionable—as, for example, Islam and respect for community elders are unquestionable.

While the role of free-floating elites remains symbolically significant, it is to the embedded elites that we must ultimately turn for true change. Given the sluggish rate of economic growth, we cannot expect change to emerge from a burgeoning middle class. Those who desire democratization must acquire the support of embedded elites and commit them to the slow process of re-linking democratic politics and policy making.

To some extent, this process is beginning through constitutional amendment and introduction of a more democratic electoral system. However, the price paid is that the frontrunners of these new

processes remain organizations and individuals whose history can be traced to the past regime. At the very least, they are humbled now by a procedure that requires them to take heed of the popular voice.

MEGAWATI VS. YUDHOYONO

The set is stage for a showdown between incumbent Megawati Sukarnoputri, and her former chief security minister, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Megawati is backed by political giants, the Indonesian Democratic Party–Struggle (PDI-P) and Golkar, while Yudhoyono is the “new hope” with limited political resources. Although Yudhoyono has led the opinion polls from the outset, Megawati’s chances are growing despite her apparent unpopularity.

Both candidates have similar orientations, and both, unfortunately, have been equally linked to darker elements related to corruption. The most apparent difference is style. Pak Bambang seems more publicly responsive, Megawati more aloof.

However, some people are increasingly concerned with the ideological orientation of Yudhoyono and his running-mate Jusuf Kalla—particularly following their linkup to more “right wing” Islamic parties. Many are remembering Kalla’s past support for restricting the activities of ethnic Chinese business people and favoring indigenous businesses through affirmative action. Apart from Yudhoyono’s own background as a retired Army general, the perception grows that he is closely aligned with American interests and receives financial support through various non-governmental organizations. In this way, sympathy grows for Megawati in the small but economically influential non-Islamic, non-indigenous population, despite distaste for her poor presidential performance.

But in the larger scheme of things, Indonesia’s fundamentally nationalist-secular character is unlikely to change no matter who wins in September. Both candidates are staunch nationalists, determined to defend the traditional icons of unity, the Pancasila ideology, and territorial integrity.

It is also realistic to say that there will be no quick fixes in Indonesia, under whatever administration. The country will continue to muddle along—economically and politically—for years to come, given the persistent structural and political obstacles. Does the elected president have the political will to sys-

tematically overcome these obstacles? In the context of democratic consolidation, there are three signposts to be watched.

First, how will the new executive deal with executive-legislative relations? The coming president must face a powerful but fractious parliament in which no single party occupies even a quarter of the seats. Yudhoyono, in particular, might have difficulty since his Democratic Party has just 57 of 550 seats. Megawati, by coalescing with major political powers, can manage a stronger coalition in the legislature, accounting for over half of parliamentary seats. The question is whether Yudhoyono would eventually compromise to accommodate a coalition of interests, eventually resulting in expedient policies.

The second signpost we should look for is how the new president addresses freedom of expression and of the press. These freedoms, acquired after Suharto’s resignation, have helped vitalize Indonesian democracy. Both Yudhoyono and Megawati have shown strong tendencies to begin imposing limitations by exploiting the general public’s shocked reaction to the media’s unaccustomed vociferousness. Already, the government has jailed individuals for burning the president in effigy and sued mainstream publications—not for misreporting facts, but for writing editorials.

The third signpost is the new president’s attitude toward regional autonomy and separatism in the provinces. The “Big Bang” decentralization approach has produced various conflicts of interest between provinces and, (many claim) spawned corrupt local powerbrokers. Megawati has regarded the situation as decentralization run amok, and shown distrust for the devolution of authority. Yudhoyono, meanwhile, fears a threat to national unity.

Indeed, decentralization in its formative years has been a mess. But Indonesia must redress the economic imbalances of the past three decades and facilitate egalitarian practices at the lowest levels. No matter who wins the presidency, recentralization—the domination of Jakarta politics over the archipelago—could be dangerous. Neither Yudhoyono nor Megawati have shown much compassion for separatist sentiments, and both resorted ultimately to coercive measures rather than try to resolve the issue through sustained dialogue.



THE LONG VIEW

Based on the above discussion, a more essential question could be posed: Do direct presidential elections, along with two free and fair legislative elections over the past five years, cement democracy's existence in Indonesia?

The short answer is “no.”

The next 10 to 15 years (two to three elections) will test the depth of democracy's roots. Based on present conditions, there are three likely scenarios at the end of this formative period.

The first scenario involves democracy maturing as Indonesians elect successive nationalist-secular administrations. Under this scenario, civil society would ripen and enable democracy to be more than a passing fad—reaching the point of no possible return to authoritarian government.

Administrations need not achieve miracles for this scenario to occur. The key question is whether democracy can be made relevant to society. Will people perceive democratically elected leaders as bringing stability and prosperity? Even if the economy is sluggish, will the public recognize that government tends to basic welfare, and that the civil service performs its minimal duty without unduly levying the community? If kept relevant, not only will democracy consolidate—its tenets will fuse into the very edifice of our traditionally paternalistic culture.

The second scenario involves the rise of non-secular elements by way of the electoral process, as dissatisfied voters—regarding politicians and civil servants as self-serving and expedient—begin entertaining “less liberal” alternatives to the pluralistic nation state. In this scenario, people would eventually weary of nationalist elements like Golkar and the PDI-P, which, as the economy stagnates, continually exploit democratic processes.

Meanwhile, smaller parties, such as the Islamic Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), would continue to burnish their clean image. Positioned on the sidelines of the decaying political hegemony, their “untarnished” members would increasingly become an attractive civilian alternative for mainstream voters.

Political Islam will—*must*—continue as a political force in Indonesia, where 90 percent of the population is Muslim and religion is woven into the social fabric. To sideline Islamic politics and accuse them of threatening the state would be to return to the New

Order days. It is only right that Islam have proper representation in the national polity.

However, the dilemma is that these small parties, despite their pluralistic claims, have been sectarian since their conception. Not that they would necessarily push Indonesia to become an Islamic state; their leaders are shrewd enough to know the divisiveness of slogans such as *syariah Islam*. But, under this scenario, exclusively Islamic tenets would subvert national laws to the point of corroding the secular basis on which Indonesia was founded. In fact, such changes are already happening, as apparent from a new law favoring Islamic education and the implementation of Islamic law in some provinces and isolated regencies. Paradoxically, democratic freedoms bring opportunity for greater intolerance.

The third scenario is a reversion to “benevolent” authoritarianism—the rise of a pseudo-democratic

It is to the “embedded elites”—individuals and organizations connected to vestiges of the fallen regime—that we must ultimately turn for true change.

regime propped by the military. Under this scenario, the government would use populist slogans to justify itself as a guardian of stability, welfare, and constitutional icons such as Pancasila, unity, and territorial integrity. Such a government would, in effect, follow the style of Suharto's New Order.

The precursors to such regression would be decentralization “run amok” and growing threats of separatism. People would begin to ask themselves the benefits of democracy. Perceived ineffectiveness and corruption, and a legal system that can be “rented” if not “bought,” would make their frustration, now simmering, boil over. If the economy stalls and genuine civilian leaders fail to inspire, the public will revert to predisposed illusions of Suharto-type security.

It is important to note that even under this type of regime, the façade of democratic government would be necessary. A coup d'état is not an option. Leaders would acquire and maintain power by subverting democratic institutions and manipulating laws. The Indonesian military has always acted with-



in constitutionally established parameters, thereby creating a shallow democracy.

In the past two years, the government has introduced two “new” bills that would keep the door ajar for the military to return to politics and renew their grip on regional infrastructure through territorial commands. Fortunately, the initial bill was rejected in the wake of a public outcry. The second—which preserves the military’s regional command structure and allows the TNI to effectively intervene in socio-political affairs at the provincial level—is still being debated. We will probably know by 2019 exactly which scenario will prevail.



Indonesian Elections in a Transition Era: An Assessment

MUHAMMAD QODARI

In the elections of 2004, Indonesian society has delivered a verdict on its government. Indonesian democracy is, it seems, functioning, and it continues to deepen and consolidate.

In the legislative elections in April, voters successfully articulated frustration and hope for the future, rewarding parties that symbolize change and rejecting those that have (in voters' eyes) performed unsatisfactorily. The relative losers were major parties—especially President Megawati's Indonesian Democratic Party–Struggle (PDI-P), which attracted support five years ago. The big gainers were relatively small (and new) parties. Secular-nationalist voters turned from PDI-P to the newly established Democratic Party (DP), while Muslim modernists supported the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

The presidential election on July 5 also demonstrated that democracy is consolidating. One apparent trend is that voters show increasing independence in political preferences. For example, though the 2004 presidential ticket was supported by the most popular party—Golkar, with the largest number of votes in the legislative elections—it has not made the presidential runoff. Although backed by Golkar's political machine (and PKB's), General Wiranto and his running mate Solahuddin Wahid came in third place. In first place are Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla with 34 percent. This result is contrary to predictions of those analysts who expected people to vote along party lines, predictions that had Yudhoyono coming in fourth with only 11 percent.

Moreover, only 10 percent of voters declare that a candidate's "background," including military background or affiliation to a religious or ethnic organization, is the most important factor in determining preference, according to national surveys on voting behavior conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute (*Lembaga Survei Indonesia*, or LSI) over the past year. The factors that mattered were competence and personality. For 40 percent of those surveyed, the president should possess economic "com-



petence" and the ability to stamp out corruption and maintain security. Thirty percent expressed that authority, honesty and concern for the community (character) are a candidate's most important traits.

What will be the results of the September runoff, between incumbent Megawati and challenger Yudhoyono? If the majority of voters are satisfied with Megawati's leadership, she will be reelected. However, if the voters are unsatisfied, then Yudhoyono will get a chance to prove his leadership abilities. Whoever wins, the election mechanisms and democratization will gain strength.

THE TWO NEW DARLINGS OF THE ELECTORATE

The results of the April 5 legislative assembly election, with 24 competing political parties, are shown in the table. A striking trend is that major political parties, such as Golkar and PDI-P, remained stagnant. Golkar improved its standing from second to first position, but its number of votes decreased slightly. PDI-P dropped to second position and lost almost half its number of votes, compared to the 1999 election. PKB and PAN failed to broaden their support base outside their respective NU and Muhammadiyah factions. Meanwhile the United

Development Party (PPP), an Islamist party, was also unable to get support from the majority of Muslim voters.

The gainers, as mentioned above, were parties symbolizing new hope, such as the new DP and the PKS. How were these relatively small parties able to garner voter support? As mentioned above, their boost in popularity shows voters' dissatisfaction with the status quo. Yet, the two parties are quite different in how they have impressed the electorate.

DP's popularity seems to be due largely to its co-founder and presidential candidate, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. He quickly emerged as a viable candidate after resigning in March from the position of Megawati's security minister. The party itself was established only two years ago and therefore was relatively unknown, with limited networks, and did no better than other new parties at proposing programs.

PKS, on the other hand, has not risen through the popularity of any one charismatic leader, but through a collaborative effort of party members and supporters. The party has won a reputation for living up to its party slogan of "clean and compassionate" (*bersih dan peduli*). Once known as the Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan*, or PK), the party had to change its name because it was unable to meet the electoral threshold, despite gaining positions at national, provincial, district, and municipal levels.

PKS legislators—particularly at sub-national lev-

els—have proved resistant to corruption, unlike other political parties who tout concern for society only at election time. The mass media and voters, particularly educated, urban, middle-class voters, praised PKS for providing community service to victims of disasters such as floods and fires. Interestingly, though professing an Islamic ideology, PKS did not promote Islamic law in its campaign. Instead, it focused on universal themes, thus obtaining a support base wider than among those who feel obliged to vote for an Islamic party.

REASONABLY FREE AND FAIR

Society's preferences are only guaranteed if election processes are conducted freely, fairly, and transparently. To what extent did the 2004 elections meet those qualifications?

Under Suharto's New Order, government dominated the National Election Commission (*Komisi Pemilu Umum*, or KPU), favoring the ruling Golkar party. Thus, reform of the KPU was imperative. In 1999, the body was democratized to include representatives from the 48 competing political parties. For the 2004 election, the KPU was again altered to comprise independent members, mostly academics, elected by the legislative assembly (DPR). This change reflects the 1945 constitution's stipulation that elections be held by the KPU (no longer by the

Table 1: Indonesia's Parliamentary Elections

1999	%	2004	%
Golkar (chair Akbar Tandjung)	22	Golkar (chair Akbar Tandjung)	22
Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDI-P), chair Megawati Sukarnoputri	34	Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle (PDI-P), chair Megawati Sukarnoputri	19
Awakening Nation Party (PKB), chair Abdurrahman Wahid	13	Awakening Nation Party (PKB), chair Abdurrahman Wahid	11
United Development Party (PPP), chair Hamzah Haz	11	United Development Party (PPP), chair Hamzah Haz	9
		Democratic Party	8
National Mandate Party (PAN), chair Amien Rais	7	National Mandate Party (PAN), chair Amien Rais	6
Justice Party (PK), Islamic ideology	1	Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Islamic ideology, same party as PK	7



president), and that the KPU be a national, continuous, and independent body.

The April legislative elections involved administrative glitches related to registration and voter-card distribution. Problematic, too, was the distribution of materials such as ballot papers, ballot boxes and voting screens. Many registered voters received no voter card and failed to appear, thus losing their right to participate in the election process. Out of 148 million registered voters, only 124 million (84 percent) exercised their right to vote, down from 92 percent in 1999.

Most serious were delays in printing and distribution of ballots to voting stations. In part, the new system's complexity created these delays. The KPU had to supply four types of voting card—for the legislative assembly (DPR); the provincial assembly (provincial level DPRD); the district assembly (district/city level DPRD); and the new upper house representing regional interests (DPD)—involving 2000 ballot paper variations for 2000 election districts. At the same time, mismanagement by KPU members caused many problems, as they often dismissed advice and criticism from election-observer organizations and other bodies.

Though preparation for the legislative election was frequently disrupted by logistical problems, the three-week campaign and election day itself (April

5) ran smoothly and peacefully. There were no security problems, even in regions of conflict such as Aceh and Papua. During the campaign, numerous violations were reported, both administrative (parades ignoring traffic regulations) and criminal (vote buying, obscurity of campaign financial sources, and misuse of government facilities by officials campaigning on behalf of political parties).

In the April 5 election, only seven political parties achieved the electoral threshold; many disappointed minor parties rejected the results. Interestingly, Abdurrahman Wahid, an influential figure in PKB, which received the third highest number of votes, also joined in declaring the results dishonest—though observers, both domestic and international, generally considered the election free and fair. The

Only 10 percent of voters declare that a candidate's "background," including military background or affiliation to a religious or ethnic organization, is the most important factor in determining preference.

Table 2: Indonesia's Presidential Elections, 2004

2004	%
Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono – Jusuf Kalla Endorsers: Democtatic Party and two other small parties	34
Megawati Sukarnoputri – Hasyim Muzadi Endorsers: Indonesian Democracy Party of Struggle and one small party	26
Wiranto – Solahuddin Wahid Endorsers: Golkar party, Awakening Nation Party, and some small parties	22
Amien Rais – Siswono Yudohusodo Endorsers: National Mandate Party, Prosperous Justice Party and some small parties	15
Hamzah Haz – Agum Gumelar Endorser: United Development Party	3

community did not lend its support to the alliance of disappointed parties, especially since (for whatever reason) the alliance did not bring its case to the new Constitutional Court.

The presidential election on July 5 was simpler—only one type of ballot—and relatively free from logistical problems. Violations, such as those described above, certainly occurred, but were not as bad as many expected. Particularly surprisingly, the four-week campaign period involved fewer public gatherings than during the legislative elections. The level of participation was lower than in April—only 78 percent of registered voters showed in polling stations.

The most apparent problem was that a sizeable portion of ballots (estimated to be 20 percent at the time of this writing) were punched without being opened fully and thus have two holes (both on a candidate's picture and on a ballot title). The KPU declared the ballots valid, but not until after many polling stations had already closed. There is no

mechanism in place to insure that the recount was conducted at all polling stations. This problem led to contestation of the results.

CONCLUSION

What will be the future of political pluralism in Indonesia? Whoever wins the runoff, I believe that the losing team will not try to use non-democratic means to limit or control political pluralism in Indonesia—by, for example, forcefully limiting the number of contending political parties as Suharto did in the 1970s.

It is possible, however, that both candidates will try to simplify the current pluralistic situation by requiring political parties to achieve a threshold of 5 or even 10 percent of voter support in order to participate in the 2009 elections. Leaders might do this by presenting a plan themselves or by working through legislators in the lower house.

Has political pluralism been consolidated in Indonesia? To be sure, I think that we must wait at least one or two more elections. The number of parties able to reach the threshold grew from five to seven, although the total number of parties participating in the election shrank by half to 24. It seems that even parties without charismatic leaders, such as Golkar, PPP, and PKS, will continue to acquire significant voter support in the future.

As for parties that *are* led by charismatic leaders, how will they fare? If Yudhoyono does not win the presidential election, he may have trouble developing his party. The parties of Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais may not last much longer than their leaders, and will find it hard to maintain voter support if they are unable to establish organizational mechanisms. Megawati is not charismatic, but is aided by being the daughter of Indonesia's founder; therefore, her party may face similar difficulties.

How many political parties is best for democracy? This question is one that is debated everywhere and will never be decided conclusively. The number of parties—as well as the level of political pluralism—is not related directly to democracy's quality. The process by which the situation is achieved is what's important. However, experience suggests that the increase in *strong* political parties in 2004 will lead to more bargaining and, perhaps, pork-barrel politics. Thus, more political parties may prove an obstacle to the achievement of good governance in Indonesia.

Indonesian democracy is far from perfect. But if Indonesian voters become increasingly ready and able to wield their democratic power as a tool for social change, they may become ever more convinced that Winston Churchill was correct in declaring that “democracy is the worst form of government, except all the others that have been tried.”



Listening to the People's Voice: Indonesian Voters' Perspectives on the Presidential Elections

JIM DELLA-GIACOMA

When the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly met in March 1998 to elect a president, there was only one candidate. Therefore, no one was surprised when President Suharto was "re-elected" for the seventh term. By contrast, the trends driving this September's presidential runoff are surprising and, in some ways, unpredictable. The runoff will be the culmination of an eight-month process involving three elections and reflecting new public political attitudes.

For the 2004 election cycle, experts have applied the techniques of modern political research like never before. Indonesia has come a long way in the past six years, as can be seen by the intensive use of focus group research, parallel vote tabulations, voter attitude surveys and other techniques unknown under authoritarian rule. Each technique relies on basic political rights, including the freedom of speech and assembly, and can be accomplished only in a repression-free atmosphere in which citizens are willing to use and trust these freedoms.

NDI'S WORK IN INDONESIA

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) has conducted work in Indonesia since 1996, when it supported domestic efforts to monitor the May 1997 parliamentary elections. For the 2004 legislative and presidential elections, NDI has involved political parties, national and regional legislatures, and civil society groups in programs to promote transparent, accountable, and inclusive electoral and political processes. These programs have five main components: establishing an impartial electoral framework; political party development; unofficial results reporting; strengthening local legislatures; and strengthening the national legislature.¹ In the past seven months, NDI has conducted or supported



three different types of research, each providing insight into Indonesia's democratic evolution.

In December 2003 and May 2004, the Institute conducted focus group research in up to seven provinces to examine voter perceptions and intentions ahead of the parliamentary and first presidential election. Furthermore, NDI provided technical assistance to the Jakarta-based Institute for Social and Economic Research, Education and Information (LP3ES) which conducted both a parallel vote tabulation (PVT) and voter attitude survey on each polling day.

NDI has supported PVTs around the world because it has found that the quick count can help promote electoral integrity. When sponsored by nonpartisan civic organizations, quick counts can empower citizens, build local capacity, and provide reliable and comprehensive information. In addition, the NDI-supported voter attitude survey gave richer expression to the numbers on why people voted how they did, within 24 hours of the poll. The results of both the two PVTs and voter attitude surveys are available on NDI's website.²

Jim Della-Giacoma is a senior advisor for Citizen Participation Programs with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). The views expressed in this paper are his own and not necessarily those of NDI, although the paper draws upon his work as principal field researcher of NDI's focus group research in Indonesia.

NDI'S FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

This paper is based on focus group research conducted by NDI and a local research firm, in which the author was personally involved.³ The aim of the two rounds of focus groups was to provide qualitative information for NDI's political-parties program, which worked with leading Indonesian political parties on organizing and campaigning techniques in six provinces. In May (the most recent round), NDI conducted 22 groups stratified by gender, age, socioeconomic status, religion, and party preference, in Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, Papua, West Irian Jaya, North Sulawesi and East Kalimantan. Ten of the 22 groups consisted of first-time voters between the ages of 18 and 21—young voters, it was believed, might impact substantially the elections and the future of Indonesian political culture.

Focus-group methodology is often mocked by political elites in U.S. public discourse. Those political candidates who rely on it are accused of populism, pandering to the public, or being unable to make their own decisions.

Importantly for SBY as the runoff campaign begins, he tends to be the voters' second choice when he is not their first.

However, in international political development work, NDI likes to use focus groups because they are democratic and democratizing. They are democratic in that they recruit men and women in equal numbers, and the trained moderator allows all members to express their views. They are democratizing because they inject citizens' voices into national debates that are often elite-dominated. What's more, NDI has found that in environments of recent political repression, participants feel empowered by the focus-group experience. The two-hour sessions model society's values and reinforce key democratic skills. An organization like NDI can gain political insight quickly and efficiently in countries without advanced infrastructure or regular scientific polling. Where polling *is* conducted, focus groups offer a richer explanation of why voters think how they do.

INDONESIAN VOTER CONCERNS

Indonesian voters have common concerns that they want elected leaders to address. For many, life remains difficult and they have not regained losses in income and status since the Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. In addition, women worry about rising costs in education that can help families escape economic hardship. Security, local and national, is considered secondary. One issue is ubiquitous:

Over all of the discussions hovers the dark cloud of "KKN" [the widely used acronym for "corruption, collusion and nepotism"]. Indonesians seem to encounter it often, from the nepotism or other "inside connections" widely perceived necessary to obtain a job, to the bribes demanded by government officials for routine administrative transactions or public services.⁴

ATTITUDES TOWARD CANDIDATES

NDI scheduled its most recent round of focus-group research to coincide with the announcement of the presidential tickets. This research looked at public perceptions of presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and examined links in voting behavior between April's parliamentary elections and July's presidential election (the first round). Participants discussed strengths and weaknesses of parties and candidates, and reasons behind their preferences. This research predates the "heat" of the election campaign when voters' attitudes were clearly influenced by campaigning and intense media scrutiny.

SUSILO BAMBANG YUDHOYONO

The most prominent finding of NDI's focus-group research (found also in contemporary polling) was the broad appeal of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) to voters of all ages, gender and demographics. He seemed to have no serious negative qualities in research participants' eyes. In particular, when participants were asked to name a candidate for whom they would never vote, Yudhoyono's name came up only once. As the report expressed:

SBY is seen as an authoritative personality who is firm (*tegas*), a man of integrity and competence, neither overly religious nor anti-Muslim. He seems to embody all the qualities that Indonesians



feel they have been missing in their last several presidents, who are variously seen as corrupt, flighty, indecisive and/or ineffective.⁵

SBY's attractiveness was reflected in participants' comments such as:

He's just charismatic. I saw him when he resigned; he seemed to be able to make a decision, he seemed to be straightforward. In addition, he is calm and has an authoritative bearing. (Young PKS woman, Jakarta)⁶

At the time of the research, SBY's public image was the antithesis of the last three Indonesian presidents. As the report noted:

Overall, SBY seems to be viewed as exuding the personal qualities many Indonesians feel they have been missing: decisiveness, fluent communication with the public, and determination to overcome the country's enduring culture of KKN.⁷

This is not to say that SBY has no weaknesses, but the focus-group moderators had to prompt participants to mention them. Even then criticism was relatively mild. Many participants perceived SBY as inexperienced in economic management, but this weakness was balanced by the strengths of his running mate, businessman Jusuf Kalla. Some noted that SBY is backed by a small party and may have difficulty dealing with the legislature. Focus-group participants had not the negative reaction to his military background that seems fairly common among activists, students and foreigners.

Most importantly for SBY as the runoff campaign begins, he tends to be the voters' second choice when he is not their first. For example, most focus-group participants who supported Megawati, Wiranto, Amien Rais or Hamzah Haz in July's first round of voting indicated SBY as their next-best alternative.

MEGAWATI SUKARNOPUTRI

Unlike SBY, the incumbent Megawati Sukarnoputri stirred mixed emotions in focus-group participants. As the report noted:

Incumbent President Megawati Sukarnoputri is staunchly supported by most of those who identify with the PDI-P (though SBY is preferred by a few), but she has also earned the hostility of

many others. Along with General Wiranto, she is mentioned most often as the presidential candidate for whom voters would "never" cast a ballot.⁸

Moreover, the research found that Megawati alone bears the burden of incumbency, although many other candidates had leading roles in government and public service in recent years:

Megawati, moreover, has the unique burden of being the only candidate in the race who is held responsible for the current situation most voters are unhappy with (notwithstanding that many of her rivals in this race have all held very senior governing positions in the recent past).⁹

Finally, Megawati's position as the country's leading female politician influences attitudes toward women candidates; yet she seems to have turned against her what might have been a natural base of female voters.

While some young women say they support Megawati "because she is a woman," it is in groups of women that one encounters the staunchest opposition to her candidacy.

While she is president we never hear her voice. We only hear her voice while she is campaigning. If she is elected again, she will be quiet again. (Young PDI-P woman, Minahasa)¹⁰

As the research found, Megawati's poor performance has reinforced traditional male biases against female candidates.

Megawati's perceived performance as president seems to reinforce in some men a bias against women as candidates, though men and women alike are favorably impressed by other prominent women. While a few voters invoke religious doctrine to justify their opposition to women in leadership posts, others say Islam does not exclude women from full equality in politics or other aspects of life. Some are opposed to women in politics for other than religious reasons.¹¹

OTHER ISSUES

A few other issues addressed by the focus groups are worth mentioning, as they illustrate the growing complexity and depth of Indonesia's democracy. Participants seemed better informed and more

engaged in the second round of focus groups (May 2004) than during the first round (December 2003). While a democracy is founded on more than an election, the presidential race seems to have focused Indonesians attention and given them richer knowledge, stronger democratic attitudes, and more willingness to participate in the process.

Some other key findings worth noting from the report are:

- Honesty and values, but not necessarily religion, are key issues for many prospective voters. Participants want their president to be honest above all, because corruption is retarding the country's progress on so many fronts.
- Despite flaws in election administration, people perceive the results as legitimate. Participants did not question the overall result of the recent legislative elections. Many believe, however, that the elections contained administrative flaws.
- Participants cross party lines to attend campaign rallies and events. Even among the relatively

Megawati seems to have turned against her what might have been a natural base of female voters.

committed voters included in the focus groups, a large number say they attend the rallies of other parties and welcome campaigners for other parties to their homes. This is partly because they anticipate there may be money, household staples or other small “gifts” to be had. Thus, turnout at political events is not a reliable guide to a candidate's true support. Also, these discussions confirm that “money politics,” the distribution of cash to voters to influence their selection, is very real in 2004.

- Inclusive cabinets are preferred to partisan governance. Although a few clearly disagree, particularly in Jakarta, participants generally believe that the parliament and cabinet should include members of diverse political parties, to achieve a degree of consensus and harmony in policy-making. Lacking is appreciation for the potential

value of a “loyal opposition” or alternative platform for voters' consideration—even among supporters of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), which has said it aspires to play this role.¹²

CONCLUSION

To someone whose experience of interviewing Indonesians spans both the New Order and Reformasi period, the fact that NDI is allowed and able to conduct political research in Indonesia is a significant advance. Moreover, that Indonesians willingly participate in such research shows how far the country has come from the politically repressive days of the New Order. As a foreign correspondent working in Indonesia during the last four years of Suharto's rule, I observed how even hardened activists gathered political information secretly and expressed themselves only furtively. Those times have passed. The difficulties I had then in coaxing Indonesians to talk politics to strangers have evaporated.

In 2004, Indonesia's “Year of Voting Frequently,” citizens have unprecedented opportunity to express themselves at the ballot box. NDI's work in support of the PVT has shown that, for the first two polls, the announced result was an accurate reflection of votes cast at polling stations. The voter attitude surveys tracked an increasingly complex pattern of voting that is departing from historical traditions and group allegiances. Finally, the focus group research has demonstrated that voters have taken to this task in a thoughtful and considered manner. For democracy to continue to evolve and ultimately flourish, Indonesia must build upon the basic freedoms of democracy, which NDI's research has shown to be present. The journey is not over, but it is unquestionably heading in the right direction.

ENDNOTES

1. These programs, including the focus group research discussed in this article, have been primarily funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

2. www.ndi.org.

3. I was the principal field researcher in both rounds. Thomas O. Melia completed a written analysis in Washington, DC on the basis of tran-



scripts. The following comments draw from the report and my observation of 14 groups.

4. “The People’s Voice: Presidential Politics and Voter Perspectives in Indonesia” (NDI, 2004), 2.

5. Ibid., 7.

6. Ibid., 7.

7. Ibid., 7.

8. Ibid., 11.

9. Ibid., 11.

10. Ibid., 12.

11. Ibid., 12.

12. Ibid., 3-4.



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