

# ELECTIONWATCH INDONESIA



## Indonesia Post-Election Watch: April 2009 Parliamentary, Provincial and Local Elections

A secular nation with the largest Muslim majority in the world, Indonesia has made important advances towards democratic consolidation in the years since President Heji Mohammad Suharto resigned in May 1998. There have been four peaceful transitions of presidential power and two national elections that were certified as open and transparent. Moreover, the people of Indonesia have demonstrated a remarkable commitment to democratization.

In April 2004, 82 percent of Indonesia's nearly 150 million registered voters participated in the national legislative elections, often cited as the most complex single-day election in history. In July 2004, voters were able to participate in the country's first direct election of their president and vice president, a milestone for Indonesian democracy. President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono was elected in a runoff that was held in September 2004, with 76 percent of registered voters participating.

On April 9, 2009, as many as 119 million Indonesians cast their votes in the third successful democratic election since the fall of President Suharto. All 560 seats in the national parliament were contested by more than 11,000 candidates representing 38 political parties. At the same time, Indonesians went to the polls to elect 1,998 provincial legislative seats and an estimated 15,750 local seats. In July 2009, Indonesians will again go to the polls to elect their president and vice president with a runoff election to be held in September 2009 if there is no clear winner.

## Elections Process and Results

The massive same-day election in the world's fourth largest democracy was not without persistent complaints of flawed voter lists and frequently changing election rules that left poll workers, political parties and voters confused about final voting procedures. Violence in Papua marred an otherwise peaceful election process enjoyed throughout the rest of the country.

Official vote counts will not be certified for another month. Early quick count tallies showed the single largest winner, President Yudhoyono's five-year old Demokrat Party, leading all major parties with 20 percent of the vote nationwide, tripling its support and moving his party from fifth to first place from the last election. The President's coattails also extended to provincial and local contests throughout Indonesia's 33 provinces, expanding his previously medium-sized party's base of support in the provinces. The public's support of the Demokrat Party is not surprising; a January 2009 International Republican Institute (IRI) national survey indicated that two thirds of Indonesians thought the country was going in the

right direction.

Maintaining its standing among the top three national parties, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), led by former Indonesian President Megawati Soekarnoputri, saw its support diminish by three percent in comparison to the 2004 elections, leaving it with 15 percent of the votes. Perhaps the most dramatic result was the nearly 10-point loss suffered by the long established Golkar Party.

## Elections Analysis

The election confirmed what IRI has said for many years: that Indonesian voters understand what democracy offers them and are becoming increasingly confident in expressing their preferences through the ballot box. Their ability to retain parties and candidates they perceive as responsive to their needs and reject the ones who aren't is a trend that has been growing since the 1999 national elections.

Historically Indonesian politics have been characterized by strong political candidates. The key difference now appears to be that a "name" alone is not enough to attract votes. This year, Indonesian voters signaled they wanted to see more than just a famous face - candidates needed to be able to articulate positions and represent their parties' positions on the issues. Parties without an identifiable leader to present their case suffered for lack of a clear voice in the midst of 38 competing national parties. For example, President Yudhoyono spent a substantial part of his presidency getting out in front of issues - not always successfully - but he was perceived by the voters as trying to address issues of national concern.

Further evidence that voters paid close attention to a party's presidential candidate is suggested by an examination of the political party "losers" from last week's parliamentary elections. Despite, historically, having a strong and well organized grassroots party organization, Golkar struggled to gather public support for the renewed presidential aspirations of its chairman, current Indonesian Vice President Jusuf Kalla. Kalla's perceived distance from his former and more popular running mate, President Yudhoyono, may have contributed to the public's diminished confidence in Golkar's ability to lead the government. Although trailing behind President Yudhoyono's popularity, Megawati's loyal base of support may have kept her PDI-P party as one of the top three vote getters in the parliamentary elections. If the early quick count results are confirmed, PDI-P held onto a core base of support with 15 percent of the vote, but, like its leader, lost a bit of its former popularity. Whether this is due in part to Megawati's drop in public opinion polls still needs to be assessed.

Major parties which did not campaign with presidential candidates (or at least popular ones as in the case of Golkar's Kalla) either suffered losses or, at best retained their standing. Two of the major Muslim affiliated political parties - National Awakening Party (PKB) and United Development Party (PPP) - suffered significant setbacks in the national elections, moving from third and fourth place after the 2004 elections, respectively, down to six and seventh places. PKB moved from a medium-sized party with 10 percent in 2004 to only five percent. PPP's support dropped from eight percent to five percent. The early election results also show that the other major Muslim-affiliated parties, Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) and National Mandate Party (PAN), each maintained consistent levels of support from 2004. Both PKS and PAN are known to have strong grassroots programs. PKS and PAN serve as

good case studies of how political parties can successfully achieve and maintain loyal public support without relying upon a charismatic leader. While many factors may surface in the months ahead to explain the public's response to the various Muslim-affiliated parties, it may be a reflection of Indonesia's political outlook: A secular nation in which religion plays a role, but is not the defining issue.

## Looking Forward

This election was progress, not perfection. The extraordinary success of the Demokrat Party should not be interpreted to mean that Indonesian voters responded to one specific political party's ideology; they responded to President Yudhoyono and his administration's policies. While a strong leader like President Yudhoyono may prove to have short term benefits for a political party, voters' memories are short. The Demokrat Party now needs to decide if it will immediately begin to plan for a longer sustained majority in the legislature by governing in a manner that is responsive to voters.

Overwhelmingly, IRI's national survey data shows that voters want greater one-on-one interaction and situations where they can hear political parties talk about issues versus the traditional mega rallies - quality over quantity. Over the next five years, it will be those parties who develop strong, consistent relationships with voters that may see the greatest success in Indonesia's next elections. Political parties who take the time to show an interest in issues that affect voters' lives, build strong coalitions on those issues and produce results will begin to see their numbers rise.

## IRI in Indonesia

IRI has been working with the people of Indonesia to advance their country's democratic development since the fall of the President Suharto regime in 1998. IRI works closely with political parties throughout Indonesia to help them develop and identify issues for political campaigns, particularly in preparation for direct local elections. Currently, IRI provides training and individual party consultations on leadership development, transparent candidate selection, accountable party finance and effective communication with constituents.

Public opinion polling is a major component of IRI's activities in Indonesia. IRI conducts public opinion research at the national and provincial levels and uses the polling data to strengthen trainings provided to political parties and government officials across Indonesia. As part of the 2009 election program, IRI conducted a national poll and a series of provincial polls. The polls were used through the 2009 elections to inform political parties at national and provincial levels. Additionally, IRI has trained political parties on polling techniques and methodologies in an attempt to encourage parties to gather and analyze data themselves.



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