

Indonesian election favours incumbent president

By John Roberts
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While the outcome of Indonesia's parliamentary elections on April 9 is yet to be finalised, the preliminary results have followed predictable lines. Stringent requirements for party registration make it extremely difficult for any but the well-financed electoral machines of the political establishment to field candidates.

Three parties—the Democratic Party of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono; Golkar, the electoral organisation of the former Suharto junta; and the Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) of former president Megawati Sukarnoputri—together secured half the vote, according to several independent surveys. Only nine of the 38 parties in the contest appear likely to gain the 2.5 percent of the vote necessary to win parliamentary representation. Final results are due on May 9.

No party will predominate in the parliament. The Democratic Party secured just over 20 percent of the vote, almost three times its result in the 2004 poll. Yudhoyono has the backing of major sections of business in Indonesia and internationally as a result of his free market policies. While his party is ahead, its vote is less than predictions of up to 30 percent in opinion polls before to the ballot.

The *Wall Street Journal* expressed disappointment at the “small margin” by which the Democrats won. “The smaller winning share means that Mr Yudhoyono, if re-elected president as expected in July, will need the support of other parties to push institutional and economic reforms through parliament,” the article stated.

The requirements for the presidential election in July are even tougher than in 2004. To nominate a candidate, a party or group of parties must have secured 20 percent of parliamentary seats or 25 percent

of the vote in the parliamentary election. None of the major parties appears to have met the conditions in its own right—Golkar currently has 14.5 percent of the vote, down from 21.6 percent in 2004 and PDI-P has 14.5 percent, down from 18.3 percent.

The Islamist Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) was the only other party to increase its vote—to about 8.4 percent. PKS leaders appeal to disenchanted voters—particularly the young, urban middle classes—by promoting Islamic law as the solution to corruption, crime and other social evils. The traditional Islamic parties—the National Mandate Party (PAN), United Development Party (PPP) and National Awakening Party (PKB)—lost support, each gaining between 5 and 6 percent of the vote.

Two other parties formed by Suharto-era generals are likely to have parliamentary representation—the Greater Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra) of Prabowo Subianto and the People's Conscience Party (Hanura) of former armed forces chief Wiranto with 4.5 and 3.8 percent respectively. Subianto, former head of the notorious Kopassus special forces, is being bankrolled by his billionaire brother Hashim Djojohadikusimo.

Large numbers of voters expressed their hostility to the entire political establishment by not casting a vote. The Indonesian Survey Institute and the Institute of Research, Education and information of Social and Economic Affairs estimate the abstention rate at 28 percent, up from 25 percent in 2004. The Centre for Electoral Reform puts the figure even higher at between 30 and 40 percent.

Given the poor showing of all parties, there is widespread media speculation that only two candidates will stand in the presidential race—Yudhoyono and Megawati—a re-run of 2004. Political manoeuvring is now intensifying to consolidate coalitions and decide

on vice-presidential running mates.

In 2004, Yudhoyono relied heavily on Golkar to provide the necessary support to run as a candidate and defeat Megawati. The increased vote for the Democratic Party allows Yudhoyono greater latitude in choosing partners. Golkar and the PKS have supported Yudhoyono and been part of his cabinet, but he is yet to announce any firm electoral alliances.

The current vice-president, Golkar leader Jusuf Kalla, had his own presidential ambitions, but is confronting criticism over his party's poor result. The Golkar leadership is seeking to maintain its coalition with Yudhoyono, but its efforts are complicated by a PKS threat to withdraw support for Yudhoyono if Kalla is on the ticket.

On April 16, Golkar deputy chairman Agung Laksono announced that Golkar would present Yudhoyono with a list of possible running mates. The PKS is pushing for Yudhoyono to accept a PKS vice president candidate.

As well as approaching Golkar, Megawati's PDI-P has tentatively announced a coalition with Gerindra and Hanura. In 1998, Megawati postured as an advocate of *reformasi*—democratic reforms—amid the upheavals that led to the fall of Suharto. Now the PDI-P is aligning itself with Prabowo, who has been implicated in the detention and disappearance of opponents of the Suharto regime, and Wiranto, who was Suharto's military chief in 1998.

The PDI-P's alliance with Gerindra and Hanura is symptomatic of the way in which the *reformasi* leaders of 1998 contained the mass movement against Suharto and allowed the state apparatus to continue largely intact. While this year's elections are less of a sham than those held under the junta, Suharto's party Golkar and the military continue to play a major role in politics.

Yudhoyono, himself a former general, was Suharto's chief-of-staff for social-political affairs. As Megawati's top security minister from 2001 to 2004, he oversaw military repression against separatist movements in Aceh and Papua. In early 2004, he quit Megawati's cabinet to make his own run for the presidency.

While Yudhoyono appears to be in a strong position to win a second term as president, the country's deepening economic and social crisis may yet upset his

calculations. Finance Minister Sri Mulyani Indrawati claimed last his week that the economic growth rate would be 5 percent by 2010. However, the Asia Development Bank's most recent prediction for 2009 is 3.6 percent. All these calculations are based on the optimistic expectation that the US and Europe will start to recover toward the end of this year.

Indonesia has not been as badly hit by the global economic recession as some of its Asian neighbours because the country is less dependent on exports. As the global crisis deepens, however, the prospects for the Indonesian economy will worsen as exports, foreign investment and remittances from overseas workers decline. Whoever is president will confront deepening political turmoil as the economic slowdown produces rising unemployment and poverty.

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