

2009 - The Super Election Year in Indonesia

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This year, general parliamentary elections were held for the third time in the history of the recent democracy of Indonesia (after 1999 and 2004), which began in 1998 with the fall of the Suharto regime; the second direct presidential elections since 2004 were also held. However, the democratic reorganization of the largest country in Southeast Asia, both in terms of area and population, is only one aspect of the so-called "Reformasi."

In addition to a consistent decentralization of the country once tightly administered from Jakarta, the last eleven years have seen the growth of an organized civil society and a multicolored and multifaceted party spectrum.

Indonesia today is a presidential democracy with a strong parliamentary component. Directly and together with a candidate for the office of the deputy, elections (under the U.S. model) for the next 5 years were held not only for president, but also for governors of the 33 provinces along with the mayors and district administrators of the 471 local regional administrative bodies. For the first time since 2004, the general parliamentary elections - and thus the elections to the national parliament and to the provincial, city and district parliaments - coincided with the presidential elections. At other times, the elections of governors and the elections of mayors and district administrators are separated by a full electoral period.

The election campaign for the general parliamentary elections of April 9, 2009 was shaped by identities and the presidential elections that took place on July 8, 2009. The reason is that under the new electoral law all parties and party coalitions must gain at least 25 percent of the valid votes or 20 percent of the seats in parliament to nominate a presidential candidate. In contrast, substantive issues such as the consequences of the global financial crisis receded into the background. The election, which proceeded relatively peacefully, was primarily hindered by organizational and logistical problems. Due to incorrect voter lists, about 10 million voters were not certified for voting. Moreover, in some districts faulty ballots were supplied, such that only parties (but not individual candidates) could be selected with them, causing the Constitutional Court to order repeat elections for some districts in Papua and North Sumatra. In addition, it turned out that a change in the electoral mechanism was not sufficiently publicized, which is why, at 14.4%, the percentage of invalid votes was unusually high.

For the election of parliament delegates, the new electoral law stipulates proportional representation under the German model, in which certified

parties in each of the 77 constituencies put up a list of candidates. However, in contrast to Germany, voters may elect individual candidates on this party list purposefully "forward." The candidate with the most votes is automatically sent into the national parliament in his or her electoral district. If his or her party fails to reach the 2.5% threshold (newly introduced in 2008), the victorious candidate is also deemed to be not elected.

As early as the second half of 2008, the PD of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono had a clear lead in the polls, although the party (founded in 2001) had obtained only 7.5 percent in the last parliamentary elections. Golkar, the party of deceased dictator Suharto at the beginning of 2008, and the nationalistic PDI-P of Megawati Sukarnoputri, the former president and daughter of the state founder Sukarno (which were far ahead of the other parties in the last two parliamentary elections) were in a neck-and-neck race for second place in most polls.

As a whole, nine parties leapt past the new 2.5% threshold and so entered the national parliament (the official final result of the parliamentary elections of 2009). Most votes were won by PD (20.85%), beating Golkar (14.45%) and PDI-P (14.03%). PKS (7.88%), PAN (6.01%) and PPP (5.32%) were reduced in number. All other parties remained under the five percent line.

On October 1 ceremonial inaugurations were held for both chambers of the MPR national council, as provided for by the constitution (the DPR-RI parliament and the DPD regional chamber). Approximately 70 percent of all parliamentarians (400 of 560) are newcomers in the DPR-RI. With a share of women of 18 percent (up from 11 percent), 102 women are represented in the parliament - more than ever before. The education status in the new parliament is, at least according to the papers, relatively high: 91 percent of all delegates have concluded a Bachelor's program. The remaining nine percent completed at least senior high school.

The follow-up presidential election campaign, from which the acting president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, emerged as a clear winner on July 8, 2009, proceeded fairly and objectively. In addition, the election campaign was more significantly shaped by issues than the previous parliamentary elections, since the substantive positions of three camps were, for the voters, easier to understand and compare than those of the 38 parties that had applied for entry into the national parliament.

The official final result from July 25, 2009 for the respective candidates (as in the U.S., always reported as a pair for the office of the president and the vice-president) is as follows:

- Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) / Boediono: 60.80% (73,874,562 million)
- Megawati Soekarnoputri / Prabowo Subianto 26.79% (32,548,105 million)
- Jusuf Kalla / Wiranto 12.41% (15,081,814 million)

Since, of all the parties represented in the newly elected parliament, only PD fulfilled the specified requirements for the percentage of votes and parliamentary group strength, all remaining parties were forced to commence coalition negotiations in order to be able to undertake nominations as party alliances. The results of the parliamentary elections thus formed the starting position and the basis of coalition negotiations, which began immediately after the initial notifications of trends became known.

The two most interesting political questions in the weeks prior to the official inauguration of the president and his new deputy on October 20 concerned the composition of the government coalition and the line-up of the new cabinet. After PD and the four Islamic parties of PKS, PKB, PAN and PPP had also formed the core of the coalition with a collective amount of exactly 45 percent (or 317 of 560 seats), Golkar also made a last-moment leap into government. The coalition can now rely on a comfortable majority of nearly 60 percent and 423 seats in parliament, which thoroughly accommodates Javanese efforts towards a harmonious natural state and "democratic consensus" policy-making. Only three parties now form the opposition: Megawati's PDI-P, and the two newcomers, Gerindra and Hanura. Revealingly, Golkar received only the addition of three ministerial positions, for a total of 34.

In this election, the citizens of Indonesia made a decision for continuity. After the turbulent initial years of the Reformasi, three presidents in six years.¹ Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will continue his politics of stability through a minimum of "friction losses" - which Indonesians call "santun" politics ("politics with integrity"), and thus continue to impart to the office of the presidency earned dignity and recognition. While this statement admittedly may sound provocative and slightly ironic, these are nevertheless important aspects and generally recognized values in Indonesian society. In this respect, the citizens have made the decision less for the political strategist and decision-maker Yudhoyono, but for the father of the nation, SBY.

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¹The presidents were as follows: 1998-99 - Yusuf Habibie; 1999-2001 - Abdurrahman Wahid; 2001-2004 - Megawati Sukarnoputri; since 2004 - Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono.