



Likely Outcomes of Indonesia's 2004 Elections – Quo Vadis? by Bilveer Singh

Indonesians are likely to vote three times this year. In April for parliamentary elections, in July for the presidential elections, and in September for the presidential run-off. As a result, 2004 is set to be Indonesia's year of uncertainty even though many would also welcome this festival of democracy. The coming elections will confirm Indonesia's democratization, making it the third largest democracy after India and the U.S.

Yet, the very nature of Indonesia's present and past calls for caution given the many uncertainties overhanging the country's future. Beneath the quest for democratization lies an Indonesia that is deeply fractured along racial, religious, linguistic, and class lines, with resort to violence an acceptable form of conflict resolution, as is evident in Kalimantan, Ambon, Aceh, and Papua.

Under these circumstances, who and which parties are likely to dominate the Indonesian "democratic" scene? In many ways, the color of Indonesian politics is unlikely to change. Since independence in August 1945, the nationalist forces have always dominated the country's politics despite strong challenge by the Islamic forces and their supporters. During both the Sukarno and Suhartos eras, measures were implemented to prevent the emergence of Indonesia as an Islamic state.

Although 90 percent of the country is nominally Islamic, nationalism has prevented the creation of an Islamic state. In the country's two landmark "free" elections in 1955 and 1999, individually or as a coalition, the Islamic parties were never in a position to dislodge the nationalists. This trend is likely to continue in 2004.

In the current political setting, the two leading nationalist forces are represented by the PDIP (30.6 percent) and Golkar (24 percent), simplistically representing the Sukarnoists and Suhartoists respectively. The United Development Party or PPP (11.6 percent), Nation Awakening Party or PKB (10.2 percent) and National Mandate Party or PAN (6.8 percent) together with minor parties such as the PBB (Crescent Star Party) and PK (Justice Party), represent different shades of Islamism in the country. In addition to the six, 24 other parties will join the fray for the 550 parliamentary seats. Of the new parties, watch the Duty and Concern for the Nation Party led by former army chief Hartono; its presidential candidate is Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, Suharto's eldest daughter. This nationalist party is likely to nibble votes away from the Islamic forces, especially in the rural areas, further strengthening the nationalist forces, especially Golkar.

The PDIP emerged as the dominant but not leading party after the 1999 general elections. This was due to public

sympathy for Megawati, as well as the party's ability to draw wide-ranging support from anti-Suharto forces that coalesced around Megawati and the PDIP. Golkar, despite being condemned for various ills of the Suharto and Habibie eras, finished second. All the other leading parties were Islamic in character but split by competing ideas, philosophies, and leaders.

From 1999 to 2004, Indonesia's politics was largely dominated by a "mega-coalition" of the PDIP and Golkar that was supported by the leading Islamic parties. Horse-trading among them determined political leadership and Cabinet portfolios. This pattern is likely to be repeated with changes in nuance as new faces are catapulted to the forefront. Hence, the description of Indonesia as an unstable democracy.

And the winners are....

Golkar is likely to emerge as the leading party in the April parliamentary election. In addition to its ability to distance itself from abuses of the past, the party continues to represent what a successful party should personify in terms of development, stability and order. Golkar has remained largely united, its cadres are well educated and professional, and its organizational structure has remained largely intact and has improved since the last election in 1999.

It remains strong in human and financial resources. With an unbeatable track record for prosperity and increased public disenchantment with the reformist forces that overthrew Suharto, Golkar is set to return as the leading party. It has also been able to propel new and credible leaders to the forefront with individuals such as Gen. Wiranto, Surya Paloh, and Aburizal Bakrie.

In contrast, the PDIP will remain an important party, but it is likely to lose ground to Golkar. The party has been badly divided by splits and defections, and most important of all, it has been tainted by inept leadership and corruption charges. Kwik Gian Gie, a leading PDIP minister, has even labeled the party the most corrupt in Indonesia today with Megawati's husband, Taufik Kiemas, as one of the main culprits. However, the advantage of incumbency, its strong financial base, and the continued pull of Megawati will ensure that the party performs well.

The Islamic parties, divided as always, have been unable to win over the public. Abdurrahman Wahid's presidency will be remembered for a long time for the damage an inept Islamic leader can do. In the context of the global, regional, and national war against Islamic terrorism, these parties and their radical supporters are likely to be marginalized compared to their past performance.

Under these circumstances, the PDIP-Golkar coalition will continue to dominate the country's politics and the next president and vice president are likely to emerge from their

ranks. This is particularly so as Indonesians will for the first time be directly electing the country's top executives rather than indirectly through the People's Consultative Assembly, as was done in the past.

Following the parliamentary elections, in July, candidates from the political parties will contest the presidential elections. While support of the political parties is important, equally crucial will be the ability of the nominated candidates to connect with the voters. While the first round is expected to throw up various candidates, the dividing line is expected again to be between nationalists and Islamic forces.

While many leading personalities are expected to contest the presidency – including Megawati, Wiranto, Bambang Yudhoyono, Amien Rais, and Yuzril Mahendra – the second round run-off is likely to pit, all things being equal, Megawati-Wiranto (or Bambang Yudhoyono) vs. Amien Rais and Yuzril Mahendra (or any other Islamic leader). If this happens, the former coalition is expected to win decisively, with the 2004 elections confirming the political status quo. This is all the more so as there are no major issues dividing the contestants. Suharto's legacy, economic development, the status of reforms, and terrorism are likely to emerge as the main points of discussion.

Possible Matrixes?

However, there is also a possibility of various matrixes if either the political parties or leading personalities are unable to reach agreement on power sharing. For instance, if the PDIP is the clear winner in the parliamentary election with Golkar second, then Megawati as president and a Golkar representative as a vice president will most likely emerge victorious in presidential elections. This could end up with Megawati as president and either Wiranto or Akbar Tanjung as the vice president.

If Golkar is the clear winner in the parliamentary election and the PDIP is second, there could be uncertainties if a Golkar candidate, say Wiranto, offers himself as the president while preparing to accept Megawati as the VP. If, despite Golkar's leading position, the party still accepts the status quo and supports a Megawati presidency, there would not be much conflict.

If however, Wiranto or Akbar decides to challenge the status quo, Megawati might respond by offering the VP to a weaker Golkar candidate, in particular Yusuf Kalla, currently coordinating minister for people's welfare, a respected bureaucrat and a non-Javanese. This would have the effect of splitting Golkar in two, with the IRAMASUKA Golkar group (Irian, Maluku, Sulawesi and Kalimantan Golkar branches) accepting the offer. This could gravely weaken Golkar and the chances of either Wiranto or Akbar Tanjung achieving any executive leadership position after the elections.

The other weaker possibilities: a Megawati-Bambang Yudhoyono, Megawati-Amien Rais or Amien-Bambang partnership triumphing in the election appears a very distant possibility. This option will only arise if the PDIP and Golkar become deeply fractured or unexpectedly perform badly in the general elections.

Conclusion

When all is said and done, Indonesia's politics will be more or less the same, with the PDIP-Golkar coalition, with the support of Islamic parties, continuing to dominate politics in the third largest democracy and largest Islamic country in the world. This would imply that discredited political forces under the country's two longest serving leaders, Sukarno and Suharto, will continue to dominate politics. While the Megawati and Sukarno clans re-entered politics on Suharto's exit, the Suhartoists seem to be re-entering politics and gaining legitimacy as a result of failings by Megawati and the PDIP. The balance of power among them will determine the future directions of Indonesian politics.

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