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INDONESIA PROGRAMME
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» The “Indonesia Election Watch 2009” is a weekly analysis of the key issues surrounding Indonesia’s 2009 Elections, from the parliamentary to the presidential elections.

» The analysis is produced by the Indonesia Programme of the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

» The analysis would benefit leaders in the business, policy-making, media, and research community in Singapore and beyond.

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Alignments of Forces:

Coalition Building towards Indonesia’s Parliamentary Election

With the campaign period for Indonesia’s 2009 parliamentary election now reaching its peak, competing political parties (numbering 44 in total) are preparing to employ their best strategies to win the April event. Parties are now expected to work harder than ever because under the new election law, securing a substantial number of votes will guarantee independence in nominating a pair of presidential-vice presidential candidates. Article 9 of Law No. 42 of 2008 on Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections stipulates that any political party or group of political parties wanting to independently nominate candidates for the top executive offices are required to secure a minimum 25% of national votes or 20% of parliamentary seats, either individually or collectively. Political parties understand that in the new election setting parliamentary elections are closely tied to the presidential election. Now more than ever they need to build coalitions with as much strategic foresight as possible.

In this issue, the *Election Watch* attempts to analyze the strategies of the two emerging camps that have dominated the Indonesian political scene lately. They are the “Golden Triangle” and “Golden Bridge,” respectively. The former consists of former President Megawati’s Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle (PDI-P), Vice-President Kalla’s GOLKAR Party, and the United Development Party (PPP). The latter consists of President Yudhoyono’s Democrat Party (PD), National Awakening Party (PKB), National Mandate Party (PAN), and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).

The Golden Triangle

The “Golden Triangle” was initiated as a means to narrow down competition during the election period. Although for the time being it has fewer members than its competitor, this loose coalition was actually designed as a platform for more parties to join in the near future. Not only do the three parties have a common history as the only political parties allowed to operate in the New Order era, but PPP as the initiator has also enjoyed a good relationship with PDI-P—built on foundations laid during the Megawati-Hamzah Haz’s administration back in 2001-2004. For PDI-P, PPP’s receptivity to female leadership—a rarity among Islamic parties—paves the way for Megawati’s bid for presidency. PPP is also a party that could potentially gain a considerable amount of support from voters affiliated to either *Muhammadiyah* or *Nahdlatul Ulama*—the two largest Indonesian Islamic mass organizations. These two factors would come in handy for PDI-P as they strategize how to win both the parliamentary elections and support Megawati’s presidential aspirations.

Although the history of their relationship could hardly be described as intimate, PDI-P and GOLKAR have recently intensified their communication, especially since a 2007 public gathering where high-ranking officials of both parties—particularly Taufik Kiemas and Surya Paloh—were present. The gathering, which took place in South Sumatra’s capital of Palembang, indicated that both parties were prepared to consider coalition-building as one of their strategies to win the 2009 elections. Nevertheless, both parties are also concerned by their acute inability to reach out to the wider Islamic community. While the need to gain the support of the Islamic community is critical in what is the most populous Muslim country in the world, to do so without compromising the support of their nationalist constituents will be tricky. Thus, by accepting PPP’s invitation to form a “loose” coalition both parties expect to benefit from PPP’s share of votes from its Muslim support base.

As the two most established nationalist parties in Indonesia, PDI-P and GOLKAR are also expecting the “Golden Triangle” to further help them secure their nationalist-based constituents. This expectation is reasonable due to the fact that their constituent support base has been declining—reflected in recent elections at the local level.

The emergence of the “Golden Triangle” should also be seen in the light of the icy relationship between GOLKAR and PD, which has grown worse following PD Vice-Chairman Ahmad Mubarak’s controversial statement that GOLKAR would gain no more than 2.5% of the total national vote.

The Golden Bridge

A February 2009 poll conducted by a group of renowned institutions (CSIS, LIPI, LP3ES, and PUSKAPOL-UI) highlighted that PD is currently the most popular political party in Indonesia. The result showed that if parliamentary elections were held in February, 21.52% of total respondents would vote for PD, 15.51% for PDI-P, and 14.27% for GOLKAR. The same poll also revealed how Yudhoyono’s popularity significantly influences PD’s vote gain.

Since Yudhoyono is currently seeking another term of office, PD as his political machine needs to build a coalition with parties that do not aim to nominate their own presidential candidates. Nevertheless the PD leadership is also aware that a large part of the party’s constituents are made up of those identified as swing voters. It is therefore natural for PD to form strategic partnerships with middle-ranking parties possessing loyal constituents. M. Qodari, Executive Director of the Jakarta-based research institute *Indo Barometer*, told the *Election Watch* that currently there is a strong push from within the PD to build a coalition with PKS since the party’s well-developed political machine could help PD gain more support from the swing voters.

While PKS decision to align itself with PD was taken exclusively by the party advisory board (*Majelis Dewan Syuro*), the party leadership needs ensure that their decision is in line with the aspirations of their cadres. This measured approach can be observed in PKS Chairman Tifatul Sembiring’s statement expressing that the party’s constituents “... prefer an alliance with the Democrats.” By aligning itself to the “Golden Bridge” rather than to the giants of the “Golden Triangle,” PKS may have a better chance to secure a vice-presidential ticket later on.

PD is also interested to reach out to PKB constituents. The Muhaimin Iskandar-led PKB realizes that its supporters will most likely be split as a consequence of the party’s continuing internal conflict. Its leaders realize that in order to keep the party’s traditional constituents united they would need a well-known figure to be supported as PKB’s presidential candidate. This is where the hugely popular figure of President Yudhoyono fits perfectly into the picture. PAN, the other member of the “Golden

Bridge,” naturally sides itself with the coalition since its status as a party that promotes the spirit of *reformasi* makes it difficult to align itself with political parties seen as dominant political actors of the New Order.

How well will they fare?

The “Golden Triangle” is supported by parties with strong political machinery and well-established infrastructure. A partnership of the two largest nationalist parties, complemented by another with support from the Islamic community, could become a formidable force with significant potential to determine the course of the elections.

However, it is obvious that parties are erring on the side of caution until the results of parliamentary elections are revealed. Only then will they formally declare their president/vice-president tickets. Both Megawati and Kalla, for example, have declared their readiness to run for president. This could complicate their relationship in the near future as both at present seem unlikely to run for the vice-presidential post.

Opportunity for the “Golden Bridge,” on the other hand, revolves very much on Yudhoyono’s popularity—one based on the claim that Indonesia’s recent political and economic stability is the pinnacle of the current administration’s achievements. If the coalition’s political machinery can function well in the urban areas—where voter preferences tend to be more dynamic—the high number of swing voters there will likely benefit the coalition most.

In the final analysis, it is relatively clear that both coalitions were essentially built for pragmatic considerations. Each of their constituent parts aim to get the highest number of votes in the parliamentary elections, which in turn, is expected to boost their performance in the presidential elections. It is also worth remembering that there is no guarantee that the composition of coalitions will remain constant. There is always a possibility for parties to switch sides. For the moment, conditions for the emergence of a strong Indonesian government based on a permanent coalition remain elusive.

» INDONESIA PROGRAMME

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