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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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# Indonesia Election Watch

## 2009

ISSUE 4, 16 APRIL 2009



## How the Democrats Won

Although official tallies are not set to be released for a few more weeks, exit polls have put President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s Democrat Party at the top of last week’s legislative elections. Pundits claimed that it was the “Yudhoyono” factor that helped triple his party’s vote—from around 7 percent in the 2004 elections to around 20 percent this year. But how exactly did the Yudhoyono factor translate into such an impressive electoral outcome?

### The Yudhoyono Factor

As former chief of socio-political affairs—and later, of territorial affairs—in the armed forces, Yudhoyono’s reformist image was formed during the waning days of Suharto’s rule. Well-versed in Indonesian politics, later on, as a minister in both the Wahid and Megawati cabinets, he personified an image of a cautious, pleasant-looking, well-mannered, and moderate reformist general.

This helped him launch his political career—beginning with the formation of the Democrat Party in September 2002, which then became a launching pad for his bid for the presidency in 2004.

Once elected, President Yudhoyono has been credited with solving the decades-long insurgency in Aceh, improving the economy, and stabilising the political system—while overseeing hundreds of local elections and steering the country through a financial crisis. Though certainly not without his critics, President Yudhoyono continues to be highly favoured among Indonesians, especially for his support for anti-corruption efforts that has implicated prominent politicians, even his own in-law.

This popularity however does not automatically translate into an electoral spike for his party. This is where Yudhoyono’s military and political experience comes into play. His reputation for leaving no room to chance and to always carefully consider all options clearly aided the Democrat’s electoral strategy.

### The Cikeas Machine

The Democrat strategy is based on the so-called “Cikeas” machine. For the national, or elite level, the Democrat party structure is geared to maximise cross-party communications, both within and outside the government.

Under Democrat Chairman Hadi Utomo, who is Yudhoyono's brother-in-law, and supported by Secretary General Marzuki Ali and political section chief Anas Urbaningrum, channels of communications between various parties—especially crucial in coalition building—has been well maintained. Moreover, Utomo's effective leadership style has been said to be influenced by his intelligence and special forces background and has relatively served the party well behind the scenes.

These party lines are further supported by Yudhoyono's cabinet ministers, especially State Secretary Hatta Radjasa, Coordinating Minister for People's Welfare Aburizal Bakrie, and Cabinet Secretary Sudi Silalahi—all of whom often assisted Yudhoyono's political communications. For the local, or grassroots level, Yudhoyono-affiliated organisations play a crucial role. Among others, the "SBY's Light of Peace Dhikr Council" (*Majelis Zikir Nurussalam SBY*), has been critical.

In conversations with the *Indonesia Programme*, well-noted Islamic scholar Noorhaidi Hassan argues that this *Zikir*—literally the remembrance of God—council helped sway thousands of Islamic voters without necessarily presenting the image of a "conservative" Islamic outlook. If anything, it helped "sell Yudhoyono's pious outlook," while not undermining his own nationalist credentials.

A report by the Jakarta-based *Gatra* magazine claims that Yudhoyono's Zikir Council has far-reaching networks across Indonesia headed by Habib Abdurrahman al-Habsy, a charismatic cleric known as Habib Kwitang. Dr. Noorhaidi, currently a visiting fellow at RSIS, adds that Kwitang, an area in Central Jakarta, has become a religio-political magnet for thousands of Muslims and previously served as the spiritual hub for New Order officials and military officers, including Suharto and his family.

As this *Zikir* network stretches down to the regions and villages, members come from across the political spectrum—attracting both Islamic voters and other party members from across Indonesia. More importantly however, it also helps Yudhoyono sway women voters—numbering around 80 million, or around half of eligible voters. A pre-election survey by *Kompas* in March 2009 shows that the piety of the political figures is among the most crucial factors influencing women's voting preference.

Aside from this network, Yudhoyono also set up new groups under his command, including Teams Echo, Delta, Foxtrot, India, Romeo, and Bravo. According to *Gatra*, Echo Team, headed by former military commander Djoko Suyanto, is tasked with territorial and intelligence operations, while Foxtrot is in charge of image building, Delta for logistical support, and Bravo as the Media Centre.

These forms of political machinery are further supported by strong financial support backed by prominent business figures as well as celebrities and musicians. The significance of such political machinery can be measured, among others, in the Democrat's growing regional strength.

Initially, in 2004, the party largely won over urban voters, such as those in Jakarta, Palembang, Manado, and Pacitan, while rural votes only contributed marginally. However, before the 2009 elections, a *Kompas* survey showed that 26 percent of rural voters—where most Indonesians reside—would choose the Democrats. The party's local election victories seem to confirm this trend—the Democrats won three local elections on their own and 66 others in coalition with other parties.

### **Marketing the party**

With the political machinery in place, the Democrats relied on its 'tip of the sword':

Yudhoyono's economic programmes, sealed in a strong ad-buy. In this respect, as the Democrats were gaining ground in the villages, Yudhoyono's Cash Assistance Programmes (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai* or BLT)—given just before the legislative elections—further tipped the balance in his favour, swaying the 19 million households spread across rural areas. Although miniscule in amount (around US\$ 20), the cash handout mattered a great deal for rural households.

Yudhoyono's strategy to increase and then lower fuel prices have positively impacted urban voters—whose spending patterns revolve around transportation costs.

Additionally, in the ad blitz between 2008 and 2009—where according to Nielsen ad-buys reached around IDR 2.2 trillion (US\$ 220 million)—the Democrats largely bombarded the airwaves and public sphere, which, according to some, cost the party around IDR 15 billion (US\$ 1.5 million) per month.

These party ads were further boosted by public service commercials showcasing key achievements of the respective government agencies. This so-called “power of the ad” was confirmed to the *Indonesia Programme* in conversations with local activists and academic circles in Bandung and Jakarta.

This helped explain the Democrat's strong showing in almost all provinces across Indonesia, which effectively tapped into the traditional bases of established parties like Golkar and PDI-P.

### **Is the battle over?**

The exit polls notwithstanding, with issues involving voter fraud being spewed around by critics, speculation about a systematic attempt to win by the Democrats remains a contested issue in post-election debates. Though very difficult to substantiate, let alone prove in a court of law, the fact that the “administrative” faults concerning the voters' list were widespread across Indonesia has allowed skeptics to question the next parliament's legitimacy.

Moreover, these allegations might just point to the fact that the election battle is not over yet. A host of legal complaints would most likely embroil the country in a political fracas at a time when party elites are negotiating coalition deals.

In the final analysis, though issues like healthcare, corruption, and economic strength were at stake in this election, Yudhoyono's multi-front strategy—targeting across the socio-political and religious streams—supported by solid formal and informal political machinery at the national and local levels, were the key ingredients explaining the Democrat's electoral triumph.

## **» INDONESIA PROGRAMME**

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