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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

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The Electoral Aftermath: Technical Turns Tactical?

POST-ELECTION developments continue to be rapid and unpredictable. On the morning of 15 April 2009, major national newspapers featured on their front pages former President Megawati Sukarnoputri, flanked by Gen. (Ret.) Wiranto and Lt. Gen. (Ret.) Prabowo Subianto standing together in solidarity with nine other well-known political figures and their associates following a meeting the previous day.

Intriguingly, most of those present have engaged in bitter disputes with each other in the past, none more so than Wiranto and Prabowo whose acrimonious contest for leadership of the TNI marked the run-up to the May 1998 riots which led to the fall of Suharto. Others in the picture were themselves leaders of parties competing fiercely for both parliamentary and presidential offices. Under normal circumstances they would rarely meet due to strong personal and ideological differences let alone be seen publicly together in common cause. So why did they close ranks on April 14, 2009 and what are the implications of their move?

Turmoil over the voter list

The gathering calls itself the “Kelompok Teuku Umar,” or the Teuku Umar group, after the location of Megawati’s residence where the meeting took place. It released a statement declaring the April election as “the worst parliamentary election” since the advent of the *reformasi* era pointing to the prevalence of electoral fraud and administrative mismanagement specifically relating to flawed voter lists (*Daftar Pemilih Tetap* or DPT).

Although an error-ridden DPT is only one of the many shortcomings observers have found impairing the legislative elections to set up a new parliament, its impact cannot be construed as a minor infraction. The flawed DPT has deprived millions of eligible voters—across the country and overseas—the ability to exercise their constitutional rights on voting day. It also contains names that belong to those ineligible to vote, such as minors and the deceased.

While similar issues marred the 2004 legislative elections, the problems then were nowhere near the scale of irregularities apparent in the just-concluded 2009 polls. Furthermore the blemished voter lists may not have become such a controversial issue had the number of missing names not been so large and so widely distributed. Millions of Indonesians across all segments of the society—from students to high-ranking public officials—found their names missing from the list. Although actual figures have not been

established, the final numbers of missing names are estimated to be very high. As of April 19, *Forum Rektor Indonesia* (an association of presidents of Indonesian universities) Chairman Edy Suandi Hamid estimated the number to be as high as 30 percent of eligible voters, or more than 51 million disenfranchised voters.

Considering the level of enthusiasm felt across the country prior to voting day, public dissatisfaction over the flawed DPT provides the perfect *raison d'être* for anti-Yudhoyono forces to coalesce and engage in counter-manoevres.

A common cause for all

The importance of the DPT goes far beyond the debate over how well the technicalities of the legislative elections were managed. *First*, the parliamentary DPT was designed to serve as groundwork for a similar list to be utilised for the coming presidential election scheduled for July 9. A compromise parliamentary DPT could hamper preparation for the presidential election—an event of greater magnitude in Indonesian politics. *Second*, since the DPT is vital in determining voter turnout, the entire election process—including its result—could be the trigger point for political challenges if a similar situation mars the presidential election. The great imponderable now is whether Yudhoyono's opponents would be willing to plunge the country into a constitutional crisis by challenging the legitimacy of three important aspects: the legislative election itself; the resulting new parliament; and Yudhoyono's claim to a second term in office should there be a recurrence of similar problems in the presidential election.

Most who find the DPT flawed hold the independent General Elections Commission (KPU) responsible. Unsurprisingly, though, many political figures—especially Yudhoyono's opponents—link these blunders with his administration while others point to outright political manipulation by his strategists utilising state institutions.

Was it really all about technicalities?

Concerns over the DPT-related turmoil notwithstanding, there might be deeper political motives behind the Teuku Umar group's desire to seize upon the prevalence of flawed voter lists to exploit electoral fault-lines.

The short-term objective would be to challenge the credibility of the election results, emphasizing that election-related flaws are part of a greater scheme to deliver an easy victory for Yudhoyono. For example, a member of the group, Rizal Ramli, was quoted saying that in areas where Yudhoyono's populist policy of direct cash assistance (*Bantuan Langsung Tunai* or BLT) was well received, fewer names were found to be missing from the election rolls than in areas where the policy is less popular.

Additionally, the constituent parts of the Teuku Umar group share a common feature: they did not fare well in the elections. Though the official results have yet to be released, the provisional tally thus far has been consistent with the findings of exit polls by independent research groups. These "quick count" exit polls have placed Yudhoyono's Democrat Party ahead of the race with a spectacular vote gain of almost 200 percent as compared with votes gained in 2004, making it the only party able to independently nominate Yudhoyono as a presidential candidate. With Yudhoyono's popularity unrivalled, combining forces is the only option left for his opponents to challenge his bid for a second term. The Teuku Umar group is attractive in that sense: the group functions as a rallying point for anyone opposing the President's reelection—even for figures who were previously at loggerheads with each other like Wiranto and Prabowo.

Raising a key electoral fault-line like the DPT issue as the rallying cry could serve the group well if it is to delegitimise the Yudhoyono administration—and more importantly his carefully-constructed personal image. The DPT controversy is a useful point of reference when it comes to coalition-building initiatives since the technical nature of the issue contested allows some leeway. As a strategy it does not place too much pressure on the parties involved at the formative stages of the coalition-building process, while at the same time provides a useful backdrop to suss out likely coalition partners.

Technical turns tactical?

So far the Teuku Umar group has limited itself to function more as a point of coordination than a formal coalition. Whether or not a coalition materialises from this venture is yet to be seen.

There are reasons that could hinder the group from maintaining long-term cooperation—a feature vital for any coalition to be built and function smoothly. Firstly, Megawati is not the only individual in the camp eyeing the presidency. Deciding a single pair of presidential-vice presidential candidates for the whole group to support will not be a straightforward process. Secondly, synergising electoral strategies among parties drawn from a wide array of ideological platforms could be more difficult than imagined. In Indonesia's highly dynamic political setting, keeping a coalition intact is often fraught with complications. Could the 14 April meeting be the start of a grand anti-Yudhoyono coalition, or will it turn out to be a prelude to nothing?

The current situation is too fluid for a clear post-election political map to be drawn. For those seeking to join the anti-Yudhoyono venture, however, one thing is certain: a platform has been set up. A clearer picture may be evident next week after the major political parties complete their national meetings over the weekend.

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