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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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## A One-Round Affair?

### Yudhoyono’s Prospects in the Coming Presidential Election

Following the May 16 deadline for the registration of presidential/vice-presidential candidates, the identities of who will compete for the nation’s top jobs was settled early this week. The three pairs of candidates who will contest the July 8 presidential election are Vice-President Jusuf Kalla who partners former Armed Forces Chief Wiranto; former President Megawati Sukarnoputri with former Army Strategic Reserve Command Chief Prabowo Subianto; and incumbent President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono with Central Bank Governor Boediono. This issue of *Election Watch* attempts to analyze Yudhoyono’s prospects together with the campaign strategy he is likely to utilize contrasting it with the strategies of his competitors.

According to a survey conducted by *Lembaga Survey Indonesia* (Indonesian Survey Institute—LSI) from 20 to 27 April covering Indonesia’s 33 provinces, remarkably, Indonesian voters seem to have abandoned their long-held beliefs on the ideal qualities necessary for an Indonesian presidential/vice-presidential pair: between representatives from Islamic and secular parties; between Javanese and non-Javanese; and between civilian and military backgrounds. Religion and ethnicity seem to be losing their appeal as determining factors in voters’ preferences over the pairing of a presidential/vice-presidential candidate.

That religion and ethnicity are now less influential factors is potentially good news for Yudhoyono. Both he and his choice for a running-mate are Javanese. It is becoming evident in the upcoming presidential election that concerns over religion or ethnicity are becoming marginal as voters concentrate on bread and butter issues. Candidates’ popularity ratings are now based on their perceived ability to make real contributions to voters’ economic well being rather than to how strongly he or she is affiliated to the Islamic community. Religious issues are neither necessary nor sufficient to attract popular support with voters preferring candidates perceived as the best-equipped to deal with economic issues. According to the same LSI survey, these attitudes were found in 87 percent of people surveyed who identified themselves as Muslim.

However, the fact that Kalla is a Bugis from Sulawesi is predictably being utilised by his campaign team to attract the non-Javanese electorate—a large group comprising more than 30 percent of voters. Kalla has also continued to follow convention by choosing a Javanese as his running-mate. The real strength of Kalla-Wiranto’s candidacy lies in the image of decisiveness that they seek to portray—a quality attractive to voters—by being the first pair to announce their candidacies long before the other two presidential

candidates announced their choices of running-mates. The combination of their ethnic backgrounds—Bugis and Javanese—however may work against their ability to consolidate support from Indonesia’s Javanese-dominated voter base, making them less competitive against their rivals, especially against Yudhoyono who on the surface at least holds sway in the Javanese voter stakes. Moreover, even if Wiranto could help boost the pair’s support among Javanese voters, he would run headfirst into competition against Megawati-Prabowo, both of whom are also Javanese.

Many political observers believe that Megawati-Prabowo will get more votes than Kalla-Wiranto due to the PDI-P’s solid political machine backing Megawati’s candidacy and Prabowo’s Gerindra’s impressive financial power. Furthermore, the former Head of Indonesian State Intelligence Agency (BIN) Hendro Priyono is supporting their candidacy adding his financial clout and political networks to boost the chances of the Megawati-Prabowo pair. Moreover the Megawati-Prabowo pro-people economic programmes are seen as offering alternative policies to those of the Yudhoyono administration.

The LSI survey shows that around 70 percent of voters would vote for Yudhoyono-Boediono, more than enough for a first round victory, compared with 21 percent for Megawati-Prabowo, and a mere 3 percent for Kalla. The survey also finds that Yudhoyono would get approximately the same number of votes regardless of who he is paired with. This means that Boediono’s candidacy neither adds nor weakens Yudhoyono’s popularity among voters. This view is shared by many political observers.

#### **“A political machine for free”**

Both Wiranto and Prabowo have military records tainted by cases of human rights abuse. The human rights factor—while seemingly not a critical dynamic in the coming election—is still well-remembered by human rights groups. Wiranto was Armed Forces Commander during the May 1998 riots where thousands died on the streets of Jakarta. Prabowo was accused of the kidnapping and murder of anti-Soeharto activists in the months leading up to the same turmoil. However, neither Wiranto nor Prabowo have ever faced trial.

This issue has troubled human right activists. Furthermore, Prabowo has appointed Muchdi Purwoprandjono as a Deputy Chairman in his party. Muchdi, the former Deputy Head of BIN, was placed on trial for the murder of human rights activist Munir. Although he was declared innocent last January by a Jakarta district court, nevertheless, many still suspect that he was involved in the murder. Human rights groups have considered the bids by Wiranto and Prabowo for the vice-presidential posts as an affront to the struggles of rights activists and families of the victims—essentially a major setback to the enforcement of human rights in Indonesia.

Indonesian human rights groups have criticized Kalla and Megawati for ignoring the “bleak human rights records” of their respective running-mates. *Imparsial*—a prominent Jakarta-based human rights group—and families of victims of human rights abuses attributed to both Wiranto and Prabowo had earlier asked executives of Kalla-led Golkar and Megawati-led PDI-P not to nominate the two former generals as vice-presidential candidates. Since their concerns have been ignored by both Kalla and Megawati, these vociferous human rights groups have by default become a free political machine for the Yudhoyono-Boediono’s campaign.

Yudhoyono’s campaign has been known to utilize human rights issues in its attempts to contrast Yudhoyono against his contenders. Some human rights activists have told the *Indonesia Programme* that they have come to an agreement with Yudhoyono’s campaign team stating that they will support Yudhoyono’s candidacy in return for his pledge to

reopen the Munir case for trial when he is reelected as President. The same sources also stated that almost all human rights groups are now inclined to support Yudhoyono.

### **Yudhoyono's prospects**

Final result of the April's legislative election shows that Yudhoyono's *Partai Demokrat* (Democrat Party-PD) has emerged as the obvious winner with 148 out of 560 parliamentary seats. With such a resounding victory, Yudhoyono can now confidently press on for a second term. More critically, PD's coalition—currently including the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), National Mandate Party (PAN), National Awakening Party (PKB), and United Development Party (PPP)—now controls more than 50 percent of the seats in the House.

Being in such a dominant position, Yudhoyono may not need to further solidify his victory by expanding his coalition to include Megawati's PDI-P—a strategy he was inclined to pursue in early May but now looks less likely to materialise. Nevertheless talks between the two parties are still continuing. If the two do ally with each other, the combination will certainly be politically unique, given the acrimonious relationship between Megawati and Yudhoyono.

Sources interviewed by the *Indonesia Programme* are unanimous in their assertions that Yudhoyono-Boediono remain the favoured pairing with a possibility of winning the race in only one round. The president romped to victory in 2004 without a huge political machine supporting him. Instead, he directly engaged voters at every opportunity. Now, that his party is clearly the preference of the majority of Indonesian voters, Yudhoyono's victory in the July race seems to be imminent.

In the final analysis, there is a strong possibility that the incumbent president will win the coming presidential election with a landslide victory. If that occurs, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono will be the first post-*reformasi* Indonesian president to finish a five-year term and the first to be directly reelected by voters. However, as we have observed in recent weeks, political developments in the run up to the presidential election can be unpredictable. As each candidate's campaign team is still in the process of drawing up their strategic blueprints, a clearer picture might emerge in the coming weeks. The crucial issue now is whether Yudhoyono's contenders can succeed in hindering his ability to win the race in just one-round.

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