

RSIS SEMINAR NOTES

RSIS Seminar on “Indonesia’s 2009 General Elections: Framework and Challenges”

Part One of a Series of Seminars on “Indonesia’s 2009 Election”

Speakers:

Mrs. Sri Nuryanti, Member of the National General Elections Commission (KPU)
Mrs. Wirdyaningsih, Member of the General Elections Supervisory Board (BAWASLU)
and
Dr. Yudi Latif, Executive Director of the Reform Institute, Jakarta

Date: Thursday, 12 February 2009
Venue: Temasek I & II, The Traders Hotel Singapore

Introduction

Mrs. Nuryanti and Mrs. Wirdyaningsih introduced the role of their agencies in relation to how the coming Indonesia’s general and presidential elections are organized. Mrs. Wirdyaningsih also explored problems that could arise in the periods leading to, and during the, execution of the elections. Dr. Yudi Latif explored the theme from a different angle. His presentation was more about predictions and analysis relating to elections outcomes rather than its framework.

Speech

KPU and the Management of Elections 2009. Mrs. Nuryanti explained the organizational structure of the KPU – the principal agency tasked with developing the elections mechanism as well as executing the events itself. The structure of KPU highlights the complexity of Indonesian elections itself. While at national level this agency essentially comprises of only seven commissioners, when counted down to local level the number expands to more than 3.6 million election officials. Mrs. Nuryanti emphasized the point that currently commissioners deal only with matters related to policy making, they are no longer involved in the procurement of election materials.

The system being employed for the elections is no less complex than the structure of KPU. Even the matter of choosing the day of voting (finalized as 9 April 2009) was proven to be very challenging due to various objections from society at-large. Eligibility of voters is measured either by age (17 years old), or their marital status. The process of creating a final voter list could go on to as many as seven stages. The total number of parties contesting at national level is 36, higher than in the previous election. To make things even more complicated and potentially confusing, local voters are to mark their selection for MP across an extra-large, four-page, ballot paper.

BAWASLU: Mapping Possible Election-related Problems. Mrs. Wirdyaningsih noted that 2009 elections are more democratic in terms of both process and system, and that the

events are decisive in attempt to bring the country towards a consolidated democracy. However, there are many problem associated with preparations of the events. The adoption of laws on Electoral Administration and Parliamentary Elections, for example, were done at a very late stage. Moreover, in many cases preparations for national elections are done coincidentally with those of local elections. In general BAWASLU, as a supervisory body, considers KPU as an agency that is not well managed, untrustworthy, and lacks coordination with other government institutions.

BAWASLU has identified several possible problems that could arise in the field, among others: a high intensity of conflicts between supporters of different political groups (potentially leading to intimidation or even violence), different interpretations of election laws, “black campaigns” among and within political parties, and the use state assets for campaign purposes. The general trend of problems, however, seems to cluster around three main issues: a long campaign period paving the way for chaotic situations to erupt; disputes on election results; and the use of money politics to win votes.

Election Result: Analysis and Predictions. Dr. Yudi Latif presented his analysis and predictions based on surveys conducted by his institution, the Reform Institute, in 2008 in all of Indonesia’s 33 provinces. His analyses were devised with the aim of finding out voter behavior at the grassroots. On the issue of swing voters, he made two important observations:

(1) perception towards government performance

Even though President Yudhoyono is still popular, public satisfaction over his government’s performance has decreased continuously. To counter such perceptions the Yudhoyono government has introduced populist policies. Although overall level of satisfaction towards government performance remains low, the electorate, however, are afraid to lose the benefits of such populist policies if Yudhoyono is not reelected as president. Yudhoyono’s personality also helps to maintain his popularity, especially among the Javanese voters.

(2) perception of voters towards political parties

The high number of contesting political parties and the absence of clear-cut ideological difference have created confusion at the grassroots level and have also contributed to an increase in the number of swing voters.

There are fluctuations in party electability rate as seen in surveys conducted during 2008. Democrat Party’s degree of electability has fluctuated significantly, from 8% in February to 26% in Dec 2008. The Gerindra Party, formed by Prabowo Subianto as his election vehicle has also seen a sharp increase in voter support and has altered public perception in his candidacy as someone who has gone from “zero to hero.” Dr. Latief asserted that it is fairly safe to say that with regard to the parliamentary election, Megawati’s PDI-P could be the winner, followed by Golkar and Democrat Party, respectively.

Increase in the number of swing voters could be explained by analyzing three factors, namely: (1) legacy of New Order’s decentralization policy, (2) the current complex multiparty system that has made it difficult for people at the grassroots level to differentiate one party with another, and (3) the breakdown of formal and informal authorities’

capability to influence the people; currently not even the *ulemas* wield much political influence over the masses.

With regard to the presidential election, Dr. Latif noted that SBY' popularity is much higher than that of his party. The opposite situation happens to be the case with Megawati. Her popularity continuously decreases while that of her party's increases. Dr. Latif concluded his presentation by asserting that currently no figure feels safe enough to propose himself as a presidential candidate without considering the person who should be the potential vice president. The minimum percentage of parliamentary seats required for parties to independently propose a presidential candidate is very high. It is unlikely that any party will be able to reach the minimum percentage. Parties will still need to form coalitions, therefore, the identity of the vice presidential candidate remains crucial.

Q&A Session

1. Question: Lately party oligarchs have been trying to build political dynasties within their parties. What is the implication of this trend vis-à-vis personal preference and rational choice of voters?

Dr. Latif: Indonesian political parties are mostly designed and organized by elites in Jakarta, essentially in a top-down model. They also tend to rely on past charismatic figures. Attempts to change this pattern have been tried but to no avail, even when the changes were prompted from within parties themselves. Therefore dynastic politics remains a prominent feature of Indonesian political parties. However, voters are getting more individualized, especially after the recent Constitutional Court's verdict abolishing party ranking list. The final arrangement of these contradictory developments will depend mostly on negotiation. In future, prominent figures associated with the political party will still be important however their role will be limited to that of party gatekeepers.

2. Question: How much will the elections cost and how to ensure that KPU members will not misuse such large amounts of funds?

Mrs. Nuryanti: The actual cost for the election is 13.4 trillion rupiah. It is further distributed to KPUs at local levels. Therefore the actual amount of funds managed by the national KPU is not as large as it might be expected. Furthermore, national commissioners do not deal with procurement issues anymore, so chances for them to use funds in an improper manner are minimal.

3. Question: Since Golkar and Democrat Party (PD) share a same ideology, is it possible for Golkar's votes to be transferred to PD in the coming election?

Dr. Latief: Golkar and PD do share a same ideology, however Golkar's constituents are mostly traditional voters while those of PD are much more of a floating mass. Based on surveys, if PD's popularity increases, Golkar's votes will decrease, and vice versa. This will further complicate future relationship between President Yudhoyono and Vice President Jusuf Kalla, especially because now both

are top-leaders of PD and Golkar, respectively. Thus the real opposition of PD is not the PDI-P, but Golkar.

4. Question: Who is the likely candidate for vice-president and what is the reason for his/her emergence?

Dr. Latief: For Megawati, there are three possible figures: The first is Sri Sultan Hamengkubowono X. However Sultan is not officially supported by any political parties. This could pose a problem if PDI-P needs a stable base in the parliament. Furthermore, both Megawati and the Sultan share the same constituents, all mostly based in Java. The second is Prabowo Subianto. Although Prabowo himself is Javanese, he could still be perceived as representing the non-Javanse population of Indonesia. The last is Hidayat Nur Wahid, who could contribute a good number of votes from outside Java.

5. Question: What is the approximate number of eligible voters at this time, and how many of them are considered young voters?

Mrs. Nuryanti: There are approximately 171 million eligible voters for 2009 elections. The number of first-time voters is around 20 to 23 percent of that number.

6. Question: Has there been any serious violations to the law preventing political parties from using children in political campaign?

Mrs. Nuryanti: According to law, any person ineligible to vote is not allowed to participate in political campaigns. The category includes soldiers, police officers, and children. The KPU has noticed that there have been some violations to the rules. Gerindra Party, for instance, has been known to use children in their TV advertisements. Some children have been observed to wear shirts with the party logo in some of the Democrat Party campaigns.

Recorded by: Sammy Kanadi, Research Analyst at the Indonesia Programme, RSIS
Vetted by:

About the Speaker

Sri Nuryanti is member of the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU) for Elections 2009. Prior to joining KPU, she was a researcher at Research Centre for Political Science at the Indonesian Institute of Sciences (Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia, LIPI). Ibu Sri Nuryanti is one of the founders of a well well-known Jakarta-based research institution, the Ridep Institute. She holds a master's degree in Asian Studies from the Australia National University. She has a wide experience in general election issues, civil-military relations, as well as gender and minority issues.

Dr. Yudi Latief is executive director of the Jakarta-based Reform Institute. He holds a PhD in Political Sociology from the Australian National University.

Wirdyaningsih is currently a board member of the Indonesian Election Supervisory Body (Badan Pengawas Pemilu, Bawaslu). She graduated from the Australian National University. Besides serving in the Bawaslu, Ibu Wirdyaningsih also holds appointment at the University of Indonesia as head of a program in the university's Faculty of Law.