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PKS Against the Rest: The Justice and Prosperity Party and the 2007 Jakarta Elections

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The Indonesian democratic transition of 1998 led to the proliferation of political parties, many of them Islamic. Among the most significant is PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera). In the 2007 Jakarta elections it failed to achieve victory, but received 42% of the vote running against a coalition of 19 other parties. This commentary explores the party's religious orientation, organizational structure and its conduct of the 2007 Jakarta elections.

Religious and Ideological Background of PKS

THE JUSTICE and Prosperity Party (PKS) is a stridently Islamic party. It has been influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood and especially by Sheyk Yusuf al Qaradawi. Qaradawi is widely regarded as being the Brotherhood's spiritual leader. He hosts the al-Jazeera talk show "Shari'ah and Life" He opposes *taqlid* or "blind obedience to authority" on legal questions and the common Islamist practice of declaring opponents apostates. This has led some Islamists to accuse *him* of apostasy. His limited support for suicide bombings, which he has declared are legitimate only in Palestinian territories, has led the US and UK to deny his visa applications. He has argued that while it may be acceptable for Christians, secularism is unacceptable for Muslims. Qaradawi was most recently in Indonesia in September of 2007. He was received by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, parliamentary and PKS leaders.

Assessments of PKS vary greatly. Some observers see it as a dangerous anti-democratic Islamist movement, others as a centrist party committed to the electoral process. This analysis supports the later interpretation.

PKS supporters are strong advocates of both the ritual and socio-political provisions of *Shari'ah*. They strongly oppose the consumption of alcohol, prostitution, pornography and other "vices". Almost all PKS women cover their hair. Party cadres I interviewed were extremely idealistic. They are convinced that *Shari'ah* is *the* solution to Indonesia's problems. Few are religious scholars (*ulama*). Many hold university degrees in technical fields. Some have studied in the US, Europe or Australia. Others are

students at Indonesia's secular universities. Few have studied in traditional religious schools (*pesantren*) or Islamic universities.

PKS emphasizes social responsibility and roots its political program in the *Qur'an* and *Hadith* according to which all humans are leaders in some sense and are accountable to God and their fellow humans. Participation in politics is often described as a religious obligation. PKS is the most thoroughly organized of Indonesia's political parties. Cadres receive intensive training. They are taught that Islam is a totally encompassing system and that *Shari'ah* is the model for individual and collective behaviour. However, most maintain that it is impossible to impose it, because the ritual acts it requires must be accompanied by proper intention. Many believe that "leading by example" will convince others of the benefits of Shari'ah-centered life.

Prior to the 1999 elections, many PKS supporters believed that the establishment of democracy would sweep the party into power. Nearly a decade later, cadres remain optimistic but experience has taught them that democracy alone will not necessarily lead to the Islamic Indonesia they desire.

The 2007 Jakarta Election

The 2007 Jakarta election was the first in which the governor was chosen by popular vote. Of Indonesia's provincial elections, Jakarta's was considered the most important because it was seen as a leading indicator for the 2009 presidential election and because control of the capital is equated with control of the nation. Because PKS had run well in previous elections, secular and moderate Islamic parties considered it imperative that it not win. 19 other parties formed a coalition in an election that can be described as PKS against the rest. PKS could not find coalition partners.

PKS candidate Adang Dorodjatun, a retired police general, ran against Deputy Governor Fauzi Bowo. Bowo was not a member of any party. This made him a strong compromise candidate. Both candidates promised to improve the province's infrastructure and public transportation, build flood control systems, improve the economy and education and alleviate poverty. Both stressed their experience.

As reported by *Kompas* on 1 August 2007, their campaigns were very different in other respects. Dorodjatun's slogan was: "Hey! Be Strong Jakarta!" This reflects the tendency for PKS to play down its Islamist orientation. PKS stressed good governance and the elimination of corruption. It made few religious statements. Many in Jakarta have noted that PKS does not emphasize *Shari'ah* during campaigns, but returns to it once the votes are counted. Indonesian analyst Yudi Latif observed that by stressing secular issues, PKS attempted to "cross the psychological barrier it created for itself" and that the party is caught between religious absolutism and political reality. Dorodjatun complained that there was a behind-the-scenes "dirty campaign", including rumours that a PKS government would ban alcohol and the celebration of the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, one of the most important holy days for traditional Muslims, but which is considered to be an unlawful innovation by Islamists. PKS supporters stated that on Election Day, leaflets were distributed describing PKS as the "Indonesian Taliban". Dorodjatun sought to assure the public that he would not "take Jakarta to extremes" and that everyone, including the Chinese, should have equal opportunities. The Islamist press took a stronger line. The July edition of *Sabili* magazine described the coalition as one in which each party had its own leader but was united to oppose Islam, just as the polytheists in Medina united to oppose Muhammad.

Bowo's slogan was "Jakarta for all!" - a veiled reference to fears of PKS intolerance. He stressed inclusivism and openly courted Chinese and Christians. On 1 August 2007, *Kompas* described him as having pluralism in his soul. He secured the endorsement of prominent *ulama*, one of who stated that Muslims were obligated (*wajib*) to vote for him. In what was perhaps the strangest statement of the campaign, Prijanto, the coalition candidate for Deputy Governor, accused the PKS campaign of using black magic to influence the election. At a religious gathering, he said: "This is not made up slander.

What is being used are hypnotism, witchcraft and shamanism.”

Future Prospects

The coalition won the election by a margin of 58% to 42%. It is likely that a portion of the PKS vote grew out of anti-establishment rather than Islamist sentiments. Overwhelming support from Jakarta's Chinese, many of whom are Christians, contributed to the coalition victory. What is clear is that secular and even Islamic parties were willing to counter what was broadly perceived to be a PKS threat.

It is unlikely that PKS will ever come to power at the national level, but it is clear that it will figure significantly in coalition governments. It has now won regional elections in other provinces, including West Java and North Sumatra. Both on its own and as a coalition partner, PKS has won 88 of the 149 local and regional elections it has contested. PKS has officially renounced the goal of an Islamic state and welcomed the support of non-Muslims. This is an example of the tendency for religious political parties to moderate hard-line positions to enhance their electoral chances. It is likely that PKS' presence in the political system may detract from the appeal of more radical movements.

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