

Outlook for the Coming Elections in Indonesia

By *Shiraishi Takashi*

IN Indonesia, elections are scheduled for the national and local parliaments on April 5, the first-stage presidential election will be held July 5 and – in the event that the first-stage election is inconclusive – the second-stage presidential election will be held on Sept. 20. Over the past year, in the lead-up to these elections, various polling organizations have been carrying out public-opinion surveys. However, to date the majority of these polls have surveyed either the residents of the major cities or the residents of several provinces, and there have been no nationwide surveys in the true sense of the word. From this perspective, the survey carried out by Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI), which was started with the support of the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), is deserving of special attention. It is a full-scale survey carried out in 30 provinces – with the exception of Aceh – with the initial poll early last August surveying 2,240 people in 224 locations, and with follow-up surveys every three months. Let's take a look at the results of these polls and examine the trends in Indonesia's political affairs.

First we turn to the evaluation of the current political system. Indonesia's

political system changed dramatically with the collapse of the Suharto regime in May 1998, changing from centralized authoritarian system to decentralized democracy. The legislature became a new power center alongside the president and the military, and local governments were more able to exert their power than ever before. How do the people view this new decentralized democratic system? According to the August 2003 poll, 65% of those polled responded in the affirmative to the statement "Democracy is the most desirable political system," that is, approximately two-thirds of respondents supported the current system. However, the rate of support for the existing political system declined from 71% in the poll of 2001.

In this regard, there is one other highly significant result – the re-evaluation of the Suharto regime. According to the survey, 26% of pollees responded affirmatively to the statement "The Suharto regime was not a good one." This is a major decline from the 2001 poll in which 60% were in agreement. Further, 53% reported that they were dissatisfied with the current democratic system, 56.4% said they thought the Suharto system was better than the

current democratic system and only 40% of those polled said it was not desirable for active military officers to hold positions in the national government.

Taking all of this into consideration, we can make the following interpretations. The people support the current decentralization and democratization, however, approval rates are clearly slipping. In response to this, there is an increase in expressions of hope for a centralized authoritarian system, like that of the Suharto regime. This is because the current system would not seem to be completely fulfilling the expectations of the people.

What exactly do the Indonesian people expect of their government? Sixty percent of respondents pointed to the need to successfully address the economic crisis. They are probably referring to the desire to see actual improvements in the economy, in such concrete terms as an increase in employment and income. Under the Megawati administration, Indonesia's macroeconomic measures over the past two and a half years have moved toward stability. However, economic growth, at 3.44% in 2001 and 3.66% in 2002, has remained low, and enough jobs have not been created to

Table 1

Golkar	25.9	(26.8)
Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle	17.6	(30.5)
United Development Party	8.1	(10.3)
National Awakening Party	9.4	(12.7)
National Mandate Party	4.8	(4.4)
Partai Keadilan (Party of Justice)	2.5	(1.6)
Crescent Moon and Star Party	2.2	(1.8)
Others	1.5	(1.6)
No response	28.1	(10.2)

Note: The numbers in parentheses show the percentage of actual votes cast for that party in the 1999 elections

Table 2

Megawati Sukarnoputri	18.3
S.B. Yudhoyono	12.2
Akbar Tanjung	8.3
Abdurrahman Wahid	8.2
Hamzah Haz	8.1
Amien Rais	7.5
Yusril Ihza Mahendra	7.0
Nururhorishu Majid	5.7
Yusuf Kalla	2.8
Others	0.6
Don't know	21.3

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absorb the 2.5 million new job-seekers who enter the market every year. In this situation, it should be quite apparent what the dominant issue will be in the upcoming legislative and presidential elections. The issue will be whether it will be possible to form a strong, stable government that can deal with the issues of economic growth.

What is the outlook for this year's legislative and presidential elections? Pollees were asked which party they would vote for if the national assembly elections were to be held immediately. The results are shown in Table 1.

There are several conclusions to be drawn from these results. First, the current multi-party system is likely to continue. Further, it is likely that there will be a continued three-way split between the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Golkar and the various Islamic political parties. Secondly, Golkar is likely to succeed the PDIP as the number-one party, and there is a high probability that most of the political parties such as the PDIP which advocated "reform" in the 1999 elections will lose support and seats in the assembly.

Next, the pollees were asked who they would vote for in the presidential elections if they were held immediately, and the results are shown in Table 2.

As can be seen, the rate of support for the current president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, is virtually the same as the support for the PDIP – it cannot be said to be high. As a consequence, it seems quite unlikely that Megawati will be able to obtain a majority of the votes in the first-stage election. That is, the president will not be elected until the second-stage election in September. When that time comes, it will be crucial who Megawati selects as her running mate for the vice-presidency, and whether she will form an alliance with Golkar or the Islamic parties. However, if Golkar becomes the number-one party, it is unlikely to be satisfied with allying with

Megawati's PDIP, choosing Megawati as the presidential candidate and having one of its own members as a vice-presidential candidate. If that is the case, then it is possible that the PDIP could form an alliance with Islamic forces and once again select Hamzah Haz, the current Vice President, as a running mate.

Is there a viable candidate for president within the Golkar party? To the degree that the polls reveal, there seems to be no single candidate who could successfully stand against Megawati. Akbar Tanjung (Chairman of the national assembly and head of the Golkar party) is accused of corruption charges, and 80% of the respondents in the survey indicated that he could not be trusted. Other Golkar

members who have announced their candidacy include Yusuf Kalla (currently coordinating minister), Wiranto (former military commander), Prabowo (formerly commander of army strategic reserve) and Surya Paloh (owner of Media Indonesia). Except for Kalla, all of these names were not even raised in the polls.

With this in mind, one can get a fairly good picture of what the administration will look like after the 2004 presidential and legislative elections. In the event that current trends continue, Golkar would become the largest party in the parliament, but the tripartite struggle among the PDIP, Golkar and Islamic forces would not change, and if



Megawati Sukarnoputri, the President of Indonesia

Megawati were reelected, the greatest likelihood would be that the situation would continue to drift along fairly much as it is now. One would not expect a strong, stable government to deliver economic growth. Also one cannot expect major progress from "reform" measures. Nor would it seem prudent to anticipate a major turning point in Indonesian government for some time to come. **JS**

Shiraishi Takashi is a professor at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University. He specializes in Asian studies and international relations.