

Five right-wing tickets contend for the Indonesian presidency

John Roberts, Peter Symonds
2 June 2004

The campaign for the July 5 Indonesian presidential elections officially began this week with five candidates vying for the country's most powerful post. The poll is the first-ever direct election for Indonesia's head of state and is generally presented in the media as a further step towards democratic reform following the collapse of the Suharto dictatorship in 1998. In reality, all five contenders are based on similar right-wing programs and have close connections to the military and bureaucratic apparatus of the Suharto era.

The political laws enacted by the previous parliament ensure that voters have a limited choice. Only those parties, or coalitions of parties, that gained 3 percent of the seats or 5 percent of the vote in the recent poll for the House of Representatives (DPR) are permitted to nominate presidential tickets. Prior to the DPR election, parties had to meet stringent requirements that ensured only those with sufficient money and patronage would be registered—just 24 qualified to field candidates.

Among the five nominees is the incumbent president, Megawati Sukarnoputri, who was touted as a “reformer” in the aftermath of Suharto's fall. At the 1999 parliamentary election, her Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P) won the largest slice of the vote by projecting itself as the party for the poor and for democratic reform. In the manoeuvring for the presidency, which at the time was decided by a vote in the Peoples Consultative Assembly (MPR), Megawati was pushed to one side in favour of Abdurrahman Wahid from the National Awakening Party (PKB).

The main lesson that Megawati drew was that she required the support of the military and the Golkar party—the political instrument of the Suharto junta—if she were to take the reins of power. Over the next two years that is precisely what she did—appealing to growing concerns in the military in particular that Wahid was too conciliatory to separatist movements in West Papua and Aceh. She was installed as president in July 2001, after a protracted impeachment process, in which the military played a key role, led to the ousting of Wahid on trumped-up charges of corruption.

Megawati's close association with the military and her administration's failure to address any of the country's immense social problems led to a precipitous drop in support for the PDI-P in the parliamentary poll in April—from 37.4 percent in 1999 to 18.5 percent. In a bid to shore up her vote, Megawati has chosen Hasyim Muzadi as her vice-presidential running mate. Muzadi is president of the country's largest Muslim organisation, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), with an estimated 40 million members.

The president launched her campaign on Monday with a rare press conference in Jakarta. In a rather desperate bid to win back voters, she told journalists that her next administration would create 12.9 million

jobs, employ an extra 100,000 teachers, raise the wages of public servants by 15 percent and slash the poverty rate by 45 percent. By the end of the next five-year term, she said, 55 percent of people in towns and 30 percent of people in villages would have access to clean water.

Megawati failed to explain how she would keep her promises or why she had failed to do anything in the previous three years. In fact, her administration has implemented the economic restructuring demands of the IMF and the World Bank, which have led to a deepening gulf between rich and poor. Her chief economic adviser Laksmana Sukardi was on hand to reassure the business elite that a new Megawati cabinet would be financially responsible. The pay rises, he insisted, would not be automatic and would only be paid in public sectors that had registered productivity rises.

The other element of Megawati's campaign is an appeal to nationalism. In May 2003, she gave the green light to the military to launch a huge operation involving more than 40,000 troops and paramilitary units aimed at crushing the separatist Free Aceh Movement (GAM). While she has recently downgraded the state of emergency, the repression continues. Speaking at meeting of religious leaders in the strife-torn province of South Maluku last month, Megawati made clear that the same methods would be used elsewhere. “All forms of separatism should be wiped out because they threaten the unitary Republic of Indonesia,” she said.

Megawati is scrambling to make up ground against her rivals. The latest poll by the International Foundation for Election Systems shows that her former chief security minister Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono is leading the field with 41 percent support. Megawati is a distant second with only 11 percent, just ahead of the Golkar candidate—former armed forces chief Wiranto—on 10 percent.

The main reason for the apparent popularity of Yudhoyono, or “SYB” as he is known, is that he resigned from Megawati's administration in March and established his own party—the Democratic Party—which was able to capitalise on the widespread disaffection with the major parties. In the DPR election, the newly formed Democratic Party won 7.45 percent of the votes.

Yudhoyono's claims to represent an honest and independent alternative to the other parties are completely fraudulent. As a former general, he was an integral part of the Suharto junta and directly involved in many of its crimes. Yudhoyono was involved in the 1975 invasion of East Timor and served there several times, suppressing opposition to Indonesian rule. A long-time associate of Wiranto, he was Wiranto's deputy for territorial affairs and thus directly responsible for East Timor and the militia violence against independence supporters in 1999.

Jusuf Kalla is standing on the Democratic Party ticket with

Yudhoyono. He was also a senior member of Megawati's cabinet and resigned his post as coordinating minister for welfare and social affairs to run for the vice-presidency. Kalla, a businessman from the South Sulawesi, has indicated that he will retain his longstanding membership of Golkar.

The other main contender is Wiranto, another retired Suharto-era general, who is deeply implicated in the crimes of the junta. As the nominee of the Golkar machine, Wiranto has access to a well-established and extensive party organisation and substantial funds, reportedly including cash from the Suharto family itself. The very fact that Golkar still exists and fields candidates is testimony to the lack of any serious democratic reforms after 1998 and the failure to prosecute either Suharto or any of his henchmen. Golkar's ability to appeal to a certain nostalgia for the relative "stability" and "prosperity" of the Suharto period underlines the failure of the so-called reformers, Wahid and Megawati, to meet the needs and aspirations of the masses.

Like Yudhoyono, Wiranto, as head of the armed forces, was responsible for the militia violence in East Timor in 1999. On May 10, the UN-backed Special Panel for Serious Crimes obtained an arrest warrant for Wiranto in the East Timor District Court in Dili over his role in directing the pro-Indonesian militia. Not only has Indonesia refused to extradite Wiranto and others to stand trial, but sections of the East Timorese leadership are seeking a rapprochement with Jakarta, and pressured the prosecutor to delay the case. In the most craven gesture of support for Suharto's military butchers, East Timor's president Xanana Gusmao publicly embraced Wiranto before the media cameras at a meeting in Bali on Saturday.

Wiranto has a long history of service in the Suharto dictatorship. He spent most of his military years in the Kostrad strategic forces, which were often involved in internal repression. He was a trusted servant of Suharto, functioning as his adjutant from 1989 to 1993. Suharto appointed him armed forces chief and defence minister in early 1998. As the regime collapsed in May 1998, Wiranto played a key role in ensuring a smooth transition to Suharto's vice-president and longtime political crony, B.J. Habibie, and keeping key state institutions intact in the face of mass anti-Suharto protests.

Significantly, Wiranto has been given the stamp of approval, not only by Gusmao, but also by former president Wahid, whose brother Solahuddin Wahid is the vice-presidential candidate on the Golkar ticket. Solahuddin Wahid is deputy chairman of the country's National Commission on Human Rights and has declared that Wiranto is not guilty of any crimes in East Timor. The willingness of Wahid to whitewash Wiranto's crimes simply underlines the fact that all the so-called reformers and democrats had the closest of relations with Suharto regime when it was in power.

Abdurrahman Wahid attempted to stand for his own National Awakening Party (PKB), which is connected to NU, but was barred on the grounds of ill health. Wahid, who is partially blind and has suffered several strokes, was not excluded from the presidency in 1999. But the 2003 electoral laws written by parliament include a medical test which was designed, at least in part, to ensure that Wahid, having been impeached and removed from power, would be unable to contest the presidency. Wahid is challenging his exclusion but has indicated that if he fails the PKB and NU will throw their support behind Wiranto.

The two remaining tickets are unlikely to gain significant support. The current vice-president Hamzah Haz is standing for the United Development Party's (PPP) ticket together with another retired general Agum Gumelar. The Muslim-based PPP was one of three

parties allowed to operate under the Suharto junta and was effectively controlled by the state apparatus. Haz never mounted any significant challenge to Suharto. Support for his PPP fell from 10.7 percent in 1999 to 8.2 percent in the April poll.

Haz's running mate is a former chief of the notorious Kopassus special forces troops, the chief instrument of repression under Suharto. He fell out with Suharto over the moves in 1996 to remove Megawati as head of the third legal party—the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI). He subsequently headed the military's thinktank—the National Resilience Institute—and served for a time as transport minister under Wahid.

The fifth candidate, Amien Rais, is standing for the National Mandate Party (PAN), which is closely associated with Indonesia's second largest Muslim organisation, Muhammadiyah. Also hailed as a "reformer," Rais, along with Megawati and Wahid, played the crucial role in 1998 in reining in the mass movement that toppled Suharto. Over the past five years Rais has worked closely with Golkar and the military. He is now teamed up with a former Golkar leader Siswono Yudhusodo, who held several cabinet posts under Suharto. Support for PAN dropped from 7.3 percent in 1999 to 6.4 percent in April.

At this stage it appears that no ticket will win 50 percent of the vote on July 5, leading to a second round runoff in September. But whoever wins the post will preside over an unstable regime incapable of meeting the pressing needs of the majority of the population. All the contenders will implement the demands of the IMF and World Bank for further economic restructuring, which will only compound the present social problems. Estimates put the country's unemployment figure at more than 40 million.

According to National Development Planning Board estimates, \$US72 billion is needed to improve infrastructure and to reduce unemployment. The country has, however, never really recovered from the impact of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis. In 2003, only 38 percent of foreign direct investment (FDI) approved by the Investment Coordinating Board in 2003 was realised. In the first two months of this year, FDI approvals stood at only 66 percent of the corresponding period in 2003. These figures will only add to the pressure for far-reaching privatisation and further market reforms to attract foreign capital.



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