

**USINDO Election Brief
July 15, 2004—Al La Porta**

“In the land of more or less, things are never as bad they appear. They’re never as good as they seem either.”

[**Note:** Al La Porta and several other USINDO participants were members of the election observer delegation of President Jimmy Carter. The Carter Center delegation monitored the conduct of the July 5th first round of presidential elections in addition to delegations of the European Union, Japan and Australia among others.]

“The 2004 elections were a necessary milestone in consolidation of Indonesian democracy,” Ambassador La Porta began. He reported that the election on July 5th was basically fair and transparent. There were no major widespread problems, no violence, spotty evidence of intimidation, and excellent voter turnout at about 84%. The elections seemed to have been just a matter-of-fact event. People came and went from the polls, cast their votes for the next Indonesian president then proceeded about their business.

Some of the significant problems at the polling sites viewed in person by the Carter Center observers seemed to be in Bali where there was evident voter intimidation and an effort to keep non-PDI-P observers away from the polling places, Aceh which had limited access to the polls outside the provincial capital, Ambon which was closed to foreign observers, and West Java where partisanship reigned around some polling places. Outside of these disparate problems the only other issue was with double punched ballots, which could have been resolved ahead of time; however, it did not become the major fiasco it potentially could have and did not change the overall vote.

The results were close to what was expected, except for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s drop of 10 points or more from pre-election polling. In the upshot, SBY seemed to have a steady lead with slightly less 35% of the vote, trailed by Megawati with about 26%, and Wiranto at around 22%. According to sources close to the polling, Megawati’s campaign team kicked into high gear the last few days before the election and her increase could be attributed to her having won over substantial undecided votes as well as those in traditional PDI-P areas.

As far as the role of foreign observers, including the Carter Center delegation, they were all legitimate groups and provided helpful insights on the election conduct and processes. All observers were invited to Indonesia by the government, for the most part the groups did not overlap each other, and the observations of each group were shared after the election and seemed to be congruent. Ambassador La Porta described the foreign

observers largely as ‘cheerleaders’ for Indonesian democracy, wanting the electoral exercise to be as successful as possible.

The upcoming campaign between Megawati and SBY will be hard fought, sometimes emotional, less concerned about the potential for violence, and more focused on policy and campaign tactics. Megawati has the PDI-P organization behind her and she will get an increased sympathy vote as ‘the mother of her country.’ SBY, on the other hand, will attract anti-military sentiment but is still viewed as a ‘clean’ and pro-reform candidate. However, he has been linked to PKB leader (and current Justice Minister) Yusril Mahendra; some allegations of support from corrupt figures may hurt him. In the time until the September 20th final round we will see several ‘soft coalitions’ and alliances between parties and major political figures. According to one prominent political analyst, the two surviving candidates will have their reasons for seeking political alliances: to win the September 20th runoff, to form a broadly acceptable (and hopefully more competent) cabinet, and to be able to work with the DPR on a meaningful legislative program.

In brief, there will be many political shifts and considerable uncertainties going into the final presidential round. To quote Yogi Berra, “**It ain’t over ‘till it’s over.**”

Q: What are the mechanics of voting? Does the corruption in counting votes occur on the first level of counting at the individual polling stations, or at higher levels of the process?

A: There are only 300 voters per polling station so the number and distribution of the votes can be pretty well predicted. The small number of voters at each polling place doesn’t leave much room to fiddle with the numbers at the first level of counting, and ballot-box stuffing would be evident. As far as corruption and fraud on higher levels where vote totals are aggregated, there is an effort to discern whether the results are roughly comparable to the April 15th legislative election results and national patterns.

Q: Was it a simple ballot; for example, were there only presidential nominees on the ballot?

A: Yes, only presidential nominees were on the ballot and it was pretty straight-forward. The ballot was double-folded, so no one could see through the paper, but it led to the double-punch phenomenon if voters did not open the ballot all the way. This did not affect the overall results, however, and was a needless distraction.

Q: How were the polling officials trained? What kind of people were they, what were their professions and backgrounds? Will there be more training for the upcoming election?

A: The polling officials had national training before the April vote. They were retrained before this election too, but not as thoroughly in some parts of the country. The officials were teachers, shopkeepers, and just average people. However, women were

underrepresented and the polling place officials were not as ethnically diverse as they might have been. This upcoming election will also require more voter education and KPU election officials' training in light of the evident technical problems and lack of uniformity in following procedures.

Q: Was there a lack of public trust in the polling officials by the voters or government?

A: No, in most areas polling officials seemed trusted.

Q: Will there be observers in September? Who will they be?

A: Yes, but not as many as there were for this election. They will be from organizations like the Carter Center, the European Union, and the National Democratic Institute. There was a general lack of local observers for the first presidential round, apparently due to lack of funding for indigenous monitoring organizations.

Q: Indonesia just held the largest single-day election in the world; what made Indonesia able to do this?

A: No single party or political faction could alter the results of a nationwide election with such a large number of voters (over 140 million) and geographically dispersed population. It helps that Indonesia has a unitary system of government, with sufficiently strong national election commission (KPU) and procedures. Also, the campaigning did not have a hostile character and in the main was rather good-natured. For example, in their presidential debates the candidates did not address or attack each other; overall the campaign was rather polite and any nastiness seemed to be transmitted via Internet gossip and similar *sub rosa* means. TV also had a tremendous effect in promoting transparency and candidates' views to the country at large, not only privileged populations.

Q: But why now? Indonesia has a very limited democratic tradition.

A: Well, Indonesia did have an open parliamentary election in 1971, as well as national elections in 1955. However, traditional allegiances and voting patterns are blurring and have shifted. Most people see this as maturation of the electorate and as an essential step in the consolidation and transformation of democracy. The elections this year are being viewed more seriously and as less of a celebration than in 1999. The voters seemed to be more discerning about who would be a good leader for their country.

Q: What are the expectations about future voting? 1 in 3 voters voted for SBY this round. Do these 40 million voters have certain expectations for reform?

A: Cabinet composition may be announced before the September 20th election and specifics on goals and priorities will be discussed during the presidential runoff. People are watching and they care about what's going to happen, so hopefully the candidates will respond to popular opinion.

Q: In the runoff election, what role would the conservative Muslim parties play?

A: They will probably gravitate toward SBY. He is seen as favoring religious values and clean government. The Muslims would probably tend to fall that way.

