

2004 election have it all: Size and complexity

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Alan Wall, Project Manager, International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES),
Jakarta

The 2004 Indonesian elections are some of the most complex and challenging elections to have faced any democracy. Let alone a new democracy such as Indonesia's.

The challenges are not only those of size -- although the statistics are daunting to even the most hardened election administrator or politician. There will be at least two and likely three election days between April 5 and Sept. 20, 2004.

These elections will be held in close to 2,000 electoral districts. There are potentially up to 475,000 candidates that could be nominated by the 24 parties contesting the April 5 national (DPR), provincial and regency/city (DPRD) legislative elections. Parties and candidates will be competing for the votes of 143 million voters.

For each election day, around 500,000 voting stations will be needed, whose 3.5 million staff and one million security officers will need to be recruited and trained. Overall, around 900 million ballot papers will need to be printed, distributed and retrieved. The logistical challenges of these huge numbers are exacerbated by Indonesian geography, and the quality of communications infrastructure. Unlike many business models, for an election the difficult locations cannot be avoided: All areas must be serviced equally.

Adding to the challenges and complexity are the changes to the election framework mandated by the amendments to the Indonesian Constitution, and the passing of new laws governing Political Parties (late 2002), General Elections, Presidential Elections and the Constitutional Court (2003).

The passage of election laws barely one year before the elections has left voters, election administrators and political parties with a relatively short period in which to absorb wide ranging changes to the frameworks for political representation and election administration.

Whenever a new election system is introduced, the degree of difficulty of the election is significantly increased. For the 2004 elections, Indonesia has to adjust to not one, but three, new election systems: An Open List Proportional Representation system for the

DPR and DPRD; a Single Non Transferable Vote system for the new Regional Representative Council (DPD); and a Two Round Majoritarian system for the Presidency. While these new election systems may facilitate better representation for the Indonesian people, each is more complex than the systems previously used. Each requires a different method of voting, and of determining the winning candidates. The resulting voter information and education campaign requirements, and staff training needs, are immense. For the first time in DPR and DPRD elections, voters may vote for a candidate, as well as for a political party as in the past. The voter must vote for a party, and may vote for a candidate. However, candidates' positions on parties' candidate lists is still likely to be the important factor in many districts in determining which candidates are elected. This is a complex overall message to impart to the people, and a necessary one to minimize disputes over election results.

At the same time voters are being informed that for DPR and DPRD elections they must vote for a party, and may vote for a candidate, they must also understand that when they vote at the election for the DPD, they must only vote for a single candidate.

There is thus large potential for confusion between DPR/DPRD, and DPD voting methods, which needs to be addressed by voter education programs. This need has been highlighted by recent election simulations, in which very large numbers of ballots for the DPR and DPRD have been invalidly marked.

In the subsequent direct election for the presidency, voters will vote for a Presidential/Vice Presidential candidate "ticket". Complex criteria determine whether a candidate "ticket" has won the election in the first round to be held on July 5. If there is no first round winner, a second round run-off between the two leading candidate "tickets" is to be held on Sept. 20.

Recent survey research strongly indicates over 90 percent of the population intends to vote at the 2004 elections. A challenge to voter educators will be to maintain this enthusiasm through three election days in six months. Especially for the second round of the Presidential elections, as many voters will not have a political party that they would normally support, still competing.

Additionally, the Indonesian public still has to be educated about the new and revised institutions being created. For example, current survey data indicates that around one third or less of the Indonesian public is aware of the DPD. Only around six in ten voters know that in 2004 they will be directly electing the President.

In 2004, for the first time in Indonesia, elections will be managed by a General Election Commission (KPU) that is independent, nationally hierarchical, and permanent at national, provincial and regency/city levels.

The KPU has built a reputation with the public as a credible and effective institution. Recent polling by IFES shows that the KPU is known by around 60 percent of the

Indonesian public -- substantially more people than are aware of other institutions such as Komnas HAM, the State Audit Board (BPK), and the Ombudsman.

Of those aware of the KPU, 69 percent were satisfied with its work, as against only 15 percent who were dissatisfied. This is by far the highest level of public satisfaction with any of the government institutions surveyed in this poll.

The Indonesian people are also relatively optimistic that their KPU is an impartial organization that will manage the 2004 elections in a fair and honest manner. Sixty-five percent of all respondents to the IFES poll believed the 2004 elections will be fair and honest (compared to 15 percent who did not), whilst 64 percent of those who knew of the KPU regarded it as a neutral organization (compared to 19 percent who did not).

Major challenges to the KPU's administrative capacities have been confidently responded to. The determination of electoral districts has proceeded smoothly, given the immensity of the task. Since July 2003, the KPU has created close to 2000 electoral districts.

While the original very tight deadlines for this task have not been met, its completion is a significant achievement. Districting processes in advanced democracies, such as the U.S. and Australia, take very much longer to determine a much smaller number of districts.

Similarly, the verification of those political parties eligible to contest the 2004 election, involving checking of party branches and membership throughout Indonesia, has been completed by the KPU close to the original schedule and using a process that has been widely accepted.

Significant administrative challenges remain for the KPU. These include the finalization of voter registration using new, automated systems (one of the biggest scanning-based projects attempted in the world); the procurement, distribution and retrieval of election materials for three election days; and the development and implementation Indonesia-wide of computerized systems to collate centrally all election results from each voting station.

These are the largest and most complex single day, nation-wide elections attempted in any emerging democracy. So far, preparations for the elections have progressed peacefully, and, considering the volume of work, relatively to schedule. Much remains to be done, however -- not only in administrative preparations, but in preparing the Indonesian people for the significant changes in their election processes and elected institutions.