

**“Democracy in Indonesia”  
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The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsors annual public opinion surveys reflecting the opinions of individuals nationwide, on a broad range of issues of political concern. Topics were: public support for democracy; pluralism and tolerance; national and regional parliaments and executives; the justice system, law enforcement agencies and rule of law; local government and decentralization; corruption; and gender equity. Alan Wall from Democracy International, the organization analyzing these surveys, discussed the results of 2008 relative to previous years.

Mr. Wall explains that the surveys purport to represent underlying political trends across the archipelago, and not necessarily to reflect or predict voting outcomes this year. It can assist in directing USAID’s institutional building programs in Indonesia. The survey has minimal editorial interpretation and provides an unvarnished overview of the perceptions within the Indonesian public. It does not present any information on how and why these opinions are formed, and is more of a top-down aggregate level of impressions from the public.

A nationally-representative, random-sampling method was used. The 2008 survey was conducted between 30 May and 12 June 2008, and 2500 individuals were interviewed. A local organization conducted all the interviews face-to-face, each roughly an hour in length. Additional collection was conducted at the provincial level, for further depth. Over the three years that the surveys have been conducted, a few questions have been added and others eliminated.

Mr. Wall brought the audience’s attention to some key issues discovered from the survey, particularly rising apathy towards the implementation of democracy:

In the 2008 survey, fewer than half of Indonesians (48%) preferred democracy to any other form of government. This is a decline from 51% in the 2007 survey and 59% in 2006. The proportion of Indonesians who state that the form of government does not matter to them, at 31% in 2008, has remained fairly stable since the 2007 survey (30%), but has increased since 2006 (22%). Only 7% believe that non-democratic government is preferable in certain situations. Economic status and education are significant factors in opinions on the

preferred system of government. The decline in the preference for democracy has been relatively greater amongst urban residents, those with secondary education and those in lower socio-economic classes. In the 2006, 2007 and 2008 surveys, the lower the education level and socioeconomic class, the more likely the belief that the form of government does not matter.

Another key observation was that Indonesians evaluated the success of democracy in terms of practical tangibles, rather than principles. In other words, Indonesians perceived that democracy should be designed to bring personal and economic security, freedom

of religion, and to bring down bureaucratic corruption. On the other hand, conventional indicators such as freedom to vote and freedom of the media were not a high priority.

Mr. Wall also discussed the existence of some differences in the results for Jakarta vis-a-vis the provinces, including strong disaffection on the condition of governance in North Sumatra.

Specific numbers and a more elaborate discussion of the survey can be found in the Indonesia Annual Public Opinion Surveys 2008 Report submitted to USAID, and on the slides available on the USINDO website.

#### Questions:

**Q:** How have the findings of this survey informed or empowered governance and democratization activities? How has it increased expectations?

**A:** The survey's publicity may increase expectations. The findings have been presented in a public forum at BAPPENAS (National Development and Planning Body), who is also working with this information for strategy planning. Previous surveys were presented in cooperation with the DPR (People's Representative Council). NGOs and other civil organizations however may have the most amount of license in actually utilizing this information.

**Q:** Were the interviewees broken down between rural and urban? What general differences were there?

**A:** Yes, we were careful to make a distinction for interviewee locale. Although the urban population from the sample seemed more cynical and less trusting of a successful democratization process, on the bulk of issues surveyed, little differences existed.

**Q:** What was the methodology of the surveys and technology used in polling?

**A:** Polling Center is an Indonesian firm that generally conducts corporate research in the country. Due to the high level of illiteracy in some areas, interviews had to be conducted face-to-face. Certainly this has an impact on quality control, however, we were able to ensure consistency on some aspects: we made sure that concepts were explained the same way in each

interview. A challenge is certainly that the interviews are in all conducted over a longer period of time, in the course of several weeks.

Another challenge in data collection is due to the fact that interviewees in some areas tend to find it harder to express an opinion on conceptual or intangible issues, or on hypothetical issues about the future. They can more easily provide an opinion on instances of daily life.

**Q:** I see juxtapositions in some of the findings: for example, there is increased appreciation for plurality, yet the apathy towards democracy is increasing. How do you explain this?

**A:** Yes, there are several instances where there is a compartmentalization of positions and where there appear to be inconsistencies in opinions. For example, a large majority view corruption as a problem within government services, but there is also relatively high satisfaction on the quality of local government services. Another is

with the courts system: interviewees perceive undue influences in the court system yet, they believe that they will be unaffected when having to deal with the courts themselves. They state that these courts will be able to protect them, and that they could be acquitted fairly should the occasion arise. An opinion on why this occurs however would be purely from personal speculation. This survey is meant to point to areas of further discussion and further investigation.

**Q:** What questions/survey points address political participation and activism?

**A:** We ask a question on attendance of events that would relate to social and political involvement: i.e. attendance in religious and political party functions etc specifically targeted to collective organization. Surprisingly, less than 10% of those surveyed attended an event in the past year, a small number compared to the estimates of membership provided by Muhammadiyah and Nadhatul Ulama.