

TWO DEMOCRACIES, SHARED CHALLENGES

INDONESIANS WANT A CHANGE IN U.S. FOREIGN POLICY BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THIS CHANGE WILL REVERBERATE IN DOMESTIC INDONESIAN POLITICS.

By DINI DJALAL

A decade ago, as a student in London, I would often meet Indonesians who would ask me why I had not chosen to study in the U.S. The pro-American sentiment followed me on my return to Indonesia soon thereafter. American brands were wildly popular, as were holidays in the U.S. Parents aspired to ship off their teenagers to U.S. high schools and colleges. The American embassy in Jakarta and its staff were seen as a positive presence, a window to the world.

Fast forward 10 years: The embassy in Jakarta is now a veritable fortress, obscured by barbed wire from the regular band of protesters demonstrating against “American colonialism” or “U.S. hegemony.” Parents of children who could not obtain return-entry to the U.S. are enrolling them in Australian schools. Vacationers, too, look to other locales, as tourist visas to the U.S. take months to process. Now, when I explain to Indonesians that I live in the United States, they look at me not with envy, but with pity and concern.

So much has changed since 9/11!

Dini Djalal, of Jakarta and Washington, D.C., writes for the Indonesian newsweekly Tempo and its daily newspaper, Koran Tempo. She is also producing an independent documentary that compares the elections in the United States and in Indonesia.

Two Countries, Two Democracies

2004 is an election year for both the U.S. and Indonesia. But the similarities do not end there. Superlatives often accompany descriptions of U.S. democracy, “the world’s oldest” being the most oft-repeated. But superlatives also suit Indonesia’s fledgling democracy. With some 150 million eligible voters, Indonesia is the world’s third-largest democracy, and the world’s largest Muslim democracy.

If you factor in voter turnout, Indonesia easily becomes the world’s second-largest democracy, after India. Consider the numbers: during the 1999 elections, the country’s first free vote in four decades, voter turnout was in excess of 90 percent — the highest in recent world history, according to the Asia Foundation.

Indonesia may be coming late to democratic politics, but the country is on a rapid learning curve, and may soon teach its peers a thing or two about free and fair elections. Indonesians rich and poor, young and old, long insecure about the strides they’ve made in democratization, are increasingly making this observation.

Take the 42-year-old administrator of a quiet Jakarta hamlet, Suyatno (who, like many Indonesians, uses just one name). Underneath a makeshift tarpaulin tent on a sweltering July day, he joined dozens of neighbors as they patiently watched the counting of votes in the country’s first direct presidential elections. Aware that I was making a

documentary comparing U.S. and Indonesian elections, Suyatno lamented, “Indonesian elections must seem backward compared to American polls. We vote under plastic tents and count the votes with pen and paper!”

I felt compelled to remind him of the 2000 election in the U.S. There, I explained, the winner is decided by an electoral college, not by the total number of popular votes. Stepping back, Suyatno replied: “That’s democracy?”

Indeed, after years debating and formulating the shape of the current presidential polls — in which voters are given a single, non-transferable vote — politicians and academics are thinking twice about the U.S. being the democracy to emulate. They decided against having legislators choose a president; instead, they gave that choice back to ordinary citizens. Hadi Soesastro, head of a Jakarta think-tank, the Center for Strategic and International Studies, says of the U.S. electoral college: “Compared to our own elections, where we elect the president directly, the U.S. system now looks very antiquated.”

Disbelief is also a standard reaction when Indonesians are told that only half of America’s population votes during presidential elections, and even fewer during legislative elections. “If so few Americans vote, why should we copy the U.S. model?” asks Riyanti, a student at the University of Indonesia. Riyanti had long regarded the U.S. as an exemplary electoral system. Now she is not so sure.

A Vote for Multilateralism

If many Indonesians are still learning about the weaknesses about the U.S. electoral process, they have clearer opinions about American foreign policy — and how the upcoming presidential poll can change its direction.

Most vehement amongst Indonesians eager for a change in leadership in the U.S. are those who spent many years living there. They are not just nostalgic for the America of their yesteryear. Indonesians want a change in U.S. foreign policy because they believe this change will reverberate in domestic Indonesian politics.

Harvard University graduate Daniel Budiman, 37, for example, is a Christian concerned about recent religious conflict in Indonesia. He worries that the current military operations in Iraq do not help efforts to “win the hearts and minds of the Islamic world,” including in Indonesia. Budiman would like to see Democratic Party presidential candidate John Kerry in the White House because he believes Kerry shares his goals of multilateralism — and that these goals would impact religious harmony at home. Says

the investment banker: “Another four years (of President George W. Bush and Vice-President Dick Cheney) would be destructive to the U.S. and to the world.”

Indeed, as militancy rises in pockets of Indonesia, the country’s moderate Muslim majority fears that external conflicts will fuel internal discord. Protests by Indonesian Islamic groups against U.S. military operations in Iraq are commonplace. Umar Juoro, an economist at the Center for International and Development Studies, an Islamic think-tank, believes that resentment against the Bush administration’s Middle East policy is mounting among Indonesians, turning moderate Muslims into hard-liners. Boston University graduate Juoro prefers John Kerry’s promises of multilateralism, specifically the involvement of more Muslim countries in solving the region’s problems. “Muslims know how to deal with other Muslims. We need to be included more in those issues,” says Juoro.

“Issues” and “problems” are code words for another foreign policy juggernaut that has a direct bearing on Indonesia: terrorism. Indonesia has thrice been a victim of major terrorist attacks: a 2002 bombing in Bali killed 202 people; in 2003, a car bomb at Jakarta’s Marriott Hotel killed 12 and injured more than 100; and in 2004, the bombing of the Australian embassy killed nine and injured more than 180.

Criticisms of U.S. anti-terrorism policy are plentiful. Aristides Katoppo, editor of the daily newspaper *Sinar Harapan*, points out that while many suspects of the Bali bombing and other terrorist strikes have been detained and put on trial, the chief suspected mastermind, Hambali, remains in the custody of U.S. officials. Indonesian investigators have had scant access to Hambali. This is yet another example of American unilateralism, says the U.S.-educated Katoppo, and one that impedes Indonesia’s efforts to tackle terrorists in its backyard.

Wimar Witoelar, 59, a former spokesperson for former President Abdurahman Wahid and a popular television commentator, is equally unsympathetic toward the Bush administration. Witoelar, too, spent his early adult years in the U.S. and maintains an affection for the America he once knew, an America that is “a strong, mostly benevolent leader of the world ... [gaining leadership] not just by attacking enemies, but by consolidating nation states and the budding civil societies in the developing world.” He sees that America fading away under a government led by a president he describes as having “no talent nor desire to be an international citizen.”

F O C U S

A former student activist, Witoelar's concern is human rights advocacy, a sore point in U.S.-Indonesia relations. Due to alleged abuses in previously Indonesian-occupied East Timor, the U.S. Congress does not want military training aid to resume for Indonesia, much to the dismay of Indonesia's generals. Now, after the Abu Ghraib scandal and the alleged abuses at Guantanamo Bay, the Indonesian military is gloating. And Witoelar fears that human rights will now become a peripheral issue.

Already, many Indonesians — military and civilian — resentful of years of lecturing by U.S. officials, are publicly saying that Washington can no longer tell us how to adhere to human rights. Even editor Katoppo, himself a victim of legal arbitrariness when the government banned his newspaper, complains of American double standards when it comes to human rights. How can the U.S. demand the trials of suspected war criminals, he asks, while at the same time insisting that U.S. soldiers serving overseas be exempt from the same laws?

Fear prompts this censure. The military is regaining

clout and power in Indonesian politics: two former generals vied for the presidency this year, and one advanced to the run-off. Without the U.S. setting a stern example, activists say, human rights advocacy may retreat to oblivion. Says Witoelar: "The human rights approach, while not always simple to implement without drifting into a patronizing relationship, is much better than the polarizing signals the U.S. sends now."

Fretting about Free Trade

If there is some agreement that a Kerry administration would offer a friendlier foreign policy, there is less accord that its trade policy — another hot-button issue in Indonesia — would be as benign.

As is the case with human rights, some Indonesians argue that the U.S. does not practice what it preaches. Katoppo outlines the protective tariff barriers on steel and other domestic manufactured goods, as well as the subsidies on agricultural products, as examples of what he describes as "self-interest at stake."

Washington's Clear Choice in Corporate Accommodations

Today's business traveler does have a choice when it comes to short-term accommodations

CAS

Corporate Apartment Specialists, Inc.

- ◆ Rates within federal government per diem
- ◆ Completely furnished apartments
- ◆ Walking distance to Metro
- ◆ Washer/Dryer in unit
- ◆ Pet Friendly
- ◆ Cable TV/Local telephone service included
- ◆ V/MC/Amex/Diners Club accepted
- ◆ All utilities included
- ◆ Maid service available upon request

Location, Location, Location!

Choice neighborhoods of Washington, DC, Suburban Maryland, Northern Virginia

Toll Free: 800 914-2802
Tel: 703 979-2830 Fax: 703 979-2813
Email: cas@intr.net
web: www.corporateapartments.com

Flexcar
SHIFT YOUR THINKING.

MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING

**Former State Department Employee
Stationed Overseas Understands Unique
Financial Situation of Foreign Service**

Services Include:

- Retirement Planning
- Tax Preparation and Strategies
- Analysis: Insurance and Investments
- Lump Sum Retirement Options

MARY CORNELIA GINN

4630 Montgomery Avenue, Suite 220
Bethesda, Maryland 20814
Phone: (301) 951-9160
Fax: (703) 938-2278
E-mail: mcgfin@erols.com

SECURITIES OFFERED THROUGH NATHAN & LEWIS SECURITIES, INC., MEMBER NASD & SIPC. MCG FINANCIAL PLANNING AND NATHAN & LEWIS ARE NOT AFFILIATED ENTITIES.

F O C U S

Erry Hardjapamekas, currently a deputy chief of the Anti-Corruption Commission, echoes this opposition to “double-standard policies.” America is redefining globalization, says Hardjapamekas, and Indonesians can see through the rhetoric. “It has to be clear that a level playing field between nations does not exist,” he says.

This self-serving approach may worsen under Kerry, says economist Juoro. Indeed, Kerry’s campaign in swing states such as economically-troubled Ohio and Pennsylvania is closely watched by Indonesia’s business community, particularly his promises to return jobs lost to Asia.

Again, two countries, shared challenges. If Pennsylvanians are lamenting the loss of jobs, so are Indonesians, who have struggled in recent years against the departure of manufacturers to cheaper labor markets such as China and Vietnam.

Says Juoro, a former economic advisor to former President Bacharuddin Jusuf Habibie: “When Kerry proposes against outsourcing, that is protectionism — at the cost of exports for developing countries like ours.” In

short, Indonesians seem to be saying: Kerry is preferable to Bush, but his policies need some rethinking.

Indeed, ambivalence is yet another shared experience of these two giants of democracy. Just as Democrats support Kerry but do not seem particularly motivated by him, Indonesians, too, are not entirely sure whether to support the Massachusetts senator. “Is the support for Kerry genuine, or is it about supporting anyone who has a reasonable chance of beating Bush?” asks Adinda Simanjuntak, 27, manager of a Jakarta bookstore.

But never mind, says Simanjuntak. After all, Indonesia just faced a similar dynamic. It was not really his own appeal that catapulted the newly-elected president, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, from relative obscurity to the status of a national icon and, ultimately, electoral victory. He was the beneficiary of widespread discontent toward President Megawati Sukarnoputri, regarded by many Indonesians as an ineffective leader.

Two countries, same war cry: Anyone But Bush; Anyone But Mega. ■



**Make Chicago,
Boston, Florida,
Or Washington, D.C.
Your Other Home Town**

Whatever you have to do, wherever you have to be in any of those cities, there's no better ending for a busy day than coming home. Smith Corporate Living will have a fully furnished, beautifully appointed apartment home waiting for you.

- Completely furnished apartments
- Fully-equipped kitchens
- All utilities included
- 25" color TV with VCR and basic cable
- Local telephone service with voicemail
- Government per diem honored
- No security deposit

Call Toll Free **888-324-4972**
or **703-769-1266**
SmithLiving.com

Charles E. Smith
corporate living
Just Like Home.

