

Jakarta Casts Its Vote

By Sadanand Dhume

Indonesians ought to raise a toast to the defeat of the hardline Islamist Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) in their capital city's first ever direct gubernatorial election on August 8. According to preliminary results, the incumbent deputy governor, Fauzi Bowo, has trounced the PKS's nominee, retired police general Adang Daradjatun, by a 60-40 margin.

Against a backdrop of rising intolerance toward women and religious minorities, Mr. Bowo and his running mate campaigned on a plank of pluralism best captured by their beguilingly simple slogan, "Jakarta for All." But though the result marks a setback for Islamism—the ideology that seeks to order every aspect of 21st-century life by the norms of seventh-century Arabia—it's only one skirmish in a contest unfolding across the archipelago.

Mr. Bowo's victory marks a beginning of sorts. He managed to line up the support of 19 national parties, including such heavyweights as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Golkar and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's Democratic Party. His intellectual backing was no less varied, ranging from the labor activist Dita Indah Sari to Jusuf

Wanandi, the *eminence grise* of Indonesia's strategic thinkers, who bravely took on PKS in the pages of the normally supine Jakarta Post.

But although cloaked in high principle, the governor-elect's grand coalition also represents politics as usual, a bargain to divide the spoils of the country's richest city. Should Mr. Bowo follow an undistinguished tenure as deputy governor, which included the floods earlier this year that paralyzed Jakarta, with a similar performance in the governor's office, then his victory may have the unintended long-term consequence of strengthening PKS rather than weakening it.

Moreover, there's little evidence to suggest that Indonesian elites fully grasp the threat PKS presents to the country's fragile democratic experiment and long-term economic prospects. Born in 1998 out of a secretive network of Koranic study groups called Tarbiyah, the party has quickly built a reputation for incorruptibility, devotion to social work and attachment to Islamic causes. As a result, even now few pay attention to the fact that it draws its ideology and organizational structure from Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood—whose vi-

sion spawned, among others, Hamas, Sudan's National Islamic Front and al Qaeda.

For PKS, as for Brotherhood offshoots everywhere, God's laws (Sharia) are superior to man's laws. Islam belongs everywhere: in the classroom and the boardroom; in banks, in courts, in movie theaters. Democracy is not an end in itself, but simply a means to achieve an Islamic state. Thanks to clever campaigning and a highly disciplined cadre, the party controls 45 seats in the 550 member parliament, is part of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's coalition government, and has won local elections in

Jakarta's industrialized satellite cities Depok and Bekasi. Last year PKS spearheaded an attempt to push through a law that demanded prison terms for women in miniskirts or couples caught kissing in public.

For Indonesians attached to their country's long tradition of pluralism, facing down PKS involves walking a series of tightropes. They must continue to welcome the party's participation in democracy while at the same time recognizing its fundamentally antidemocratic charac-

ter. They must acknowledge that many PKS supporters are highly educated and idealistic—motivated more by bribe-free government offices than public executions—while also recognizing that their bedrock beliefs are incompatible with women's rights, freedom of conscience and freedom of speech.

Instead of accepting the evasions and prevarications that are the Islamist stock-in-trade, Indonesians must be willing to ask PKS leaders tough questions. Do they believe that women have the right to dress as they please, and to rise as high as their talents will take them? Can Christians and other religious minorities expect the same freedom of worship routinely granted Muslims in non-Muslim democracies? When the Universal Declaration of Human Rights collides with Islamic tradition, which one ought to give way?

More than a single election, it's answers to these questions that will determine whether Indonesian democracy and Indonesian pluralism are compatible or fundamentally contradictory.

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A ray of hope
in Indonesia's
long struggle
with Islamism.