

# **Indonesia: A Report on Public Opinion And the 2004 Elections**

**Qualitative Research Survey  
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The survey was carried out by ACNielsen, an Indonesian research firm, and CharneyResearch of New York for The Asia Foundation

This report is a preliminary assessment of 30 in-depth interviews and 3 focus groups on elections and democracy in Indonesia. They were conducted between January 6 and 15, 2003 among members of the general public and the Indonesian elites. The 20 general public interviews were conducted in the cities of Jakarta and Yogyakarta and in peri-urban and deep rural villages in West Java. The remaining 10 interviews were conducted with leaders and staff of social, religious, and women's organizations and think tanks. The three focus groups were held in Jakarta with members of Muslim, social, and women's rights organizations.

The interviews are the first phase of a two-phase research project to help Indonesian organizations plan voter and civic education efforts before next year's election, with a national survey to follow. Because these are qualitative, not quantitative, findings, our results cannot be projected numerically to the population at large, but we believe the findings illuminate some important aspects of Indonesian public opinion. Our aim here is to lay out initial findings suggested by the work and issues highlighted for investigation in the coming survey. Craig Charney of Charney Research (New York) and Achala Srivatsa of AC Nielsen (Indonesia) wrote this report, with some editorial assistance from The Asia Foundation staff.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The major findings of our study include:

- The national mood is rather pessimistic, with the public discontented with the direction of the country and the work of the government. The elite is more optimistic, thanks to the progress of democracy, but cynical about the government.
- The country's key problems are seen as the economy, justice, and corruption.
- Both the public and the elite are quite critical of top political leaders.
- Average Indonesians remain fairly uncertain of the meaning of democracy.
- Although some of the public know new elections are coming, and most know voters will have to re-register to participate, few know of direct Presidential elections.
- Some voters prefer men as legislators, others would give women an equal chance, but men are generally preferred for the Presidency. Women are seen as best suited to women's rights or social ministries. The elites would let either gender occupy any post.
- The public accepts the idea of a 30% quota for women among legislative candidates, although some of the elite oppose this idea.

- Ordinary Indonesians tend to think of sharia as a set of personal obligations rather than as a legal system.
- Most ordinary Indonesians interviewed did not favor replacing Indonesia's civil and criminal laws with sharia; the same held true for the elites.
- There was also the feeling that the Islamic penalties for adultery and theft were too harsh and that laws requiring headscarves for women were too restrictive. Views were mixed among the public on unequal inheritance and separating the sexes, although the elite was opposed to both.
- The general public had mixed views of fundamentalist leaders Abubakar Ba'asyir and Jafar Umar Thalib, while the elite was mostly hostile to them. Yet while many members of the public were not sure who was responsible for the Bali bombing, the public was more willing than the elite was to attribute it to Islamic militants.

### **THE NATIONAL MOOD: Pessimistic Compared to 1999**

The mood of the general public appears consistently pessimistic – across age, education, sex and urban-rural segments -- although the elite is more hopeful than the general public. However, it must be recalled that the interviews took place at a time when the government had just announced massive price hikes in fuel and amenities like electricity and telephones. According to the public and the elite, the biggest problems relate to the economy, justice and corruption, and general issues regarding the government.

#### ***Changes Since 1999***

When we conducted our previous research in 1999, the national mood was marked by optimism about democratization despite fears of rioting and demonstrations, rising prices and unemployment. The concept of reformasi was a powerful symbol of hope for the future. The new democracy brought expectations of openness, freedom of speech, and a more peaceful life. The economic crisis was laid at the door of the old regime, and people hoped democracy would also bring prosperity. The old leadership was discredited, but there was a great deal of hope for new leaders who would bring change.

It appears from our interviews that the public's expectations for democracy have not been realized, while the problems of rising prices and unemployment remain unsolved. The respondents appear disillusioned by the performance of the new government and the continued economic crisis. This was especially the case at the time of our interviews, due to the recent price hikes of fuel and utilities, which were powerful

irritants to the people, whatever the economic case behind them. (Economic stabilization or improvement, of course, would probably rebound to the government's credit.)

The economic difficulties people face, combined with the corruption and nepotism that appear to continue unabated, if not grown, have eroded the respondents' faith in the democratic government. In turn, the President's and Vice-President's images appear to be suffering as a result.

### *Direction of the Country*

Most of the members of the public interviewed feel the country is headed in the wrong direction.

- This is linked largely to the price hikes as well as to unemployment "We can't provide for basic needs, I have no faith in government." It's negative because of unemployment and homelessness."
- There is also a sense of disappointment in the government – a feeling that "the big people ignore the little people." "I don't believe that the leaders care."

Overall, there appeared to be a lack of trust in the government's policies. There was even some nostalgia for the stable dictatorship of the past: "I preferred the time of Suharto because the situation was not as bad as at present." (The only reason one respondent believed the country was moving in the right direction was because there were fewer demonstrations and riots compared to the conflict-filled years of the recent past.)

The elite was more hopeful than the public at large: many leaders were positive about the country's direction, because they saw democracy and decentralization as forward-looking steps. "There is movement in the right direction. More democratic participation of civil society in politics, district autonomy and decentralization, limitation of military role" (social organization leader). "Decentralization is very positive" (think tank staff).

Furthermore, being a transitional democracy means initial problems and hence this group of people is still optimistic. "We are in transition, and therefore I am still optimistic".

However, what causes general pessimism even among this group is the feeling that the incumbent government seems to have no clear vision for the country nor is there a sense of direction. "There is no clear direction. Politicians are only concerned about their own interests"

- The issue seems to be deep and to involve very high-ranking officials, including the President. “The President does not have the commitment to solve problems” “There is a crisis of trust.”
- The latest fuel and utility price hikes seem to be deepening this crisis of trust.

According to both the public and the elites interviewed, Indonesia’s biggest problems today appear to be related to three key areas:

- The economy
- Justice and corruption
- General issues regarding the government

### *The Economy*

The immediate concern, and the factor driving general discontent among the general public, is the poor state of the economy.

- For the general public, the economic issues are the recent price hikes, the lack of job opportunities and general poverty. “Everything is expensive, gasoline and basic needs.” “Difficult to earn money...” “Difficult to earn enough to eat”.
- Elites are more concerned about the big picture: Indonesia’s debt situation and the country’s economic policy and governance. “Debt, bankruptcy of the country” (Islamic institute staff). “The crisis is not just due to dollar fluctuations, when a nation does not conduct its systems properly, by ignoring good governance, it drives the country into a crisis.”

### *Justice and Corruption*

The generally negative feeling among the elites and public both regarding institutions of justice and law in Indonesia is not necessarily grounded in experience with such institutions, but rather reflects a general perception.

Among the leaders the problem that dominates is corruption and the absence of the rule of law.

- There are concerns and cynicism about the current state of affairs and elites express these strongly and unambiguously. “No clear law related to economy, security of people, crimes, and military, corruption” (social organization staff). “Corrupted mentality” (think tank staff). “No certainty about the law in Indonesia” (women’s group leader).

- The general public echoes these concerns, as well as focusing on crime (particularly motor vehicle theft) and insecurity. “Crime, car and motorcycle theft.” “Crime because of the economic situation.”

There seemed to be little credit, among elites or the general public, given to the positive spaces for change opened up by “law” recently – election law reform, constitutional amendments, etc. (It will be important to explore more deeply in the quantitative survey public response to these developments.)

#### *The Government*

In addition to a general discontent related to corruption and justice issues, there is also a sense that the government has lost touch with public feeling: “The president does not care about the people.” These two major issues also appear to indicate that the government lacks vision and has no policy on the direction in which the country should go.

- Elites are upset about the lack of solidarity and leadership in the government – “they are not solid, don’t work together,” “no leadership,” “they don’t make decisions” (think tank staff) – as well as the “lack of coordination between the executive and the judiciary” (Islamic institute staff).
- The general public bases its opinion of the overall job the government is doing on the economic and legal situation and is overtly critical. “They have failed, an unjust government.” “Does not listen to the people.”

#### *The President and Vice-President*

Many, both among the public and the elite question the leadership of President Megawati Sukarnoputri.

- The most frequent criticism of the President among the public is weakness: “Too soft, needs to be firm and assertive,” “Not firm, not assertive in decision-making, not attentive to people’s needs.”
- A second criticism was failure to deliver: “doesn’t follow through on campaign promises,” “many promises and no results, people are in a difficult situation and she was at a feast in Bali.”
- Others – particularly in the elite – criticized personal failings. “Not hard worker, does not give a chance to people to talk” (women’s group member). “Silent, stubborn, feudal” (social organization members).

The result is a seriously dented image: “with her limitations, she cannot manage her ministers and make a decision that can be accepted by the majority. And she’s not good with communicating with people.”

Vice President Hamzah Haz, who belongs to a Muslim party rather than the President's PDI-Perjuangan Party, has a somewhat different image.

- The members of the public we spoke with were mixed on him. Some were favorable, arguing that he is more in touch with the public ("better than Megawati, seems to care about people, came to the neighborhood once," and noting his religious affiliation ("good, a religious person.") Others were more critical, because of his support for sharia (Islamic law), alleged corruption, or undistinguished record ("ordinary vice president").
- However, the elites were almost uniformly hostile to Haz. He was criticized for political opportunism ("only cares about his party," women's group leader), his stance on sharia, and his background ("no vision to lead the country, not qualified," think tank staff).

Elites and the general public point out also that the gap between the haves and the have-nots has widened and that endemic corruption continues without the government taking any action.

### *The Local Level*

At a micro level, the general public acknowledges some improvements made in their areas – local canals fixed to prevent floods during the monsoons. ("Good job fixing the canals, there won't be any more floods this year.") But high crime rates, damaged streets, and high prices still dominate perceptions at the local level. "Lack of food, of work, of money." "No streets, draining system, litter, increased fees for basic needs." "Motor bike robbery, stealing, unemployment."

### **DEMOCRACY: Still Only a Vague Notion**

We found that the notion of democracy is not widely understood in Indonesia, which is reminiscent of the findings among the public from our 1999 research. These initial qualitative findings require validation in the quantitative survey. This research reinforces the need to bring the process and the possibilities of democracy closer to the people at the grassroots level. Among the elite, on the other hand, we find a considerable degree of cynicism has developed in the early years of the democratic regime, a function of disillusionment with the performance of the new government and perhaps of exaggerated expectations at its installation.

By and large the general public only has a vague understanding of the concept of democracy. If they have an opinion at all it is broadly in the area of freedom and liberty.

“People express their opinions on some problems.” Indonesians with little or no education seem to have no or at best elementary notions of what democracy means.

- Many of the uneducated and partially literate have no concept of the meaning of democracy. Some believe it to be an acronym (as most Indonesian institutions) and claim ignorance of its meaning. “I don’t know...I’ve seen it somewhere.” “Wonder what it means.” “Never heard of it.” “Heard about it but don’t know what it means.”
- Some do venture a response – usually limited to a single concept: “Freedom to choose, free will,” “Stop fighting,” “By their own opinion.”
- Some associated democracy with conflict: “Better not participate in demonstration” “Creates conflicts” “Is it the same as ‘demonstration’?”

Secondary educated respondents had clearer ideas about democracy: “Everything about congress and politics.” “Working together to reach a decision.” “Allow people to speak their minds freely.” Almost none of the members of the public interviewed associated democracy with free elections, alternation of government, or responsiveness to public demands.

Elites talk more about power of the people and government figures being elected representatives of the people. The key themes are:

- Freedom – freedom to choose, free will, liberty as opposed to the Suharto regime hence a better world. (“liberty,” “freedom with responsibility,” “human rights.”)
- Elections – democracy being equated with democracy and the power to choose representatives in the government. (“general elections” “power of the people” “supremacy of those below”.)

Elites also seem disillusioned about democracy working in Indonesia owing to endemic corruption and nepotism. “Low enforcement.” “There is no democracy here.” “Democracy is dead...in the coffin.” “A dream that would not come true.” “It’s all a lie”

### **ELECTION AWARENESS: Little Consciousness of Direct Elections**

Awareness that elections are planned for 2004 is uneven. Generally the source of information in rural areas has been the village headman and in fact some respondents in rural areas were better informed than their urban counterparts. However, this qualitative study indicates that general awareness in urban and rural areas is low and this needs to be validated and sized.



Almost all Indonesian voters interviewed were aware that people would need to register once more in order to vote in the next election. Unlike 1999, where getting the word out about registration was an urgent task, this does not look like a big problem for 2004. People agreed that registration is important in order to keep control of the election process, to monitor old and new voters, and to prevent fraud (“double id cards etc.”).

However, there was almost no spontaneous awareness among the public that the next election of the President would be directly by the people.

- When we asked if respondents had heard of changes in how the election would be conducted next year, almost all of them said they had not. The issue confused some. “I thought the previous elections were direct, like choosing a village head. But apparently it was for the MPR. I am illiterate, I do what I am told.”
- Of those who mentioned changes, one said that the change would be that the President “would be elected directly by the MPR” – precisely the system which is being abandoned. The other said changes would not be made “until 2008, it is difficult to make all the people understand.” (Perhaps this respondent had worked in voter education.)

## **WOMEN AND POLITICS: Signs of Progress, Elite-Public Differences**

### *Women and Leadership*

The acceptance of male domination, particularly the belief that such dominance is endorsed by Islam, runs surprisingly widely through the Indonesian public if our respondents are an accurate indication. There are pronounced differences between the elite and general public on many issues related to women and politics, though there are limited gender differences in views.

We tested a statement by a conservative Islamic leader that women can progress but men must progress further, against the argument that male supremacy is not part of Islam.

- Most of our general public respondents agreed with the first claim – that men must remain ahead of women. This was the view of almost all the women interviewed as well as that of many of the men. “Men have to be on top and strong because they have an obligation to support the family.” “It is clearly stated in the Koran that men are above women.” “Men should be leaders of the family and women should respect their husbands.”

- The few members of the public who rejected male dominance in our interviews were, ironically, all men. “Equal position, respect each other.” “Men and women are the same and should have the same rights.”
- Elite respondents, who were drawn from NGOs which generally favor human rights and democracy, mostly rejected the notion that male must come first. “Male supremacy is not part of Islam. Islam seeks harmonization of male and female helping each other within equal functions and roles” (think tank staff). “Absolutely wrong, they should be equal to support each other” (women’s group leader).

Among the general public, there are mixed views on whether a women should be entitled to take up any position of power even with the appropriate competency.

- At the level of the local DPRD II assembly, the public was divided. Some felt men or women were equally fit to serve (“it depends on capability and willingness.”) Some preferred men (“men are good speakers, women are always worried.”) One preferred women (“so that women can express themselves in all situations.”)
- For the National DPR, a similar pattern prevailed, with some for equality, some for men, and a few for women. “If a woman was smarter and braver, why not?” “Men are braver, dare to be responsible and take the risk.” “You need women to handle women’s issues.”
- For President of Indonesia, most of the public respondents preferred a man, though some thought women were equally qualified. For this post, even some of those who preferred women for lower offices preferred men in principle. “Men because they are natural leaders, women are weaker.” Some cite the example of President Megawati as setting the cause of women back. “Look at President Mega. She is a woman, yet she has no vision for Indonesian women. It is embarrassing.”

Here, too, the attitudes of the elite were strikingly different. The leaders interviewed were almost all in favor of gender equality for political office or even preferred women. There were few among them who preferred male politicians.

Ironically, there are few gender differences visible in responses, with men as likely as women to support equality for women in political office. (This needs to be pursued further in our quantitative research.)

Are there specific portfolios to which women are more suited?

- In general the public felt that women were best suited to work on problems such as women's rights and social issues (education, health, environment). "Women would be good with human rights for women." "Women for things that need attention to detail (accounting, child welfare, social matters). It would be inappropriate to have the Defense Minister be a woman."
- A couple of respondents suggested that women should deal with finances. Only one suggested women were suited for any post.
- Men were seen as more appropriate for politics, "work that requires muscles and brains," financial matters, and defense.

Once more, the elite view is different and more supportive of the idea of equality for men and women in government, including access to any posts for which they are qualified.

### *The 30% Quota*

[This qualitative research was completed before the February 2003 passage in the DPR of election legislation suggesting that at least 30% of political party candidates be female.]

Interestingly, the positions of the public and elite were reversed on the question of the 30% quota proposed for women among political candidates, with the public more supportive than the elite.

- Almost all the ordinary Indonesians interviewed supported the 30% quota, despite their general preference for male political leadership. It was felt that this would allow women's concerns to be expressed ("women's opinion can be heard," "women could share and give inputs to men.") The proportion seemed low enough to be unthreatening to those who backed male dominance ("the proportion is good, one woman with two men.")
- The elite was divided: though most favored the quota, some did not. Those in favor thought it a boost for women ("part of an effort to create an equal culture, good political affirmation for their new role," human rights advocate). Those opposed preferred election on merit ("there is no guarantee who is smarter and better educated," social organization leader) or thought men should be on top ("I don't agree with the emancipation of woman and man, man should be the leader," Islamic institute staff).

Thus on gender issues we found gaps between the elites and the ordinary public – with the elite ahead on the theory of gender equality and the public more attached to everyday concerns. Ordinary men and women accept male dominance as an Islamic dictate, lean more towards male than female political leadership, and favor traditional "women's" roles in government (education, women's rights, etc). The elite stands four-square in favor of theoretical positions of equality on these issues.

Yet on the immediate issues that might make a difference to women, the public has more of a practical focus. Ordinary Indonesians were ready to support a 30% quota for women as candidates for office, which would dramatically enhance their representation, while some in the elite hesitated for various reasons.

## **SHARIA: More A Personal Matter than a Political One**

### *Formalization of Sharia*

As was the case with most of the issues we addressed through this survey, there was a significant difference in attitudes of the elite and those of the general public with regard to the formalization of the sharia, or Islamic law. The most frequent spontaneous associations the ordinary Indonesians we interviewed had with sharia were the religious obligations of the individual.

- A number mentioned the five pillars of Islam: the confession of faith in Allah and Muhammad (shahada), prayer (salat), charity (zakat), the Ramadan fast (siyam), and the Mecca pilgrimage (hajj). “Pray five times a day, fasting, sacrifices, give donations.” “Islamic rules, donations, Mecca.”
- A few referred to conventional moral principles “all people must be honest,” “men and women are different.”)

For the elite, in contrast, the subject was more politicized: several referred to sharia as a legal system (“the law to bring justice”) or a potential legal alternative (“very practical as a solution.”) Indeed, the possibility of its statutory imposition was sharia’s top-of-mind association even for leaders who opposed it: “creates a lot of conflicts, would lead to an Islamic society,” “old fashioned, not suitable for Indonesia.”)

When asked directly about replacing Indonesian law with sharia, most of our respondents were not in favor. This was true for the general public and elite group, both of whom gave similar reasons.

- The principal reason was hesitation about imposing Muslim law on non-Muslims. While they knew that Indonesia has a Muslim majority, they were concerned about the rights and reactions of minorities who are not Muslim. “It’s good only for Muslims, not for people of other religions. Muslims aren’t allowed to force their religion on others.” “We shouldn’t mix religious and national matters because there are many races in the nation, it would cause conflict”. “It will destroy the country. We are not an Islamic country, it is based on consensus, not a certain religion” (women’s group leader).
- The principal reasons offered by the elites who favored sharia were justice and toughness (“better than any other law, real punishment”) (Islamic institute staff).

### *Controversial Aspects of Sharia*

Reactions to some of the more controversial aspects of sharia varied.

Most Indonesians we spoke to thought putting adulterers to death and amputating the hands of thieves to be excessively cruel.

- “Indonesians are not so mean and it would be inappropriate.” “It’s too cruel. If proven guilty, they should be punished but not beaten to death.” “It is not fair, it is against justice” (think tank staff), “It’s like cannibalism, better to send them to jail, I absolutely disagree” (women’s group leader).
- It was also seen as inappropriate for those of other religions. “We can’t apply these today because we will have to consider non-Muslim people.”
- Even some of those who favored sharia in principle did not support these penalties (“Impossible, not suited to the current context” development studies center staff).
- The few who supported these ideas felt such rules would toughen law enforcement (“then people will not sin again,” “clear punishment to stop crimes” Islamic institute staff).

Although many thought headscarves for girls were a good idea, most also opposed requiring all girls to wear headscarves by law. Among the public, all the women who expressed themselves were against a legal requirement, while the opinions of men were divided. Almost all of the elite was against it, including some of those generally sympathetic to the imposition of sharia.

- The main arguments against it were freedom of choice (“Indonesia is a democratic country, which includes freedom to choose”) and the honest expression of religious sentiment. (“Forcing people to wear headscarves will make people hypocrites, pretending to obey the rules, it should come from us.” Elite members also suggested that headscarves represent Arabic, not Indonesian culture. (“Wearing headscarves is not a universal value, it is derived from Arabs, not Islam. It should be personal choice” human rights organization member).
- The principal claims in favor were that headscarves are Islamic (“Islam says all women must,” “it should become positive law in our country”, Islamic institute staff) and modest (“more feminine, mature, and holy.”)

Reactions were divided to girls inheriting only half as much as boys under sharia among the general public, while most of the elites interviewed were opposed.

- Those opposed emphasized women’s right to equality (“it should be equal, both are human beings,” “they should share rights because both are one’s children,” “Islamic law does not discriminate against women, this is Islamic law for the fundamentalist” (human rights advocate).

- Those in favor emphasized the responsibilities of men within the household. (“Men should be the leader of their families and need to support their families.” “A daughter is less than a son.” “The man deserves to have it, since he has a bigger responsibility to his family”, think tank staff). They also cited tradition (“it has been the nature of the law for a long time.” Men and women could be found on both sides of this question among the public, although among the elite all the women and many of the men favored equality.

There was a good deal of sympathy for the idea of separating the sexes at public meetings and entertainment among the public. On this question too, men and women were on both sides. However, all of the leaders we spoke with were against the idea.

- The main arguments in favor concerned protecting or controlling women (“then I won’t have to worry about my daughters,” “women are too free now that we are mixed.”)
- Those against felt that it was unnecessary (“you don’t have to separate men and women, they can control themselves”) and impractical (“you can’t put such rules now, people are difficult to manage.”) Separating the sexes at places of amusement came in for particular criticism from the public.
- The elite emphasized freedom of choice (“people are free to decide for themselves”, women’s group member) and women’s equality (“separation “makes women second class citizens”, women’s group member). Even those favoring sharia in principle agreed. “The function of headscarves is to support togetherness, the sunnah does not state that rule” (Islamic institute staff).

When we asked again how respondents felt about imposing sharia as the law if these elements were part of it, there was a slight increase in uncertainty but no big shifts of opinion.

- The main objection remained the imposition of religious law on non-Muslims. “It may be OK for me because I am a Muslim but not all are Muslims.” “Indonesian law is not based on a certain religion” (human rights advocate).
- A big consideration in favor of sharia was the shortcomings of the courts and legal system. “I’m sick and tired of seeing crime and sin everywhere.” “The laws of Indonesia are too soft, there are no real consequences of crime.”

### *Pancasila and Islam*

The principal counterweight to sharia in the public sphere to emerge in the research was ordinary Indonesians’ belief in Pancasila. Elaborated by founding President Sukarno, but most systematically applied under President Suharto’s New Order, Pancasila is the state’s “ideological foundation”, whose five principles include democracy, social justice, nationalism, humanitarianism, and the equality of religions.

- The spontaneous associations of rank-and-file Indonesians with Pancasila were almost all positive: “justice and prosperity for all Indonesians,” “one of the most important regulations in Indonesia,” (The only objections voiced were that it was neglected: “people seem to respect it less.”)

We tested reactions to a statement by an Islamic leader who said he disliked Pancasila because it did not give Islam a privileged place against one that said Pancasila and religious tolerance were the foundations of the state in Indonesia.

- Almost all the general public respondents came out strongly in favor of Pancasila. “Indonesia has different people and respect is essential to be one nation.” “It is not good to give Islam privilege because it will cause war between religions.” These responses are consistent with their reactions to the idea of the imposition of sharia – to which coexistence with non-Muslims posed the principal stumbling block.
- Even most of those who supported sharia fully or in various respects backed Pancasila—an indicator of the complexity that has always colored the Islam-Pancasila issue. Only one respondent came out openly for Islamic dominance (“Islam should be higher, it has proved itself.”)

Yet the attitudes of the elite respondents regarding Pancasila proved quite different – and most were doubtful about it.

- To a person, they rejected the criticism of Pancasila for not privileging Islam. Even the pro-sharia individuals supported the notion of equality of religions, while others suggested that democracy could let the Muslim majority express its values without a formal Islamic state (“Islam already enjoys some privilege,” women’s group leader).
- Yet the leaders’ spontaneous associations with Pancasila were almost all skeptical. They suggested that it was dated (“merely a historical document” (think tank staff), ignored (“it is good, but never practiced” (Islamic institute staff), or a mask for authoritarianism under the previous regimes’ “Pancasila democracy” (“political tools to limit freedom” (think tank staff).)

In the popular mind, Pancasila appears to be a powerful support for democratic values in Indonesia. However, the elites interviewed appeared inclined to dismiss this potentially significant factor out of cynicism over the extent to which Pancasila has been applied or misapplied in the past.

In conclusion, attitudes to sharia and Islam among ordinary Indonesians thus seem in our results more a matter of personal faith and private relations than a systemized political ideology. It is striking how carefully Indonesian Muslims balance the demands of their faith with respect for those of others. Belief in sharia for many of our general public respondents did not translate into support for the replacement of secular law or the

establishment of an Islamic state, as much as it meant that sharia should govern personal conduct or relations among believers.<sup>1</sup>

Some striking differences are also evident between the attitudes of rank-and-file Indonesians and the leaders we interviewed, reflecting this lack of uniformity in understandings of Islamic law. The members of the elite were quicker to associate the idea of sharia with its formalization within the legal system, and seemed somewhat more supportive of the principle. However, when we raised some of the more controversial provisions of sharia, the elite was more reluctant to apply them than were the public, particularly with regard to headscarves and unequal inheritance. The leaders were also far more cynical than the public about Pancasila.

## **ISLAMIC AND POLITICS: No to Terror, Yes to Moderation**

### *Attitudes to Indonesian Islamist Leaders*

Indonesia's most prominent Islamists – Abubakar Ba'asyir and Jaffar Umar Thalib – got mixed responses from our public interviewees and mostly negative ones from the leaders we spoke with. Ba'asyir is the leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, the group alleged to be responsible for the Bali bombing last October, and Thalib heads Laskar Jihad, which has openly fought in the religious conflict in the Maluku and has been accused of bombing religious institutions in Java and elsewhere.

Ba'asyir is better known – perhaps due to the aftermath of the Bali bombing, including his arrest in the wake of well-publicized accusations against him and his group. Most of our respondents among the general public had heard of him and their opinions of him were divided. The elite were mostly negative towards him.

- The accusations of terrorism against his group made people reject him. “I don't want to be involved with him. Many people don't like him. Some say he's responsible for the Bali bombing.” “Bali bomb” (religious group leader).
- Others see him as an Islamic extremist. “His preaching is improper.” “Fundamentalist” (human rights advocate). “Islamic country” (women's group leader).
- Some others, however, think well of him and disbelieve the allegations. “I don't believe he is a terrorist.” “A calm, quiet person.” “Preacher of truthful Islam” (Islamic center staff).

Thalib was not as well known to the public – only a few expressed opinions on him. However, most of the leaders were hostile to him.

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<sup>1</sup> We will explore this in our upcoming survey by asking whether Indonesians would prefer sharia to be a personal moral code, replace the laws governing Muslims' personal status and relationships such as marriage and inheritance, or replace all secular civil and criminal laws.



- Some members of the public and most of the leaders disliked him. “Makes things worse.” “He has no concern for Indonesia, only for his group” (think tank staff). “Has connection with terrorists” (religious group leader).
- Others were positive. “Ulama, same as Ba’asyir. Jaffar is for outside activities, closer to the people.” “Courageous man against odds, charismatic person” (think tank staff).
- And some were ambivalent (“Jihad is fighting against crime, but some groups make things worse. People become brutal.”)

The fact that both Ba’asyir and Thalib are of Yemeni origin, not Indonesian, divided rank-and-file respondents predictably. Moderates were disturbed by this (“they are Arabs and destroy Indonesia,”) while sympathizers of the Islamists were not (“it’s their business, I don’t care.”) For most of the members of the elite, the question of nationality was not important, even though most of them were unfavorable to the Islamist leaders. “If we see from the sight of Islam, this shouldn’t matter” (religious group leader).

### *The Bali Bombing*

The Bali bombing clearly makes average Indonesians upset and uncomfortable.

- Most were clearly troubled by it and several indicated that they thought it a sign of religious excess. “Muslims would not have the guts to do it, but a fanatic might.” “They want to warn Bali that there is too much sin and adultery but I do not agree with the use of a bomb.” Only one offered a justification: “It’s OK as long as it was done to make the country better.”
- Many insist they don’t know who was behind it. But most of those who ventured an opinion referred to alleged perpetrators linked in the media to Jemaah Islamiyah (Imam Samudra, Amrozi, Abubakar Ba’asyir), while a couple of them mentioned Al Qaeda. A couple of others mentioned the US and Jews and one suggested Tommy Suharto, the former dictator’s son, who had been linked to accusations of bombings elsewhere in Indonesia.

The elites interviewed were less willing than the public to place the blame for the bombing on Islamic militancy.

- Some made references to Amrozi, Imam Samudra, Islam, or pesantren (Islamic academies), or had previously noted the allegations that Ba’asyir was connected.
- But many placed the responsibility on the government, army, or intelligence services for not stopping the bomb: “they failed to anticipate the bomb, protect the people” (human rights worker).
- A couple suggested that the US government was somehow involved and one ascribed it to the “gap between rich and poor countries.”

### *Moderates vs. Extremists*

Moderate leaders should take heart from the views of our interviewees among members of the public. Most said they would like moderate Muslim leaders to speak out strongly against groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and Laskar Jihad, while few felt such groups should be heard and respected.

- The association of Islam and terror was strongly rejected by most. “Islam is good, but useless if it turns out you are behind things like the Bali bombing.” “I agree with fighting for Islam, but not like the extremists.” “I believe in Islam without the sword. It’s better to compromise. The sword causes hostility, while compromise can lead to peace.”
- On the other hand, some Indonesians interviewed said they would pay attention to militants. “They fought for Islam, this could make Indonesia better.” “A Muslim leader who is a good Muslim will support the movements.” Almost all of those who took this view were young and secondary educated – who make up a minority, but a politically vocal one.<sup>2</sup>

However, the elites were more divided than the public was about taking a strong stand for moderation.

- Some agreed: “the moderates should speak louder and more bravely” (religious group leader).
- Others urged discussions with Islamists (“moderates should dialogue with militants, get to know them better,” women’s group leader), while opposing violence (“I could not accept them if they use violence,” think tank staff).
- Some denied that it was correct to use the label of “extremist”: “Laskar Jihad is not radical or extremist” (Islamic center staff); “Extremism is invented by Sydney Jones,” [the human rights activist], think tank staff). These were the views of respondents favorable to Ba’asyir and/or Thalib.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general this preliminary qualitative survey serves to underscore the complexity of the issues facing the Indonesian public. There appear to be large gaps in citizen knowledge about democracy and election processes. At the same time, there are strong inherent inclinations towards democratic values--for example, the commitment to preserving religious freedoms for non-Muslims. Another significant result of this research is the sometimes wide disparity of views between elites and the general public on a number of key issues. For the elections donor and NGO community, this would appear to reinforce the need for carefully crafted voter education programs leading up to the 2004 elections. Clearly these programs need to be designed, in content as well as approach, to the

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<sup>2</sup> A question to investigate in our forthcoming survey is whether people with such views are likelier to have attended pesanteren or madressas as opposed to secular schools.

divergent views and needs of particular population groups. One should not assume, for example, that a nation-wide TV campaign will be equally effective in reaching both elites and grassroots populations. Especially given the evident complexity of issues such as Islam, as well as women's roles, nuanced and locally grounded approaches should be taken to ensure optimal participation, on multiple levels, in the 2004 elections.