

**The Indonesian National Election (Pemilu)
As observed in the Kabupaten of Mimika, Irian Jaya
From June 5-9, 1999**

An open report submitted to Indonesia Election Watch

**Brigham Golden
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I. Preface:

The information that is contained in this report is based on research that was conducted between June 5 and June 9, 1999 in the sub-district (kabupaten) of Mimika in the province of Irian Jaya, Indonesia. During this period I met with a wide variety of individuals, including officials of the regional election office (PPD II) and nine polling stations (TPS), representatives of four major parties (Golkar, PKD, PBN, PDI-P), a number of major monitoring organizations, as well as numerous voting and non-voting citizens. I also spent a number of hours observing registration, voting and vote-counting procedures. And yet, while this report is my own analysis, and based primarily upon my own observations, I was greatly assisted by a tenacious group of election monitors from EMCSBSI (Election Monitoring Committee of Serikat Buruh Sejahtera Indonesia), including: Antie Solaiman, Budiman Kogoya, Paulus Yanengga, Pene Kogoya, and Marton Wenda. Without these people the depth and breadth of this report would have suffered tremendously. Even so, the responsibility for any errors or misrepresentations contained herein is mine alone.

II. Overview:

Much like the rest of the nation, the Indonesian election of June 7, 1999 in Mimika, Irian Jaya contained clear aspirations to a democratic process. This *‘proses demokratik’*, it was said, could be expressed only in elections that were “free” (*bebas*) and “fair” (*jujur*); and for those of us that served as observers, both foreign and domestic, these words represented the method and measure by which we would judge the successes and failures of the day.

But the events that transpired in Mimika, and for that matter, across the rest of Irian Jaya, upset the idea that a “free and fair” election is always a simple forum for the expression

of political aspirations and the enactment of a democratic ideal. Indeed how can a national election be dubbed either free or fair when a significant portion of a regional populace completely boycotts the process and expresses open contempt for its objectives? In this sense, I would claim that not one, but two elections occurred on June 7th in Mimika. The first election might be dubbed relatively free and fair, though it was certainly compromised by numerous incidents of incompetence and fraud. The second election was, in effect, a referendum on the legitimacy of the first, and its results were resounding and unanimous. Of course the results of the first will be transmitted around the globe with tremendous repercussions for millions of people. The results of the second will likely go unheard, and its effects will be hard to measure anytime soon, if at all.

In Mimika, I can say with confidence, less than 10% of the ethnic “Papuan” chose to vote. Comprising perhaps 40% of the total population of the region, it was a constituency that included the educated and the uneducated, civil servants and private sector employees at all levels, farmers, hunters and gathers both male and female, and even, I might add, election monitors. The tremendous diversity and strong unity of the non-voting Papuan community refuses cynical and condescending analyses that these people did not understand the meaning of the election. It is more accurate to suggest that they felt that there was no choice on this ballot that would represent their interests; and thus the only statement that remained was expressed through the conscious decision to boycott. On the day before the election a local government head (*kepala desa*) of an almost entirely Papuan community articulated the sentiment to me clearly: “there is so much discrimination against Papuan people. Maybe KKN [Corruption/Collusion/Nepotism] can be ended with this election, but discrimination against Papuans cannot”. For the most part, any discussion of the election with Papuan people quickly transformed into the expression of a different desire entirely, that is for a “free”, “fair”, and independent Papuan State: “we don’t want an election, we want freedom”.

As for the Indonesian national election that was, in fact, held in Mimika on June 7, 1999, I believe that the process was *relatively* free and fair, though it was certainly characterized by significant amounts of incompetence and fraud. Nearly every polling station observed was the site of some form of impropriety. While it is hard to say what effect this had upon the election results, some indicators suggest that these infidelities served to create an appearance of increased support for Golkar that varied from site to site between 5 and 15 percent. Even so, Mimika stands as the only kabupaten in Irian Jaya that registered a majority of votes for a party other than Golkar (PDI-P). Ultimately it must be acknowledged that voting Indonesians, almost entirely immigrants from other islands, were unaware of the impropriety that did occur, and generally saw the election as a significant event and an unprecedented step towards a democratic process. In this respect the Indonesian election of June 1999 was without a doubt a profound event and its irregularities should not be seen as diminishing its significance or rendering its results entirely invalid. One can only hope that future democratic forums build upon what has transpired such that manipulation by existing powers will be eradicated and equitable representation for *all* will become the norm.

III. The Registration Process and the Campaign Period:

According to the head of the PPDII Taslim Penuteru, much differed between this election and elections in the past with respect to the registration process. In the past, I was told, the office took an active approach, going into villages to register people. This year however, it was each individual's responsibility to come to the office to register themselves. Even so, the PPDII was proud to say that it had managed to register 39,296 individuals, nearly 97% of the 40,229 that were registered for the 1997 election. But with a total voting population of 78,384 according to a recent census, this number is still far off the total number of possible voters. This was explained as an effect of the fact that native Papuans were generally uninterested in being registered, with three major desa: Tsinga, Waa, Arowango with not a single soul registered, and another, Kwamki Lama, with only 75 out of a population of a few thousand. Said the PPDII head with regards to unregistered individuals: "We can't pressure them".

But with immigration to the Timika area exploding at a tremendous rate, I am inclined to believe that far fewer of the immigrant population (both Papuan and western Indonesian) was registered than the PPD II imagines. I met many individuals of voting age, but most younger than 30, who had arrived in the previous two years and were not registered to vote. In addition, and far more upsetting, were widespread reports and rumors of individuals, all Papuans, being registered against their will and without their knowledge. For obvious reasons this prospect was extremely upsetting to those who wanted to boycott the election, and as it turned out, this seemed to provide a likely mode for some voting fraud on the day of the election.

At the office of the PPDII I also spoke with representatives from four of the 14 parties that were registered in this region (Golkar, PBN, PDI-P, PKD). All claimed that the campaign period was relatively quiet, with only PDI-P and Golkar generating much support in the streets. I was interested to hear from all the party representatives that the large and conspicuous police and security forces were entirely unpartisan during the campaign period, a claim that was echoed almost wherever I went. Said one intelligence agent that coordinates military activity: "we don't care who wins, we just want the elections to go smoothly and safely". Of course this intent is somewhat at odds with the desires of the Papuan community.

One concern in this respect was that the Papuan community might pressure individuals to join the boycott or block those who did intend to vote. Conversations with the local government head in Kwamki Lama assured me that this would not occur, and that any individual would be free to vote. The few Papuans that I could find who were intending to participate in the elections did, however, describe a strong conformist pressure in the community, with a mild ostracism for anyone who did decide to support a party openly. Perhaps not surprisingly, the polling station at Kwamki Lama was razed on the night before the election. The few individuals from that community who sought to vote were forced to go to other polling sites to do so.

IV. Election Day:

There were 45 voting sites in the kabupaten of Mimika. Of these I visited nine personally, and had reports from independent observers at least ten others. From the start, certainly the most obvious characteristic of all sites was the absence of ethnic-Papuan voters, an observation made more stark due to the fact that many Papuans chose to watch the spectacle from outside the fences that defined the polling sites. Voting occurred throughout the day at a nearly constant pace, and women seemed to be well represented among the voters. Over 50% of the polling stations had an independent observer of some form, usually a representative of one of the University student monitoring organizations.

For the most part voters maintained that this election was different from any they had ever experienced, and expressed excitement over the fact that the outcome could not be predicted with any certainty. Save one important exception voters maintained that they were not pressured to pick one party over another, and that in this respect above all this election marked a change from previous years where they were forced to select the ruling party Golkar. The one incidence of pressure came to our attention at the polling site of Timika Indah, where individuals had been offered jobs if they would vote for Golkar. Special cards were issued to these individuals and would be collected by a biased administrator at the polling site who would ensure that their votes were cast for Golkar. There was only one significant instance of active campaigning within 200 yards of a site, and this occurred at Kuala Kencana, where a Golkar representative was appealing to voters.

On the other hand, and certainly more significantly, incidences of irregularities at the polling sites were common, though it was often difficult to tell the difference between incompetence and potential fraud. On a number of occasions men were allowed to vote on behalf of their wives who were reportedly ill. In another case representatives of parties and other observers were turned out of the polling site, a strategy that reduced the number of monitors and may have made tampering easier as voters were not aware of standard procedures. Incidence of voters being refused entrance to the site due to improper identification but their voting cards collected and later used (by individuals ink marking the other hand) were reported at a number of sites. Also reported was the use of cards issued to Papuans who had not registered themselves. At one polling station I witnessed, 152 individuals entered the booths but 173 votes (including 91 improperly punched) were counted at the end of the day. At this site Golkar lost by a narrow margin, where informal polling suggested that it would lose by a larger margin. It was the opinion of some observers that tampering on the day of the voting was made easier because many individuals do not understand the fundamentals of a democratic election, and were therefore able to be manipulated.

V. The Counting Process:

On the afternoon of the 8th a group of observers and I went to the PPD II to discuss the vote-counting process. There we found the head, his secretary and a military

representative recounting the votes without any party representatives present. This was an act greatly out of established procedure, and one that represented tremendous potential for tampering. We were assured that the party representatives had left only minutes before and taken the same data to be counted independently. When we went to the offices of PDI-P to verify this claim we found that this was not the case, and that the parties thought that official vote counts had already been submitted. Representatives of PDI-P called representatives of the other parties and returned to the office of the PPD II to ensure that no tampering could take place.

Besides this upsetting event, I could not testify to much with regards to the counting process. As of the time of this report I understand that Golkar has secured a narrow but significant lead over all other parties in the Province of Irian Jaya. Apparently the only kabupaten that Golkar did not win is the kabupaten of Mimika.

VI. Conclusion:

In every sense the national election of June 7, 1999 is only the beginning of a movement towards a more democratic process in Indonesia. This is certainly true in the kabupaten of Mimika as well. But in Mimika, and across Irian Jaya more generally, the significance of this election as a step towards democracy remains profoundly undetermined at other levels. Will the voice of the Papuan community articulated in its boycott be heard? And if so, will it be allowed to shape a more democratic process for Irian Jaya in the future? What form might this process take? These are certainly the central questions that will shape this region over the near future, and they are questions more clearly defined in the wake of this election than ever before. The answers to these questions will have tremendous bearing upon all the people of Irian Jaya in the years to come.