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Abstract The latest results from the gubernatorial elections in the provinces of West Java and North Sumatra, Indonesia, would suggest that a sea-change of sorts is taking place in Indonesia. Shortly after the shock election results following the general election in Malaysia earlier this year, the gubernatorial elections of Indonesia has led to the victory of the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) and the National Mandate Party (Pan), both of which are Islamist in character and both of which trace their ideological and intellectual genealogy back to the Islamist Masjumi party of the 1950s that struggled to make Indonesia an Islamic state until it was finally banned by President Sukarno in 1960. Farish Noor analyses the implications.	

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A wave of change across South-East Asia? But counter-currents too



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The latest results from the gubernorial elections in the provinces of West Java and North Sumatra, Indonesia, would suggest that a sea-change of sorts is taking place in Indonesia. Shortly after the shock election results following the general election in Malaysia earlier this year, the gubernorial elections of Indonesia has led to the victory of the Justice and Prosperity Party (PKS) and the National Mandate Party (Pan), both of which are Islamist in character and both of which trace their ideological and intellectual genealogy back to the Islamist Masjumi party of the 1950s that struggled to make Indonesia an Islamic state until it was finally banned by President Sukarno in 1960. **Farish Noor** analyses the implications.

What do these results entail and what does it say about the state of Indonesian politics today? More importantly, should the victories of PKS and Pan be seen as the victory of political Islam, and does this signify a shift towards a more Islamist-inclined politics for the rest of the country?

For a start, we should begin with some important observations comparing the results in Indonesia with the recent results in Malaysia. In both cases, the parties that won fielded candidates who are young and relatively unknown compared to the older veterans of the more established parties like Golkar in Indonesia. Yet, as was the case in Malaysia recently, it was precisely the relatively younger age and lack of exposure that perhaps accounted for the victory of the candidates of the PKS and Pan, for they were certainly not associated with the older modes of politics in the past and were not involved or implicated in many of the long-standing political and economic scandals associated with the old regime that dates back to the time of former President Suharto.

Secondly, it should be noted that the Indonesian parties, like the opposition parties that did extremely well in Malaysia, campaigned on a reformist ticket calling for change and a new vision of politics for Indonesia. While speaking to Indonesian students at the Muhamadiyah University of Surakarta and Sunan Kalijaga Islamic University of Jogjakarta, I was struck by the overwhelming consensus among all of them that Indonesia is thirsting for a new form of politics that breaks away from the norms of the old feudal past. Like Malaysia, Indonesia today has an entirely new generation of younger voters, many of whom will be voting for the first time during the general election of 2009. Already, many local analysts are predicting a major shift in voting patterns and are awaiting results that may shock all the older established parties.

Change, however, is always a contested process and needless to say it will take much more than an election to deal with the chronic problems of corruption, nepotism and lack of transparency and accountability in Indonesian politics. While the more modernist Islamist parties like PKS and Pan have totally abandoned the sectarian and divisive discourse of holy war, sharia and the calls for the imposition of an Islamic state and Islamic constitution in Indonesia; a counter-reaction is also brewing among the more conservative movements in the country.

While the members of the PKS and Pan celebrate their fresh victories, on the very same day the Indonesian government's religious authorities have formally declared that the minority Ahmadi community – a sect that originated from South Asia but has spread all over the Muslim world – are deviants and that the sect should be banned 'for their own good'. The reason behind this somewhat bizarre pronouncement is that many extreme right wing Islamist groups in Indonesia like the Indonesian Mujahideen Council (MMI), Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) and others have openly declared total war against the Ahmadi communities.

Thus, ironically, on the same day that Muslim moderates of PKS and Pan celebrated their victories in West Java and North Sumatra, the leaders of the Islamic Defenders Front have openly called for FPI members to go out and kill the members of the Ahmadi community all over the country. In a recorded

public rally the FPI leader went as far as crying out: "Kill them all! Kill all Ahmadis! Wipe them out of Indonesia! Kill, kill, kill!"

Indonesian politics is likely to remain on the boil well into next year when the General Elections will pit the new Islamist parties like PKS and Pan against the old guard led by Golkar and even parties like the Partai Demokrat of current President Bambang Yudhoyono. While tempering their public discourse, some PKS and Pan leaders have already stated that they will not compromise on issues of public morals such as imposing a ban on consumption of alcohol for Muslims, stricter dress codes and personal morality laws for Muslims, bans on rock concerts and in particular the very popular form of local pop music known as Dangdut.

With the Islamists - both moderate and conservative - setting the terms for the debate on Islam and politics in Indonesia, it is clear that religion will remain one of the central issues of Indonesian politics for a long time to come. But what sort of religious politics? Will it be the modernist vision of the Islamists of PKS and Pan (which is already conservative enough on social and moral issues), or will it be the exclusive and sectarian vision of Islam currently pushed by the likes of the Indonesian Mujahideen Council? Only time will tell, but for now Indonesia remains a focal point in the battle for hearts and minds of two hundred million Muslims.

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