One by-product of democracy over the last dozen years in Indonesia has been the creation of a political polling and consulting industry. This mass commercialization of elections rewards popularity and diminishes the role of party insiders but it also increases the hold of big business on the political process, writes Andreas Ufen.

ELECTIONS IN WESTERN countries long ago became highly professionalized with sophisticated consultants and marketing experts using the latest techniques to deliver results. By contrast, this has until recently been an infant industry in Indonesia, where democracy was only established in 1998. In recent years, though, and hardly noticed by most political observers, there has been a marked shift in electioneering in the archipelago. The most important innovations since the fall of Suharto are polling and professional consultants.

POLLSING, POPULARITY AND PARTIES
In Indonesia’s first free elections in 1955 — they would turn out to be the only ones for many years — voters were mobilized along social cleavages; the organization of the campaign was decentralized with strong local party branches; advertising agencies, consultants and opinion polling were not involved. TV and radio were insignificant. Under Suharto’s authoritarian New Order regime (1966-1998), although the media grew more important, elections were tame affairs controlled by the ruling Golkar party. Political restrictions stalled the transition toward “professional” campaigning and public opinion polling was effectively banned.

The first pollsters emerged in the late 1990s. The Institute for Economic and Social Research, Education and Information (LPIIES) conducted
a voter survey in 1997, but it was restricted to Java island and the results were not published. By 1999, LP3ES and a few other institutions could publish the results of their surveys openly, but between then and 2004, few political parties employed pollsters on a regular basis. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s victory in the 2004 presidential elections and the accurate surveys by pollsters accompanying it convinced leading politicians that campaigns had to be organized differently in the future.

Currently, the scenery is very packed with pollsters including the Indonesian Survey Institute (Lembaga Survei Indonesia), the Indonesian Survey Circle (Lingkaran Survei Indonesia), LP3ES, the Reform Institute, Kompas newspaper’s polling arm, the Indonesian Research Council (LR1), Indo Barometer, the Center for Political Research at the University of Indonesia (Puskap UI), and the CIRRUS Survey Group, among others. At the local and provincial levels there are an array of smaller pollsters active, not to mention political parties themselves using technical surveys.

There are now two national polling associations. The Indonesian Research and Public Opinion Association (AROPI) was founded in response to concerns about ethical issues in the polling industry. AROPI successfully initiated a judicial review of two electoral laws restricting public surveys. AROPI, led by University of Indonesia Professor Andrinof Chaniago, has supported a code of ethics demanding that respondents and the public be informed about the funders of surveys. In September 2009 an organization of political consultants, the Asosiasi Konsultan Politik Indonesia (AKPI), modelled after the American Association of Political Consultants — was founded with Denny JA as its chairman.

**CHANGED LANDSCAPE, WORRYING SIGNS**

Combined with electoral reforms, polling has had a profound impact on the workings of political parties. Since 2004 the president and vice president have been elected directly, and as of 2005, direct elections have included mayors, district chiefs and governors. To succeed, parties must identify the most popular candidate in a province, district or municipality. Would-be candidates now have to conduct surveys to check their own popularity ratings. In 2005, the internal guidelines for one of the biggest political parties, Golkar, demanded local branches present a list of potential candidates to the central executive council. Surveys would determine the popularity of the candidates, meaning that both the party leadership in Jakarta and local apparatchiks have less ability to simply nominate candidates to whom they are close. Popular candidates, often without a partisan background, gain in importance as party stalwarts see their influence diminish.

The first political marketing agency to engineer whole campaigns was Denny JA’s Indonesian Survey Circle. Denny, a familiar figure on television, proudly styles himself the “king-maker” on his web site, and he previously worked with the Indonesian Survey Institute. (Many of the weighty opinions in opinion surveying have Ph.D.s in political science from Ohio State University, including the Indonesia Survey Institute’s boss, Dodi Ambardi, its previous head, Saiful Mujani, Rizal Mallarangeng, who heads Fox Indonesia, and Denny JA.)

The Indonesian Survey Circle, established in November 2004, was also the first pollster to sign a contract with a political party, Golkar. It was asked to conduct surveys in nine provinces and 100 districts. The company prides itself on consulting for hundreds of candidates, 90 percent of whom have won. It even seeks out popular would-be candidates and offers them financing by investors and campaign assistance.

It has to be borne in mind that raising funds on behalf of candidates is problematic in Indonesia. On a few occasions the Indonesian Survey Circle has financed a candidate in advance with the understanding that double the amount must be paid back in the case of a victory. Since the new a range of campaign teams beside Fox Indonesia and the Democratic Party staff. Military-style teams (Echo, Romeo, Foxtrot, etc.) mobilized regional and sectoral support, targeting businessmen, religious leaders and others. But the most important player in the campaign was, arguably, Fox Indonesia, which also played a part in internal party elections. It assisted both Golkar’s Aburizal Bakrie and Hatta Rajasa of PAN to obtain the chairmanships of their respective parties. Fox’s image was tarnished somewhat in

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ly elected candidate did not have the money to finance his own campaign, this creates an opportunity for corruption as he has to use his new position to pay back the debt.

The other big player in the consultancy sector is Fox Indonesia, which was established in February 2008 by brothers Choe and Rizal Mallarangeng. It works only for three parties, Yudhoyono’s Democratic Party, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and Golkar. Fox Indonesia defines itself as a company that provides “strategic and political consulting.” According to Choel Mallarangeng, it provides numerous services: style and content analysis, social and political networking, media campaigning, media monitoring, surveys in cooperation with the Indonesian Survey Institute, event organizing, simulated public debates and so on.

During Yudhoyono’s 2009 re-election campaign, Fox Indonesia was responsible for image-making, countering negative campaigning from rivals, arranging advertising and organizing events. Yudhoyono, a retired general, also had
2010 when it failed to secure the chairmanship of the Democrats for Andi Mallarangeng, the brother of Choel and Rizal, who lost out to Anas Urbaningrum, who used Kompact Indonesia’s consulting services.

Another important consultancy is Charta Politika, which was established in March 2008 and focuses on gathering data, political marketing and media analysis and research. Its repertoire consists of personal and party branding, door-to-door campaigning, campaign and communication strategies, issue mobilization through networks of journalists, and focus group interviews. Media analysis looks at political configurations at the national level, key political issues and opinion makers. It has provided training for members of municipal parliaments in co-operation with the International Republican Institute. It organized PAN’s 2009 campaign and provides training for PAN members of parliament. Charta Politika also worked together with Fox Indonesia on the campaign of Edhie Baskoro Yudhoyono, the president’s youngest son, in the 2009 legislative elections. Ahead of the legislative elections, it also regularly provided analysis for TVOne’s program ‘Apa Kabar Indonesia Malam?’ (How are you tonight, Indonesia?)

Among the latest developments in the field is the establishment of PolMark Indonesia in October 2009, a consultancy that expressly states that it wants to improve the democratic system by offering more than other consultancies can. It targets government agencies, parliaments and state-owned enterprises. With its PolMark Research Center (PRC) it intends to provide “revolutionary” new data in co-operation with other outfits. PolMark’s head, Eep Saefullah Fatah, has a strong track record as a lecturer at the prestigious University of Indonesia, and he has been a columnist and TV personality for many years. He is married to a well-known TV presenter and gains, to a certain extent, from her celebrity status. He is well connected to journalists, scientists and politicians alike.

PLENTY OF BUSINESS
Campaign consultancy is a thriving business in Indonesia because in addition to national polls, more than 500 local elections for mayors and district heads will be held over the next four years. In 2010 alone, some 200 elections were held. Local candidates often use their own staff but have increasingly been engaging external experts.

Another factor in Indonesia is that consulting firms do not limit themselves to just one party. Fox Indonesia, for instance, has a close relationship with both Yudhoyono’s Democratic Party and with Aburizal Bakrie’s Golkar. Charta Politika is to a certain extent connected with PAN but not exclusively.

Outside observers often note that the distinction between private and public surveys is often unclear and that pollsters frequently do not disclose their sponsors, thus making results questionable. In 2009, the generally respected Indonesian Survey Institute publicly confessed that it was paid by Fox Indonesia for surveys it published ahead of the elections showing Yudhoyono winning. According to other pollsters, this financial dependence can result in doctored results. While these accusations are often hard to verify, the case created a storm of controversy and gave rise to PERSEPI’s efforts to impose a code of ethics on the industry.

In another case, Johan Silialahi, the director of the Information Research Council (LRI) and a political consultant to the unsuccessful campaign of Golkar’s Yusuf Kalla for president, closed down his agency after publishing a seriously flawed survey. Other pollsters are said to have manipulated surveys in order to get more lucrative orders from customers. These widely circulating accusations grabbed headlines in 2009 and damaged the industry.

Political consultants in Indonesia trade on a wide range of contacts in the media and political parties. They tend to offer a whole package of services, in contrast to counterparts in the United States and Europe who often focus on specific techniques. Leading consultants are also well-known and media-savvy personalities. Most of them have studied political science, often in Australia or the United States. While they may not have systematically studied political marketing overseas, they have developed their own techniques for the local market.

THE WEALTHY AND THE WELL-CONNECTED
The whole consulting market is still in its infancy, and political parties generally lag behind in grasping the importance of professional political communication. Yet parties are increasingly forced to seek external advice. That can lead to tensions between the central or local executive and the hired professionals around the candidates, because the company tends to take over the planning and conduct of the campaign at all stages. Campaigning is still centered on TV, but professional consultants have become personalities in their own right who use sophisticated means to compete with party executives over the conduct of the campaign.

In Indonesia, it also seems easier now for wealthy businessmen to grab the wheel of a political party to influence policy-making, the prototype being Aburizal Bakrie, whose family conglomerate is among the largest in the country. Turning politics into a commodity amplifies an already deep-rooted pattern of “money politics.” It encompasses four different forms that contribute to the realignment of parties and voters. First, the mobilization of voters — that is, campaigning — is marked by spiralling marketing costs to sell candidates and their policies. Second, candidates often have to pay political parties for their candidacies. Thus, internal party organization is commercialized, which also reinforces a third form of money politics, the mobilization of delegates at party congresses through campaigning and different forms of vote-buying. Fourth, policy-making by lawmakers and directly elected mayors, district heads, governors, and presidents is, arguably, influenced by their own business interests or those of their financiers.

Whereas in Western countries campaign financing is at least regulated by strict laws, the lackadaisical observance of the law in Indonesia opens the door for misuse. The latest big political scan-
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cal parties across the spectrum.

The introduction of direct local elections also has changed the forms of “money politics.” Whereas before, lawmakers had virtually the sole power to choose governors, district heads and mayors (and to accept money in exchange), now the candidates have to pay huge amounts to the nominating political parties. And they have to finance their own campaigns, often without the help of the cash-strapped parties. A candidate for a gubernatorial election may spend up to Rp 40 billion ($4.8 million). Investigations by the newspaper Kompas suggested that a survey at this level costs anywhere from Rp 100 million up to Rp 500 million, and that advertisement cam-
paigns in different media cost from Rp 1 billion up to Rp 5 billion a month. Few individuals have that kind of money.

In 2008, allowable contributions from individ-
uals (Rp 1 billion) and from groups or compa-
nies (Rp 5 billion) were significantly increased. Nevertheless, the system is bypassed with the help of proxies. Many entrepreneurs contribute via related companies. In 2009, the Elections Supervisory Board (Bawaslu) accused the owner of transport company PT Sohibul Barokah, Zaenal Abidin — who was also general treasurer of the Democratic Party at that time — of illicitly donating money to the party through a related firm. In this vein, Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) has accused all major political parties of accepting illegal campaign contributions, under-
reporting campaign funds and not reporting cam-
paign spending on advertising.

**BIG BUSINESS AND ERODING PARTIES**

The parties are now desperately searching for money because they have to shoulder the expenses for political marketing. In 1999, they spent about $10 million on advertising; in 2009 this amount increased to $117 million. Between January and late March 2009 alone, the Democrats spent $5.1 million on television advertisements, followed by Golkar with $4.8 million and Gerindra with $4.4 million. The consequences of this commercializa-
tion are twofold: Parties are increasingly financed by a few conglomerates, and more MPs and politi-
cians in general are businesspeople or their prox-
ies. In 2004, many more members of the House of Representatives were businesspeople (around 40 per cent) in comparison to the 1999 parliament. In 2010, the majorities of all party factions in the DPR are entrepreneurs or businessmen.

The commercialization of campaigning is dan-
gerous for democratic consolidation because of the weakening of party organizations and grass roots networks. At the local level, ordinary citi-
zens are hardly able to actively influence local politics. Moreover, wealthy businessmen expect compensation for their investments. Business tycoons such as Soetrisno Bachir (former chair-
man of PAN), former vice president Jusuf Kalla, Surya Paloh and Aburizal Bakrie have risen through the ranks because of their money, and at least some of them are accused of using their positions to help their companies. It is easily conceivable that such patterns are replicated below the national level. Moreover, some owners of commercial television stations have a direct stake in party politics. The Bakrie Group, for ex-
ample, owns ANTV and TVOne. Former Golkar politician Surya Paloh, who recently formed his own political party, the National Democratic Party, owns Metro TV.

This rapid commercialization is taking place at a time when political parties are increasingly estranged from voters. It is indicated first by par-
ties that have poor platforms and/or are no longer deeply rooted in the social milieu. Second, there is a tendency among political parties to form cartels so that inter-party competition is mostly reduced to infighting not related to policy issues. Third, new parties that have no predecessors — such as the Democrats, Gerindra and Hanura — have been successfully formed. The Democratic Party, founded in 2001, is a vehicle for Yudhoyono, who is its chairman. Hanura, established in 2006, is controlled by Wiranto, the former commander of the armed forces. Gerindra is led by Prabowo Subianto, a controversial retired general and a former Suharto in-law.

Indonesia’s democratic deepening may be at risk by the rise of professional parties within an environ-
ment of mass media controlled by big capi-
tal and powerful business conglomerates at a time when voters have less loyalty to traditional par-
ties. Yet so far, Indonesia’s young democracy and relatively well-institutionalized party system have stalled the development of the likes of huge busi-
ness-backed parties such as Thaksin Shinawatra’s Thai Rak Thai party and its successors in Thailand, or Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia.

Professionalization itself, of course, does not necessarily assume an erosion of party organiza-
tion. Professionalization can also improve inter-
nationalization, sharpen the profile of political parties and contribute to voter education. Polls can be a means to feel the pulse of voters and to respond to their demands.

The process becomes troubling when spin doc-
tors deluge the public with empty sound bites and artifical images and when personality and style take precedence over political platforms. When democracy is combined with financial irregulari-
ties and a poorly regulated media sector, democ-

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