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2006 Pilkada Elections in Aceh

An Overview of Pre and Post Election Surveys



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An Overview of Pre and Post Election Surveys

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Cover photo: An elderly woman enters a polling station to cast her vote. A poll worker verifies her identity. (Anhar Jamal)

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INTRODUCTION

The first direct local election, or *pilkada*, scheduled for mayoral and gubernatorial positions in Indonesia's province of Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam for May 2005 was delayed due to the tragic earthquake and tsunami which struck in December 2004, leaving over 200,000 dead and over 400,000 displaced. This natural disaster devastated local physical infrastructure, however it provided a catalyst for the negotiations ending the province's 29-year separatist conflict between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia. Seeking to secure this historic peace, the Government of Indonesia agreed to a broad range of new special autonomy measures for the province leading to a level of self rule that goes beyond the rest of the country's experiment with decentralized governance.

Among the new powers granted to Aceh was the right for independent candidates to run for local office, and for local political parties to contest local elections (starting in 2009). Formerly the exclusive domain of national parties and their candidates, these new provisions opened the political process in Aceh to a host of new voices, culminating in the election of a former resistance leader as Aceh's new governor.

The *pilkada* was rescheduled for December 11, 2006. Aceh's special Independent Elections Commission (KIP)—established in 2005 but yet to be tested—was empowered to manage the election, which would prove to be the biggest local direct election ever attempted in a single province of Indonesia. Out of a provincial population of 4,031,589, there were 2,632,935 registered voters and 8,471 polling stations run by 42,355 poll workers. There were 20 polls conducted simultaneously to elect 15 bupati or regents (heads of kabupatens or regencies); four mayors (heads of municipalities) and one poll to elect a governor-vice governor pair. The total number of candidate pairs (both run on political party tickets or as independents) was: eight pairs for gubernatorial election, 122 pairs for bupati/deputies and mayors/deputies, or 260 candidates. Of these, only five were women.

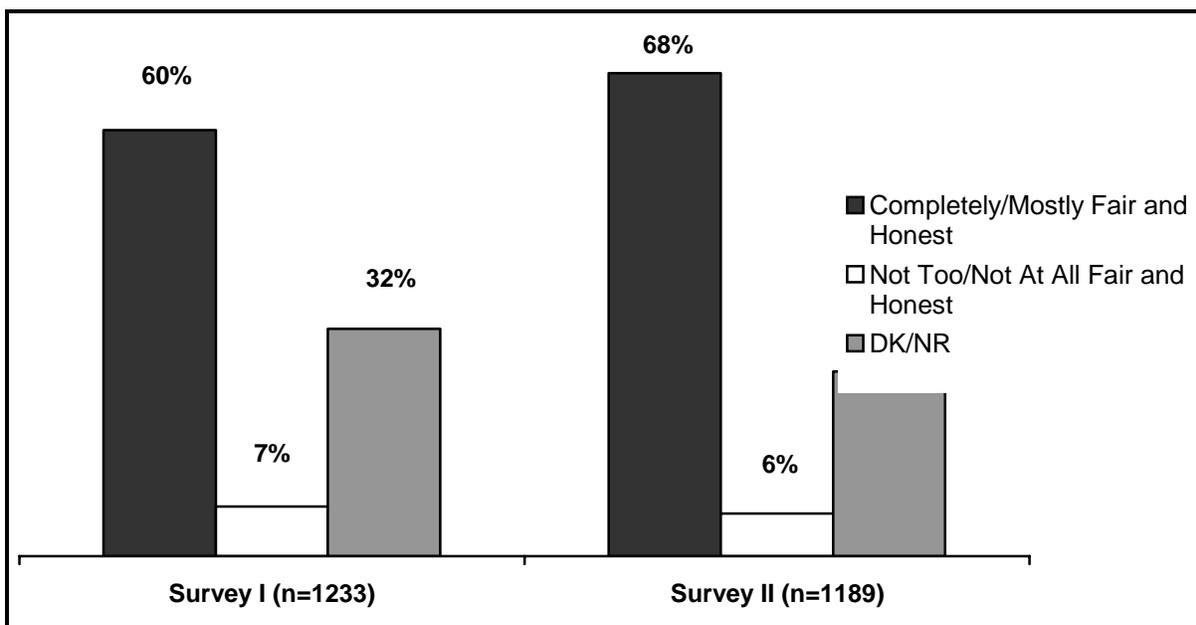
The KIP, political parties, candidates, nongovernmental organizations and international donors preparing for Aceh's *pilkada* needed a mechanism to gauge public awareness and public opinion in this challenging new political and electoral environment. IFES developed a pre- and post-election survey project,¹ funded by USAID, to gather and disseminate detailed data and analysis intended to guide programming in voter and civic education sectors as well as alert election administrators to public perceptions, concerns, or lack of awareness on key election procedures. The post-election survey also enabled IFES to gather the opinions of Aceh residents on their new government, and their expectations as newly-elected officials began their terms in office.

¹ IFES fielded the first pre-election survey from late September to mid-October 2006, followed by a second survey fielded from November 20-26, 2006, some two weeks before the December 11 *pilkada*. The third survey was fielded from January 25 through February 4, after the election. The first survey had a sample of 1,233 respondents, the second survey had a sample of 1,189 respondents and the third survey consisted of a sample of 1,203 respondents. These samples were designed to be representative of the Acehnese population and the margin of error for a sample of this size is plus/minus 3%. The surveys were conducted through face-to-face interviews in the homes of respondents throughout Aceh (excluding Sabang and Simeulu), in either Bahasa Indonesia or Acehnese.

GREAT DEAL OF ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PILKADA THROUGHOUT THE ELECTION PROCESS

In both the pre-election surveys as well as in the post-election survey, a large majority of residents of Aceh expressed enthusiasm about the *pilkada* and felt that the elections would lead to positive change in Aceh. Accentuating these positive expectations was the fact that in both of the pre-election surveys, the majority of respondents felt that the election would be fair with very few believing that it would not be fair (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Expected Fairness of Pilkada in Pre-Election Surveys

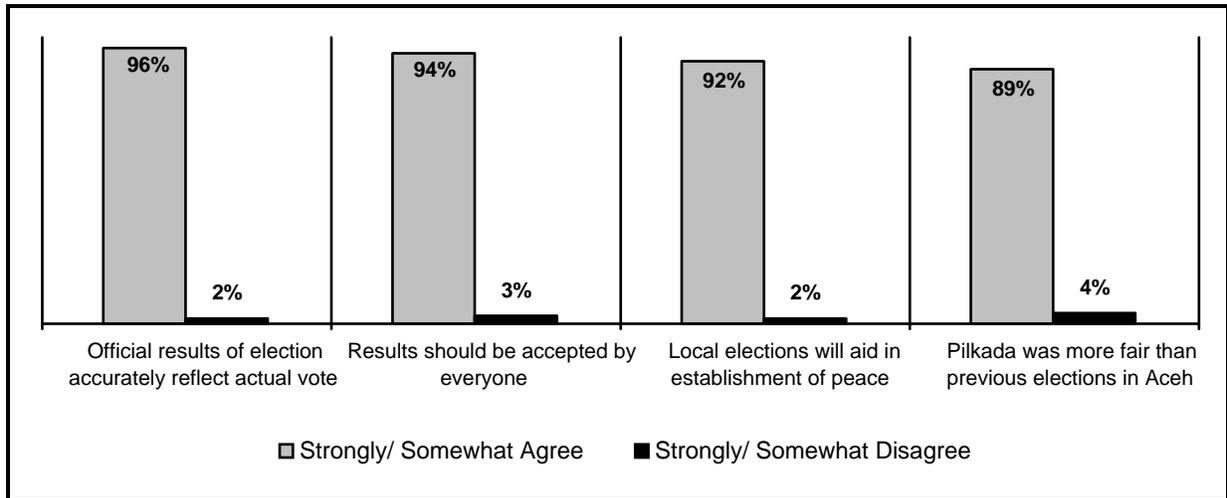


“How fair and honest do you expect the upcoming local elections to be: Completely fair and honest, somewhat fair and honest, not too fair and honest, not at all fair and honest?”

In the second pre-election survey, 68% felt that the election would be completely or mostly fair, compared to only 6% who thought it would not be fair. A little more than a quarter did not offer an opinion, most likely because they did not have enough information to make a judgment on the fairness of the election. In the post-election survey (presumably judging the fairness of the election after observing it) 92% of respondents said that the election was completely or mostly fair.

Opinions on other questions in all three surveys also offer evidence that the vast majority of Aceh residents expected, and eventually found, the election to be a positive experience. Close to nine in ten or more of the respondents in the two pre-election surveys felt that the results of the election would reflect the actual vote and that the elections would result in the establishment of peace in Aceh. These opinions carried over to the post-election survey with almost all respondents rating the election highly (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attitudes toward Election in Post-Election Survey

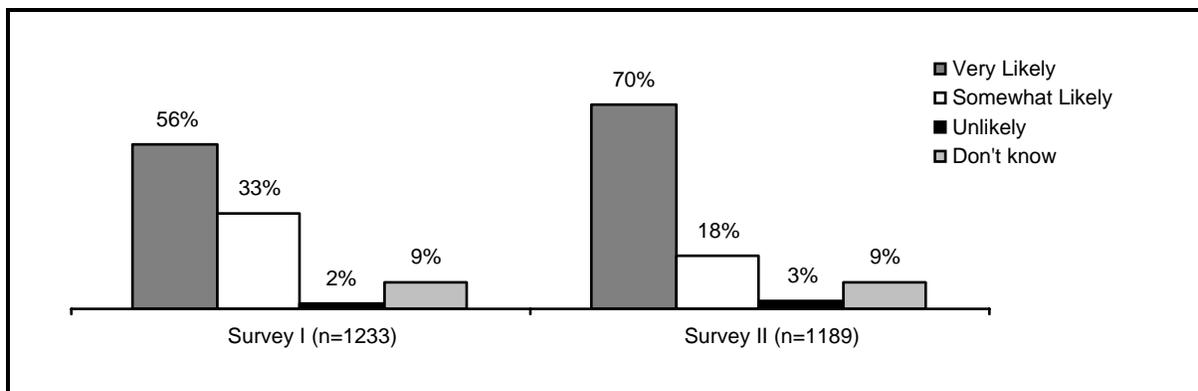


“Please tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with each of the following statements.” (n = 1203)

The large level of agreement with the statements above points to the perceived success of the *pilkada*—at least in the eyes of ordinary residents of Aceh. 90% or more of the respondents in the post-election survey thought the official results reflected the actual vote and that these results should be accepted by everyone in Aceh. Similar percentages also thought the local elections would aid in the establishment of peace, and that the election was fairer than previous elections in Aceh.

Given the positive expectations and evaluation of the election, and because of its historical significance, it is not surprising that close to eight in ten registered voters voted in the election. Data from the pre-election survey predicted that the turnout would be high (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Likelihood of Voting (Pre-Election Surveys)

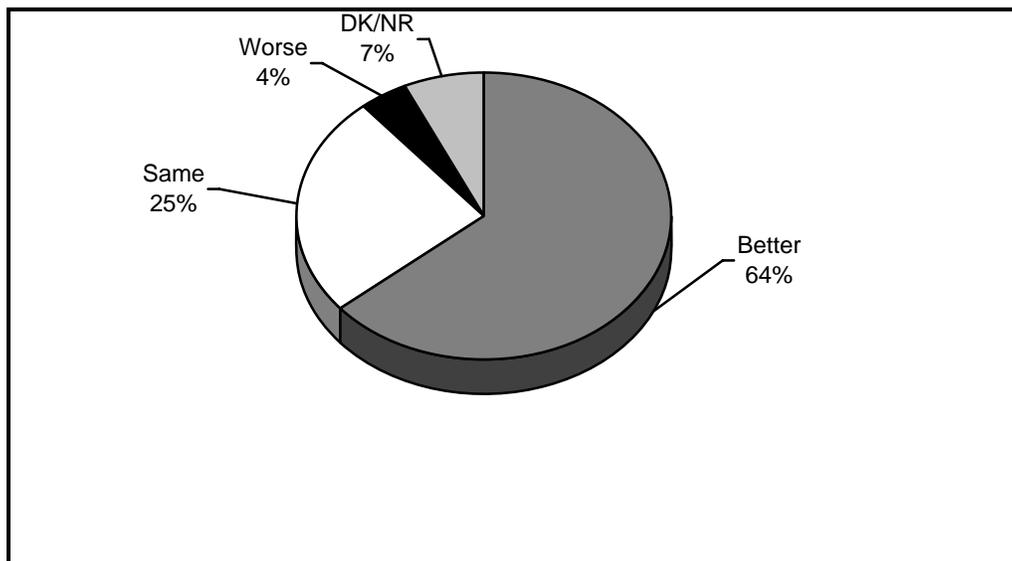


“How likely are you to vote in the upcoming local elections? Are you very likely, somewhat likely, somewhat unlikely, or very unlikely to vote in the election?”

Among those who say they voted in the election, very few reported actions that would bring into question the conduct of the election. Just 4% of those who said they voted responded that they knew of an acquaintance who was offered a reward in exchange for voting for a specific candidate, and 2% said they knew of an acquaintance who was pressured to vote in a specific manner.

One of the findings discussed earlier was the fact that most Aceh residents expect that the elections will lead to the establishment of peace in Aceh. One key component of that peace is the relationship between Aceh and the central government in Jakarta. Data from the post-election survey suggests that the majority of Aceh residents believe that the relationship between the central government and Aceh can be described as good or very good (68%), while 23% described it as bad or very bad. A majority also believe that relations between the central government and Aceh have improved over the past year (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Change in Relationship between Aceh and Central Government



"In your opinion, has the relationship between Aceh and the central government in Jakarta improved over the past year, stayed the same, or deteriorated over the past year?" (n=1203)

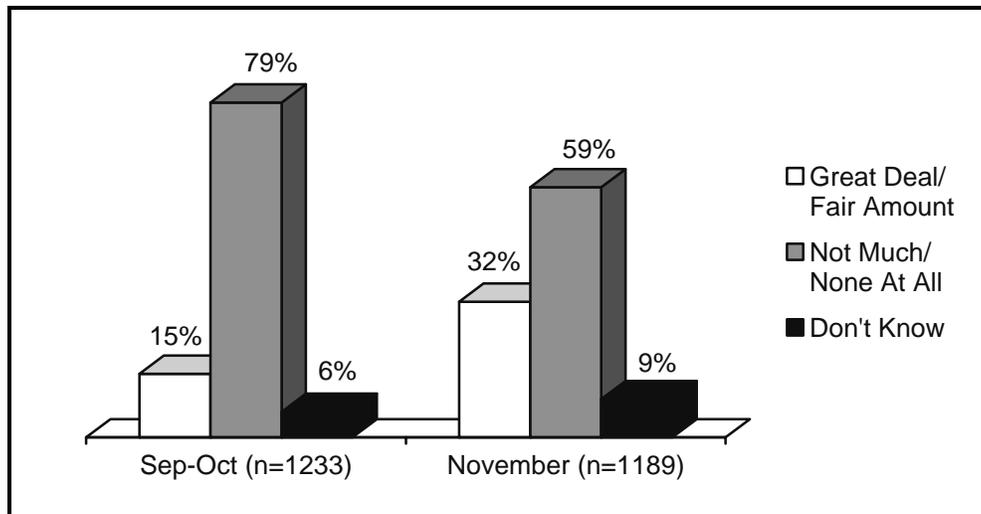
About two-thirds believe that the relationship between Aceh and the central government has gotten better while a quarter think it has remained the same. Only 4% believe the relationship has gotten worse. Residents of Aceh also have high hopes for the future of the relationship. Despite the fact that Governor Yusuf Irwandi is a former leader of GAM, 76% of respondents in the post-election survey said that his election was a positive development for the relationship between Aceh and the central government.

GENERAL LACK OF INFORMATION ON ELECTION PROCESS

While the survey data shows that there were positive expectations for and evaluations of the elections, it also shows that the majority of Aceh residents said that they did not have much or any information on the election process. While the 2006 *pilkada* was deemed a success, many observers have identified concerns about the implementation of the election that, in the case of a closer election, may have led to tensions in the post-election environment. One of these concerns is the lack of information about election procedures among voters. This issue should be addressed in time for future election cycles in Aceh, especially since such elections may not benefit from the generally celebratory atmosphere surrounding the 2006 *pilkada*.

One notable finding from the surveys is that the majority of Aceh residents said that they had little or no information throughout the course of the election process for the *pilkada*. Though there was an increase from the first to the second survey in the percentage of residents who said they had a great deal or fair amount of information on the election process, a majority still lacked this information two weeks before the election (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Level of Information on Election Process, Trend



“In your own opinion, how much information do you have about the election process for the upcoming local elections?”

The lack of information on the election process was spread throughout society, with even well-educated respondents and those with a great deal of media access saying that they did not have much or any information on the election process.

One interesting point emerged from the second pre-election survey. It indicated that many Aceh residents were exposed to messages on the election process, yet a majority said that they did not have much or any information about the process. In the second pre-election survey, 49% said that they had watched messages about the elections on television and a similar percentage said they had read them in newspapers, while

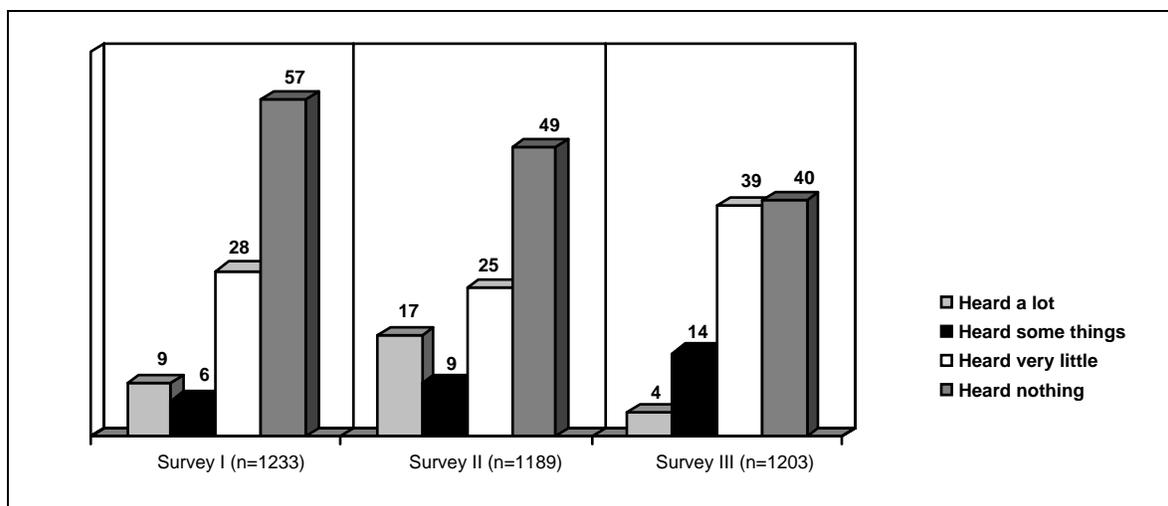
36% had heard them on the radio. This data seems to suggest that even though residents might have been exposed to messages on the election process, these messages did not provide them with sufficient information to say that they were informed about the process.

One indication of this lack of knowledge is that in both pre-election surveys a large majority of respondents were not aware of the requirements for a candidate winning an election in the first round of the election. The questions used to gauge knowledge of these procedures were different in the two pre-election surveys, but they both showed a large majority lacking knowledge of the 25% threshold to win an election in the first round. An inability to understand this stipulation in the electoral code could have had negative repercussions in the case of a close election.

The survey data also shows that the majority of respondents in the pre-election surveys lacked knowledge on *Komite Independen Pemilihan* (KIP), the body responsible for organizing the *pilkada*. In both the September and November surveys, less than a third of respondents said that KIP was responsible for organizing the election. In the first survey, only 18% said that KIP was responsible for organizing the election whereas 29% cited the *Komisi Pemilihan Umum Daerah* (KPUD) and 23% cited the *Komisi Pemilihan Umum* (KPU). This improved in the second survey with 33% naming KIP as responsible for organizing the election, but 38% still named KPU or KPUD and a further 31% did not know who was responsible for organizing the election. Only in the post-election survey did a substantial percentage of residents (49%) say that KIP was responsible. But half still could not correctly identify KIP.

The lack of recognition of KIP’s role in the election goes hand-in-hand with a lack of information on KIP. When asked how much they had read or heard about KIP, 26% or less in each of the three surveys said that they had heard a lot or even some things about KIP (Figure 6).

Figure 6. How Much Heard or Read about KIP? (in %)



“How much have you heard about the Komite Independen Pemilihan (KIP)? Have you heard a lot of things about this body, heard some things, heard very few things, or have you not heard anything about KIP?”

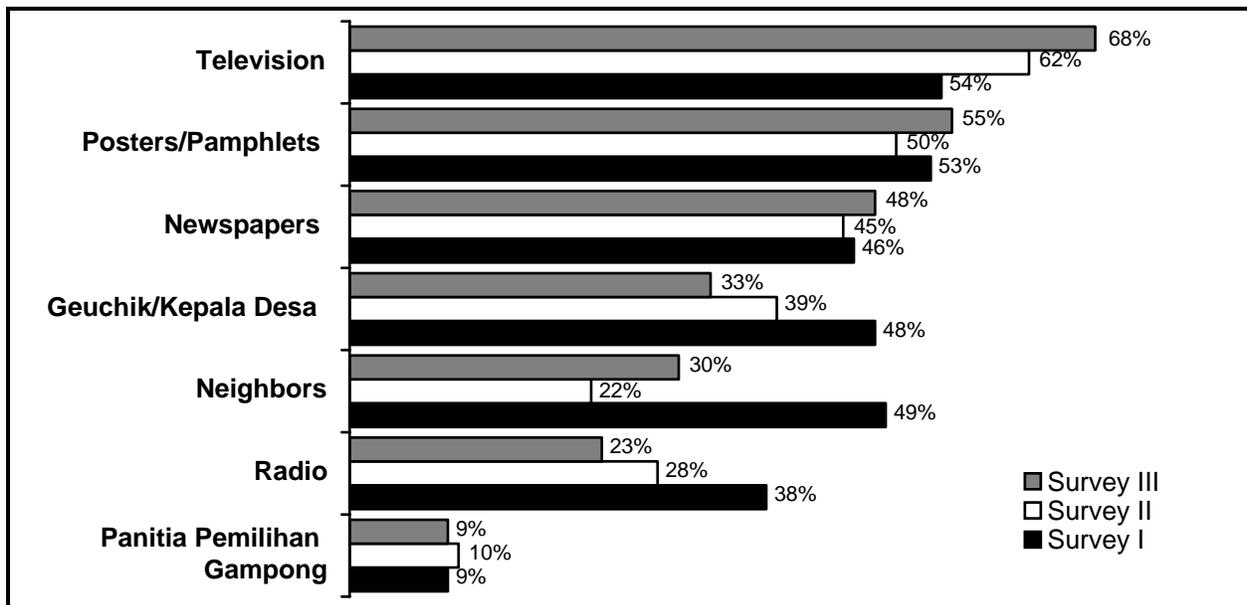
The large majority of respondents in all three surveys said that they had heard very little or nothing at all about KIP. The data shows that respondents with greater access to media were more likely to have heard a lot or some things about KIP. However, even among respondents with access to multiple media sources a majority said they had heard little or nothing about KIP. Given that KIP was created before this election, the lack of awareness of the body is not surprising but the KIP should use the success of the 2006 *pilkada* to make Aceh residents aware of the constructive role it played in delivering these elections.

One reason for KIP to market itself is because those who have read or heard something about KIP tend to be satisfied with its work. This is not surprising given earlier discussion on the largely positive evaluations of the election. In each of the first two pre-election surveys, more than six in ten respondents who had heard or read at least a little about KIP were satisfied with its performance. In the post-election survey, this percentage jumped to 89%.

Respondents to the post-election survey were also asked if they had heard or read about Panwaslih, the body responsible for adjudicating election disputes. As in the case of KIP, few (22%) had heard or read a lot or some things about Panwaslih, while the majority had heard only a few things or nothing at all about Panwaslih. Among those who had heard at least a little about Panwaslih, the vast majority (88%) were satisfied with its work.

According to the survey data, a mix of media and non-media sources should be utilized in order to reach a large audience effectively during any voter education campaign (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Media Sources Rated Reliable for Information on Elections



“Listed on this card are several sources through which information about the local elections (pilkada) could be provided to you and others in your community. Please pick the four sources you think have provided you the most reliable information on the elections?”

The perceived reliability of information sources on the election process remained fairly consistent through the course of the election cycle. Television was felt to be a reliable source of information in all three surveys, and this opinion increased throughout the course of the surveys. A non-media source—posters and pamphlets—was consistently rated as a reliable source in all three surveys, with newspapers running a close third.

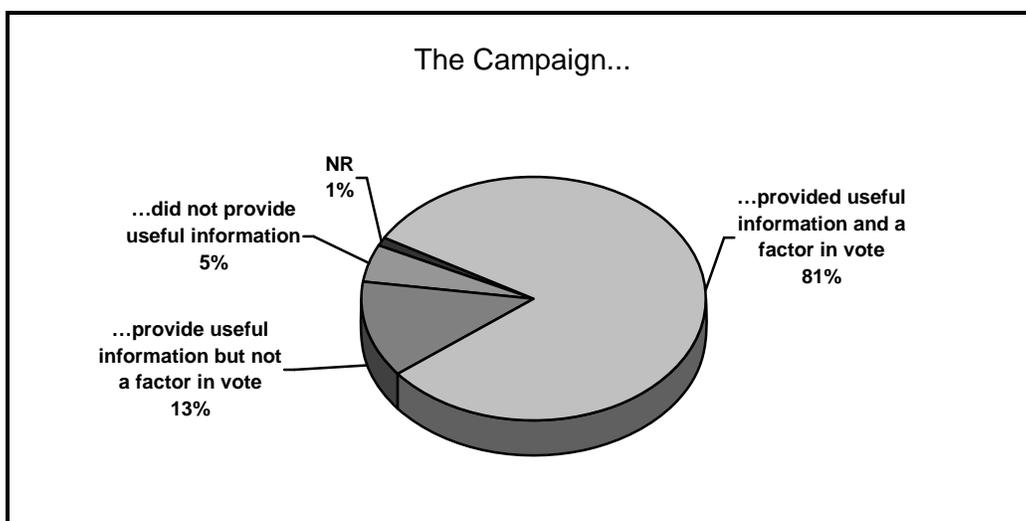
It is interesting to note that two sources considered reliable by a large percentage of respondents in the first survey—radio and neighbors—experienced a significant decline for the second and third surveys. This may be because Aceh residents were using these sources at the beginning of the election process, but later felt that they were not as reliable as other sources of information. A similar pattern can be observed for local officials (*Geuchik/Kepala Desa*). There is a noticeable decline in mentions of these officials as reliable sources from the first to the third survey.

There are also urban-rural differences in use of sources. Urban residents were more likely to cite the reliability of media sources than rural residents, while rural residents were more likely to cite the reliability of local officials and their neighbors.

Survey data from the second pre-election survey indicates that many respondents were exposed to information on the candidates in the election. More than three-quarters in this survey (78%) reported that they had seen campaign posters, 69% had been handed leaflets or brochures from the candidates, and 52% had read ads for candidates in newspapers. Smaller percentages had seen ads on TV (38%) or listened to them on the radio (36%).

The importance of the campaign period also was emphasized in the post-election survey with the vast majority of those who reported voting saying that the campaign period played a factor in their vote (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Importance of Campaign Period



"I will now read you three statements about the campaign period before the election. Please tell me which of these statements you most agree with."

For 81% of voters, the campaign provided useful information and was a factor in their vote. Thirteen percent said that the campaign provided useful information but was not a factor in their vote, and 5% said that the campaign did not provide useful information to them.

One critical conclusion that can be drawn from the data from the three surveys is that despite the reported usefulness of the campaign, there was a general lack of knowledge about the election process and electoral institutions among a majority of Aceh residents during the course of the election period. The majority of residents through the course of the three surveys reported that they had little or no information on the election process. This is despite the fact that a large percentage of respondents were exposed to election-related messages. Even residents with a relatively high level of access to media said that they lacked information on the process. This finding is critical for future voter education efforts in Aceh.

This general lack of information could have been driven by either a lack of sufficient repetition of voter education messages, or by ineffective messages. While the survey data does not pinpoint either of these two causes, the fact that even a large percentage of those exposed to the messages reported a lack of information suggests that the content of the messaging may not have been sufficient to meet the needs of Aceh voters.

For future elections, it is also critical that the majority of Aceh residents understand the unique role played by KIP. During the recent election process, only about a quarter of Aceh residents had heard at least something about KIP. The rest had heard very little or nothing at all about this institution. Since KIP is uniquely responsible for organizing future elections in Aceh, an understanding of its role can only serve to lend greater legitimacy for future elections.

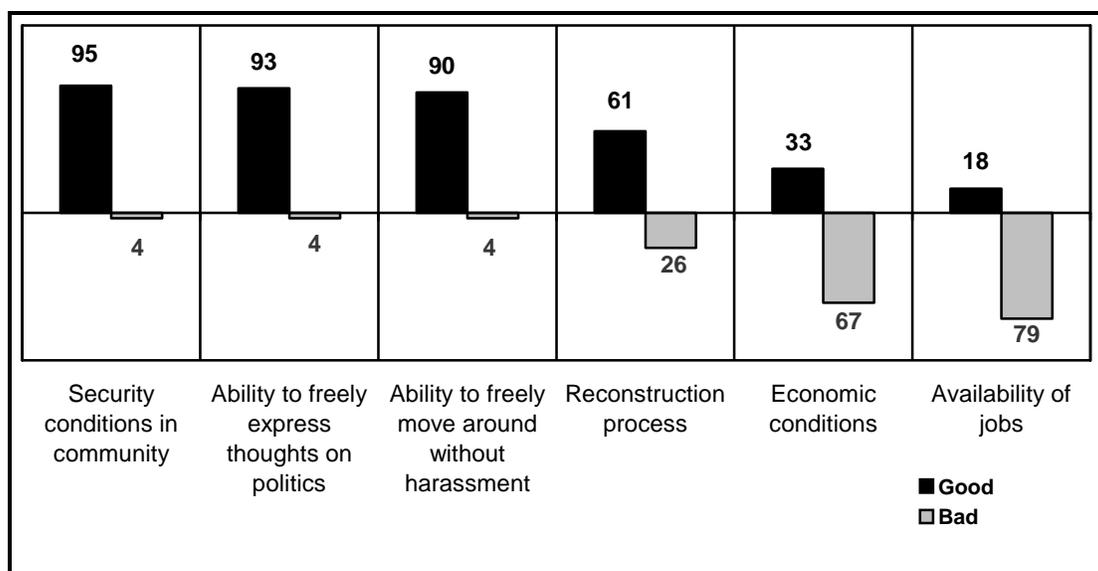
Given the overwhelming nature of the victory by Governor Irwandi and the generally positive assessments of Election Day, the lack of information was not a negative factor for the *pilkada*. However, Aceh faces other critical elections in 2009 for provincial and national-level legislative positions that are likely to be more highly-contested and lend themselves to higher possibility for tensions. Aceh's unique electoral status in Indonesia—as the only province where local parties can run candidates for provincial and (through affiliation) national legislative institutions—will further add to the uncertainty surrounding the 2009 legislative elections. In this environment, it will be essential for the voting public to receive as much information about the election process as possible, including characteristics unique to Aceh. A stronger and more effective voter education process will be crucial in helping ensure that misunderstandings are minimized during and after the election process.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

The *pilkada* was an important step in the process of putting the contentious relationship between Aceh and the Indonesian central government to rest, and starting a new chapter in Aceh’s history. Data from the surveys indicates that most Aceh residents are satisfied with the security conditions in Aceh, but that they are concerned about economic conditions and would like Governor Irwandi and his government to focus on economic issues.

Figure 9 shows how residents of Aceh evaluated specific socio-political aspects of life in Aceh in the post-election survey.

Figure 9. Evaluation of Specific Conditions in Aceh



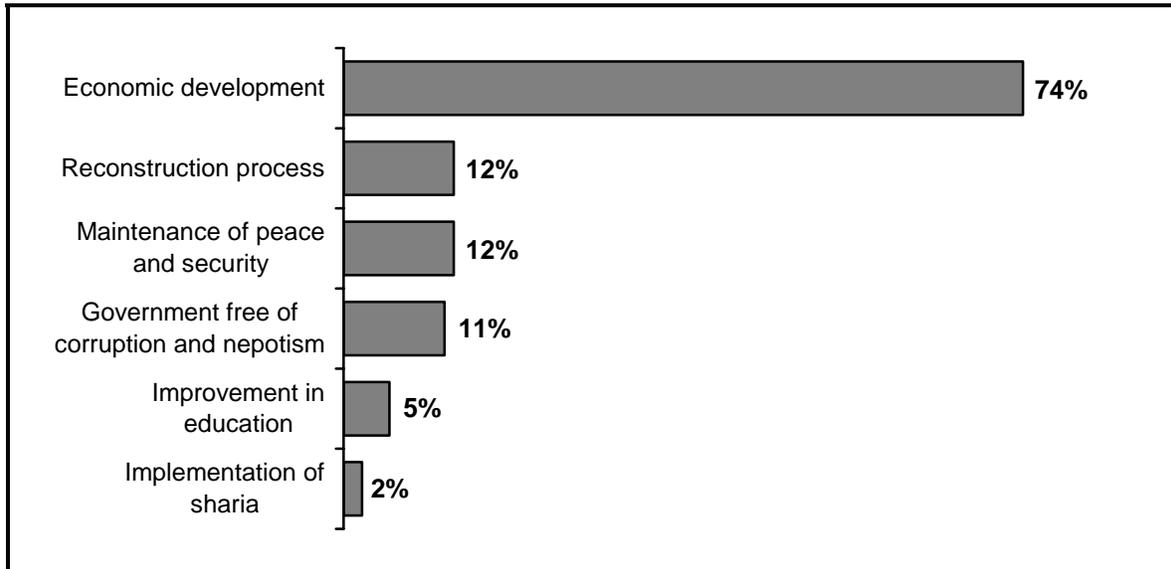
“I will now read to you several aspects of life in Aceh. Please tell me how you rate the current condition of each of the following aspects of life in Aceh: very good, good, bad, or very bad.”

The figure above indicates that nine in ten Aceh residents (or more) are of the opinion that the security conditions in their community are good, that they are able to express their thoughts on politics freely and that they have the ability to move around freely without harassment. This data, as well as the generally positive evaluations of the *pilkada*, indicates that residents of Aceh are happy with the political benefits of peace in their province.

A majority (61%) also rate the reconstruction process as good. However, there is generally negative sentiment toward economic conditions in Aceh. Almost four in five (79%) rate the availability of jobs as being bad and 67% have the same opinion on overall economic conditions in Aceh. This question also was asked in the two pre-election surveys, and the pattern of responses was similar to that observed in Figure 7 above. The fact that economic concerns were voiced consistently in all three surveys points to the primacy of economic issues for the

majority of Aceh residents. This finding is further reinforced by the post-election survey in which nearly three-quarters of respondents said that the Irwandi-Nazar government should focus on economic development in its first 100 days in office (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Most Important Issues for Irwandi-Nazar Government to Address



“What issues would you like the Irwandi and Nazar government to focus on in its first 100 days in office?”

While other issues also are listed in the figure above, it is clear that economic development and the reconstruction process are the primary needs that Aceh residents want the Irwandi-Nazar government to focus on in its first days in office.

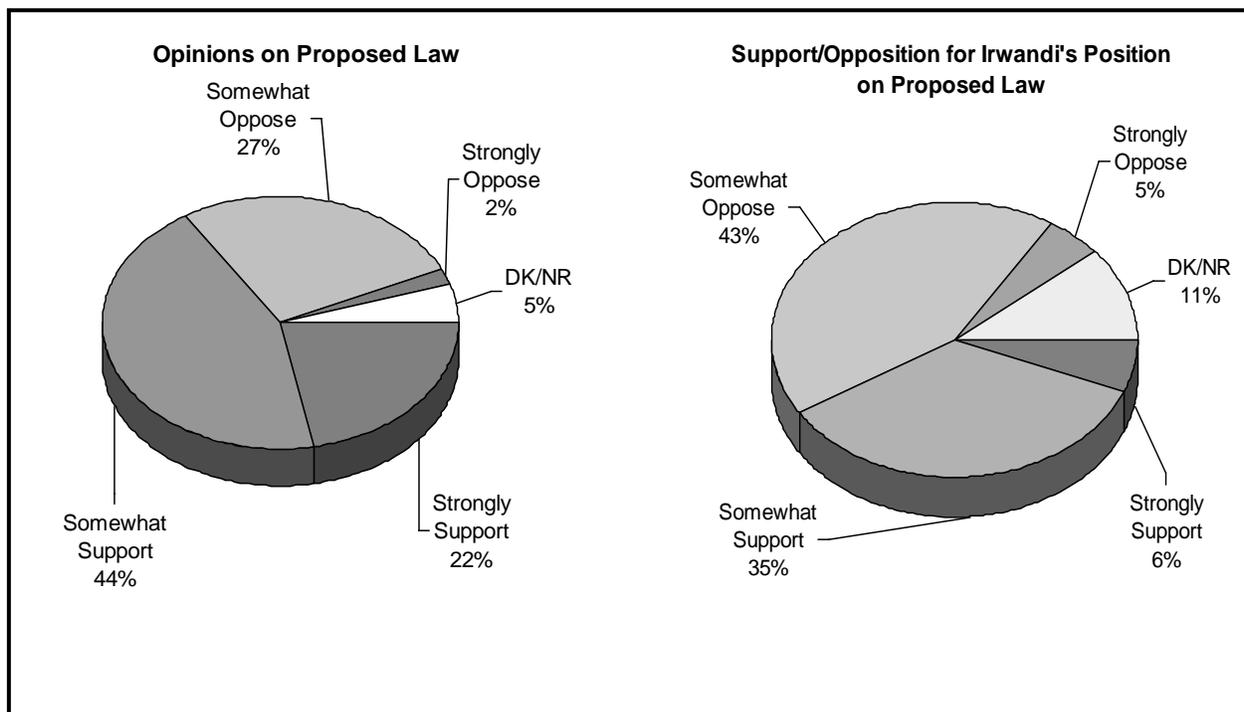
The data from the surveys not only indicates that the Irwandi-Nazar government is expected to focus on economic issues, but also that many residents expect to see quick results from their actions. When respondents on the post-election survey were asked how quickly they expect the Irwandi-Nazar government to tackle economic development issues, 44% of respondents said it would take less than a year, 38% said it would take from one to two years, and 14% said it would take more than two years. The expectation of quick improvement in the economic situation by a significant percentage of respondents is a challenge for the government.

There is similar sentiment on the creation of jobs in Aceh. Thirty-six percent expect that the job creation issue will be tackled by the Irwandi-Nazar government within a year, 28% expect it will take one to two years, and 19% expect it to take more than two years.

Data from the post-election survey shows some interesting results on an issue that became important in the post-campaign period in Aceh, a proposed law on amputating the hands of thieves who are convicted of stealing a certain amount of goods. In the days following his election, Governor Irwandi indicated that he was opposed to this law. Respondents to the post-

election survey were asked for their opinions on the law, and the data shows an interesting pattern of responses (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Opinions on Hand Amputation Law



“Recently, a law has been proposed that would require the amputation of the hands of convicted thieves in Aceh who steal something that is worth more than 94g of gold. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose this law?”

“Governor-elect Irwandi has said that he opposes the law to amputate thieves’ hands and that he would block this law. Do you strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose Irwandi’s position on this issue?”

When respondents were initially asked about the law without reference to Governor Irwandi’s position on the law, a majority (66%) expressed support for the law while 29% opposed it. However, after respondents were told that Governor Irwandi opposes this law, 41% say that they supported his position while 48% said they opposed his position. Thus, Governor Irwandi’s position seems to influence the opinions of a significant percentage of Aceh residents and may indicate that attitudes on religious matters—and Sharia in particular—may not be fixed.