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### **Performing in the 2004 Indonesian elections**

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**Dr. Jennifer Lindsay**

Asia Research Institute  
National University of Singapore  
[arijml@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arijml@nus.edu.sg)

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#### **Asia Research Institute**

National University of Singapore  
Shaw Foundation Building, Block AS7, Level 4  
5 Arts Link, Singapore 117570  
Tel: (65) 6874 3810  
Fax: (65) 6779 1428  
Website: [www.ari.nus.edu.sg](http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg)  
Email: [arisee@nus.edu.sg](mailto:arisee@nus.edu.sg)

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## Performing in the 2004 Indonesian elections<sup>i</sup>

*Jennifer Lindsay*

Late June-early July 2004 was an exciting time in Indonesia. The final stages of three major competitive events were being played out concurrently on national television. On 2 July, two of the remaining eleven candidates in *Indonesia Idol* were voted out in the *babak spektakuler* (“spectacular phase”) based on viewers’ votes sent in by phone text messages.<sup>ii</sup> At midnight on 4 July, the Euro Cup football final – an unexpected encounter between two outsider teams – was broadcast live, with Greece narrowly defeating Portugal. Then early the following day, on 5 July, the polls opened for Indonesians to make their choice between five presidential/vice-presidential teams in the first round of the country’s first-ever direct presidential election. The last round of the elections would take place later in September. All these events had stars, winners and losers, and were truly media events, as Dayan and Katz describe them (1992; 1999), designed for and by the media.

The worlds of popular culture and politics in Indonesia crossed more intensively than ever before in the build-up to the July 5 presidential election, and the mass media was central to this process. Much of the election campaigning took place in the broadcast media, in talk shows, messages and party advertisements, as had previously been the case in the 1999 and 2004 legislative elections when viewers and voters celebrated post New Order airing of difference (Lindsay 2002). But the 2004 presidential election saw something new, namely a marked increase in the participation of national pop culture artists – called “*selebritis*” and known to Indonesian audiences via television – in the campaigning. The declared participation of “*selebritis*” in politics had been on the increase since 1999, with a number of “personalities” standing as legislative candidates in April 2004. But in the July presidential campaign, this participation suddenly exploded as a trend, with wide print and broadcast media coverage of celebrities’ choices, and celebrities vying for public airtime to display their support for their favoured presidential candidate. At the same time, the presidential candidates themselves increasingly presented themselves competitively as performer-celebrities.

This paper examines this phenomenon in the context of the established Indonesian practice of artist involvement in election campaigns. Looking at the 2004 elections in particular, the paper asks two questions: firstly, how does the new celebrity participation in politics differ from and alter earlier practices of performer participation in election campaigns in Indonesia? Secondly,

what does this practice and the trend of candidates-as-performers suggest about Indonesian attitudes towards elections?

### **Background: Performers and politicians**

The worlds of performance and politics have always been closely intertwined in Indonesia. Politicians have long drawn on Indonesian performance genres for their own communicative strategies. One has only to recall the oratory of Indonesia's nationalist leader and first president, Soekarno, who drew strongly on the oral tradition of Javanese *wayang kulit* both in his style of delivery, and in imagery and vocabulary. More recently, one might recall the spectacle of New Order politicians like the State Secretary (*Sekneg*) Moerdiono singing popular *dangdut* songs at public rallies, a trend documented by Lono Simatupang (1996). Political activism in Indonesia has also long been highly performative. Street politics and political demonstrations, particularly in the late New Order period, were often performance events staged for maximum symbolic impact, as Bain (2004) and Berman (1999) have described.

Performance has been both a means of expression and the subject of important wider cultural debates in Indonesia, from the "Great Debate" (to use Claire Holt's term) that began in the 1930s about the direction of national culture, to the bitter cultural polemics of the late 1950s and early 1960s about the place of "socialist realism" and "art", so well documented by Foulcher (1986).

In the "Great Debate", proponents of a forward-looking national culture that would make a clear break with "traditional", "regional" culture seen to be associated with the past, found little in "traditional" performance forms such as the shadow-puppet performance, *wayang kulit*, to either admire or maintain. "What can the *wayang*", Indonesia's first Prime Minister Sjahrir wrote, "with all its simple symbolism and mysticism, parallel to the allegory and wisdom of Medieval Europe, still offer to us intellectually or culturally? Practically nothing." (Sjahrir under pen-name Sjahrazad 1945:61, my translation). However, the very popularity of "traditional" art forms helped to secure their place in a cultural nationalism that rather stressed local identity over "the West" and, later on, a political role for them in the new republic. Prior to the 1955 elections, for instance, both the Nationalist Party (PNI) and Communist Party (PKI) sought support among *dalang* (puppet masters) in Java, recognizing their influence over the *abangan* (syncretist nominal-Moslem) community (Feith 1957:32–33). By the mid 1950s, LEKRA (the "Institute of People's Culture") found performance forms such as *wayang*, *reog*, *lenong*, *ketoprak*, *ludruk*, and

*randai* not only legitimate as national culture, but powerful examples of People's Culture (Peacock 1968; Meier 1987).

It is difficult, in fact, to pry apart performance (and the larger concept of “art”) and politics in this period. To take a stand on “art” or “culture” was to make a political statement, even if that statement was a declaration of the non-political, “humanist” value of art. “Art”, and performance as part of “art”, was in a very real sense never apolitical. It involved allegiance in some way to the project of national culture, and a position in the widening political divide between opposing ideological streams on social commitment and the arts.

That divide blew viciously apart with the so-called attempted Communist coup of 30 September 1965, and artists with declared socialist leanings, and those merely perceived to have had such sympathies, were subsequently hounded and imprisoned. Many performers kept their art alive through long years of incarceration (Hersri 1995). Even after their release, and until the end of the New Order in 1998, these artists were still prevented from pursuing their artistic work. Art and performance have thus always been taken seriously in Indonesia, and performers, writers and visual artists, from colonial times on, have taken risks and often paid dearly for their practices, beliefs and affiliations, and have also found solace in their art in times of oppression. It is important to recall this at the outset of the following discussion that focuses on the apparently less-than-serious participation of artists and celebrities in the 2004 elections.

It is also important to recall that in Indonesia the arts—and the performing arts in particular—have long been considered a fertile field for political promotion and propaganda, and as a vehicle for political messages. This was true both during the Orde Lama (Old Order), with the Communist-Party affiliated LEKRA (Institute of People's Culture) sponsorship of performances to spread political messages, and during the Orde Baru (New Order), with government sponsorship under the umbrella of the state party and civil-service bureaucracy, *Golkar* (*Golongan Karya*, technically, “Functional Groups”). It was particularly true of “traditional” performance forms (such as *wayang*, *ketoprak*, *randai*, *ludruk* etc), which were perceived to be close to the “people”, and also more open to direction from sponsors. Traditional performing arts during the New Order were also targeted as tools of the regime and the national development project, and used to promote state policies and convey messages about sacrifices required in the name of progress.

## Performers and Elections

(I) *What, no performers? And you call yourself a political party?*

Feith's description of the 1955 campaign for the first and only general election mentions "meetings where popular theatre was the attraction" and the "*ramai* (bright, noisy) fair-like atmosphere of mass meetings" (Feith 1957:21–22), but the emphasis at these meetings was more on voter training and instruction on voting itself. Since elections were revived under the New Order in 1971, performer participation has been an established practice and has taken two forms. Firstly, the affiliation of "big name" or "star" performers with particular parties at campaign time, or the formal identification of performers with parties, and secondly, the commissioning of "generic" popular performances for entertaining the crowd at campaign rally events, using performers who are not necessarily well-known.

During the New Order, performers were enticed and coerced into support of the State party, Golkar, particularly at campaign times. As the state apparatus, Golkar offered good performance fees, as well as access to government sponsorship for both official and "private" performances commissioned by the political elite and cultural missions abroad. More significantly, rejection of Golkar "sponsorship", or overt support of other parties, brought sanctions in the form of denied access to funds, projects and the state-controlled media.

During the New Order, elections were held in 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997. The 1971 elections, the first after the bloodshed of 1965–66, were held in July, and the campaign period began in April. The government party, Golkar, was quick to mobilize performers in its campaign. Ward describes the new election campaign style as follows:

The most publicized part of Golkar's campaign was the Safari tour. Safari was the name given to tours by teams of popular Djakarta singers and musicians organized and financed by Bapilu [*Badan Pengendalian Pemilihan Umum*, Body for Managing the General Election] in Tanah Abang, and dispatched to every Indonesian province except West Irian in May 1971. Each team, with as many as twenty members traveling by plane across the seas and by train and bus across land, was led by the *penghubungs* [liaison personnel] for each province....The entertainment provided by Djakarta artists (with local dances often added by regional artists) was combined with election speeches in each regency capital, delivered by local Golkar notables or electoral candidates. When Safari arrived in Surabaya on 5 May, the two teams were met by a jubilant rally of perhaps ten thousand Golkar supporters headed by Said, were escorted in a ticker-tape procession around the city, were received officially by the East Java *Muspida* [*Musyawarah Pimpinan Daerah*, Regional Leadership Council], and were asked to present a show of pop songs in Surabaya's vast Gelora stadium. The same pattern occurred in each regency. (Ward 1974:85–6)

Golkar's campaign organizers recruited a total of 324 artists for the "Team Kesenian Safari Golkar 1971", comprising singers, comedians, dancers and bands. The 13 bands included *Koes Plus*, the 60 singers included Titiek Puspa, the comedians included Bing Slamet, and musicians included Rofiqoh Dharto Wahab and his *rebana* orchestra (*Tempo* 9 April 1977). Fourteen planes were mobilised to transport this "Artis Safari" around the country over the months of May and June.

The Golkar safari became a regular feature of New Order election campaigns. The big-name Jakarta artists were predominantly singers, known through radio, TV and the recording industry, and included Hetty Koes Endang, Elvie Sukesu and Titiek Puspa (who composed a song for Soeharto, "Bapak Pembangunan" (Father of Development)). The only challenge to Golkar's use of such "star" performers during election campaigns came from the PPP party, which managed to get *dangdut* star Rhoma Irama to head its 1977 election campaign. As a result, he was blacklisted by state television, TVRI, the only TV channel at the time. In 1992, however, Rhoma Irama left PPP and joined the Golkar campaign, an act considered to be a major betrayal by PPP supporters and one that was surely a factor in the decline in his popularity, despite his reappearance on TV.

In the field of traditional arts, Golkar also moved methodically to secure its influence, and wield it at campaign times by commissioning local star performers. This was particularly true of Javanese *wayang kulit*, which in the Old Order had been a contested field for propagating political ideas, as one of the performance forms supported by LEKRA. During the Soeharto regime, Golkar funds and control for *wayang kulit* were channeled through two "national" organizations, both offshoots of the Indonesian Association for the Promotion of the Art of the Dalang, *Ganasidi (Lembaga Pembina Seni Padalangan Indonesia)* which was established in response to Presidential directives in 1969 and functioned under direct military patronage (Clara, 1985:139–151)

Presidential funds were channeled to chosen *dalang* through Pepadi (*Persatuan Padalangan Indonesia*, or Indonesian Association for the Art of the *Dalang*, established in 1971) and Senawangi (*Sekretariat Nasional Pewayangan Indonesia* or National Secretariat for *Wayang*, established in 1975). Funds were used to sponsor performances, and to support the purchase of costumes, puppets and gamelan instruments, as *dalang* were asked to create and perform new stories supporting government programs and promoting Golkar and its mythologized iconography (e.g. the banyan tree), often using puppets designed for this purpose. Leading *dalang* such as

Anom Soeroto and Mantep Soedarsono performed under Golkar patronage and were handsomely promoted both in Jakarta and on tours abroad. Even imprisoned leftist *dalang* were made to participate in the New Order reinvention of *wayang* in the name of Golkar. Tristuti Rachmadi, confined on the island of Buru, was made to compose a *wayang* scenario titled “Revelation of the Golden Banyan Tree” for the 1977 general election (Hersri, 1995:19).

In addition to targeting popular “name” stars in both the traditional and commercial arenas from pop music to *wayang kulit*, Golkar also employed lesser-known performers of popular genres as entertainers at campaign rallies and parades. Writing on the 1982 elections in Solo, Pemberton [1986] mentions local *wayang wong* clowns performing for Golkar along with nationally-known pop star Elvie Sukei. Other political parties used the same strategy during campaign time, the most common popular entertainment being *dangdut* bands. Theoretically, groups with no “name” could be asked to entertain the crowd at a rally of any party, but Golkar paid the highest fees, and declining a Golkar invitation was certainly considered unwise. Although they could ostensibly perform as they wished, in reality groups became “tainted” by a perceived affiliation when they appeared at a particular party rally, and were unlikely then to be invited by a competing party. The power of labeling thus lay in the hands of the inviting or commissioning party.

Since the fall of the Soeharto regime in May 1998 and Golkar’s loss of influence, the link between performing artists and political parties has become at once sharper and more fluid: “sharper” in the sense that, in the legislative elections of 1999 and 2004 and the two rounds of the 2004 direct presidential election (July and September), “celebrity” artists were more likely to make clear, public declarations of party or candidate support; “more fluid” in the sense that lesser-known performers have been able to move more flexibly between parties.

Garin Nugroho’s short film about the April 2004 legislative election campaign entitled “The Fear Factor” shows the new fluidity at work in the world of small-scale *dangdut* singers in Yogyakarta. His film crew follows the singers (all female) and their booking agent as they perform before crowds (all male) at one rally after another, for one party after another, changing their costumes (but not their act) to match the party colour. The campaign rally events are treated as just another performance gig. No particular party has the power to make a label of affiliation stick to these performers. Performing at a Golkar rally no longer means they will be spurned by PDI or vice versa. It is the artists who call the shots, and perform for all parties, the more the



merrier. “Let’s have an election every year!” one of the singers says in the film. “It doesn’t matter who is president as long as we can dance!”

The situation with regard to *wayang kulit* has also become more fluid since 1998. Many well-known *dalang* are now approached by various parties during election campaigns, and they agree to perform for more than one. This is true even of the Golkar-stamped *dalang* of the New Order. Mantep Soedarsono claimed to have performed for “all major parties” last legislative campaign (April 2004), and Anom Soeroto performed for PAN, PDIP and Golkar. It may be that these *dalang* are playing safe by spreading their allegiance wide, or it may be that they also now merely treat campaigns as opportunities for work. Either way, this new trend indicates a weakening of the power of any political party to “stamp” these performers as their own. As Bambang Murtijoso, lecturer at STSI (College of the Arts) Solo said, “parties now don’t like to use *dalang*, because they think the *dalang* use parties”.<sup>iii</sup>

In 2004, it was notably the “showbiz” *dalang*—those whose performances are large-scale events involving comedians, singers and dancers, and whose popularity is more reliant on television—who aligned with specific parties and candidates. Enthoes, for instance, supported PKB and Wiranto; Joko Edan supported PAN and Amien Rais; while Slenk declared support for PDI. In general, however, one can say that the traditional and popular (or popular traditional) arts with less television exposure, are now more flexible in their relation to political parties and candidates at election time. Like the *dangdut* singers in Garin’s film, the “nameless” (or TV nameless) popular artists can float; their appearance at a campaign rally is no longer necessarily considered to be a declaration of support.

### **Celebrities, performers, and political parties**

*What, no political party? And you call yourself a celebrity?*

As sociologists such as Alberoni (1962/trs 1972) and Marshall (1997) tell us, celebrities are formed via the media. They are known to the public through media exposure, and often entirely through that exposure. As media constructions, celebrities are marketable commodities; they have a name to sell to endorse certain products, including political candidates or parties. But conversely, as in the Indonesian campaign, they can use the public airtime provided by political campaigns to enhance their own celebrity status.

Since 1999, the Indonesian elections have increasingly become media events, and this has in turn increased the involvement of “celebrities” in the election campaigns. Having a name to sell so that a political party seeks one out is now the stamp of celebrity at election time in Indonesia. Whereas in years past a political party would invite well-known personalities (local performers, popular music singers, film stars) to make live appearances at campaign rallies; now it is more a collusion of interest between nationally-known (read “television”) personalities and political parties: celebrities wish to be sought by parties to show that they have a name worth selling, and at the same time political parties and candidates seek celebrity names for endorsement. Each side has television airtime and public promotion to offer.

The participation of “celebrities” in Indonesian elections is thus effectively sharpening class distinctions within the arts *through* politics, occurring at the point of performance in mass media, the world of showbiz. Artists with less access to that media space, the nameless *dangdut* performers of Garin’s film or even the *wayang kulit dalang* with less of a mass media following, now find themselves with less to “sell”. This is in one sense a liberation, permitting them to move more fluidly between parties at campaign time, as discussed above. In contrast, for those highly media-savvy urban “celebrities” from the Jakarta world of *sinetron* (TV drama and soap opera) artists, film actors, fashion models and musicians who came forth in the 2004 elections in Indonesia as never before, the commodity of ‘name’ restricts movement. The elections provided gigs for them and plenty of free exposure on TV and in the press to enhance their PR. But endorsement of one product means loyalty to that product; endorsement must be sharp. Having a “name”, being a celebrity, becomes synonymous with single product endorsement and identification.

Since 1999, celebrities have been participating in elections in Indonesia in various ways. Firstly, many now openly endorse a particular political party by making appearances (and performing) at party rallies, a long-established practice in Indonesia, as explained at the outset of this essay. They have become much more visible in the print and broadcast media during election campaigns, giving interviews and participating in discussions and debates. The media seeks their views. Celebrities also become involved in behind-the-scenes promotional teams for particular parties and candidates (“*tim sukses*”), contributing their promotional know-how and networks for fundraising. Finally, some agree to stand themselves as candidates for a particular political party.

In the first “reformasi” elections of 1999, it was notably more the older-generation film stars who came out in open support of particular parties. Eros Jarot, Slamet Raharjo and Sofan Sofian (all of whom had been activists during the Soeharto regime) supported Megawati and the PDIP campaign; Sofian stood for a parliamentary seat and was elected. By April 2004, disillusioned with Megawati, their loyalties had shifted, but they remained politically active. Eros formed his own party, PNBK. Prior to the April 2004 legislative elections, political parties actively sought “names” from the world of popular culture both as candidates and as campaign supporters. But in 2004, celebrity participation had moved to the world of *sinetron* actors, singers and models, and on the whole to a younger generation with no track record of political involvement.

One reason why parties rushed to find celebrities—and *sinetron* stars in particular—to stand as candidates, was to fulfill the new gender requirement that 30% of party candidates should be female. Female actors, singers and models were thus at once able to fill the gender and visibility requirements. The need for parties to find candidates with national visibility—that is, for “celebrities” rather than artists with only local reputations—was also a response to the freeing up of electoral residence requirements, which allowed parties to place their candidates for election in any electorate in the country. Celebrities were easily transportable candidates. Indonesia’s 2004 legislative elections were the first in which voters knew the names of party candidates, and were able to choose candidates rather than simply voting for a party. (Previously, voters could only choose parties, and the seats were filled later by party decision.) The change encouraged parties to field candidates who were well-known to the voters, including artists and celebrities. Media reports listed at least 32 “celebrity” candidates from various parties, of whom seven were successful in gaining seats in the legislature (PDIP 3; PD 3; PAN 1),<sup>iv</sup> an extremely high success rate. Susilo Bambang Yudoyono’s new Partai Demokrat fielded four celebrity candidates, three of whom gained seats (Windoro Ati; 27 February, 8 June).

Media interest in “artist candidates” (*caleg artis*) was high. Newspapers and journals profiled them, while television programs such as SCTV’s “Topic Minggu Ini” interviewed prominent artist candidates, and viewers then phoned in their “vote”. Artists and celebrities also became the focus of media attention for their political stand. Newspapers and journals queried which party they supported, or which party was seeking their support. The *dangdut* star Inul, for instance, was the subject of much speculation, and at one stage it was announced that a deal with PDIP was imminent. Yet interestingly, Inul declined all offers. Although her phenomenal popularity was already just beginning to wane, she had no need for campaign PR, nor any wish, it seems, to be

claimed by a single party. Celebrity product endorsement in politics is a status symbol in the sense that one is seen as having a name to sell, but non-endorsement can also mean, as with Inul, that although one has such a name, one does not need to sell it.

Media interest in celebrity participation in politics took a new turn with Indonesia's first direct presidential elections, when individuals rather than parties were the focus of voter choice. The April legislative elections, when voters knew party candidates in advance, were already a step in this direction, but as the presidential/vice-presidential teams comprised mixed parties, the personality component now became more important. There were five teams of personalities in the first round: Wiranto and Salahuddin Wahid; Megawati and Hasyim Muzadi; Amien Rais and Siswono Yudo Husodo; Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Jusuf Kalla; and Hamzah Haz and Agum Gumelar. With this shift, the worlds of celebrities and politics moved closer together and the link between the celebrities choosing and the object of their choice could be even more personalised.

The worlds of arts and politics thoroughly intersected in the media of popular culture. Over the month before the first stage of the presidential elections (held on July 5), magazines, newspapers and television featured numerous stories about celebrities' and artists' choices. The national weekly magazine *Gatra*, for instance, published a feature story on "100 Celebrities' Choice". The gossip columns in the major papers and television infotainment programs tracked the latest news of celebrities declaring their team support. SCTV broadcast both an artist debate held as a public event at Semanggi café in Jakarta, and a studio interview panel of artists arguing their support for presidential candidates, the format of which was the same as the earlier April SCTV program when the artists *were* the candidates.

### **Candidates as performers**

The distinction between the celebrities as candidates and celebrities as candidate-supporters was further blurred as presidential candidates vied for media coverage and popular support by themselves performing as singers and poetry-readers at the rallies and on TV. Ostensibly, this was to soften their image and help them relate to the public at a human level, but their competitive rivalry *as* performers became quite serious. It was no longer a case of some party figure like Moerdiono singing along with a *dangdut* band at a party rally, as happened in the Golkar Safari

days; indeed, the seriousness of the competition between the candidates as performers was precisely signaled by the absence of *dangdut*, now considered to be too low-class for the performer-as-president. The “*tim sukses*” behind Amien Rais, for instance, actually withdrew existing CDs of him singing both *dangdut* and the popular Javanese musical form *campursari* from circulation. As of 2004, the only suitable music for political candidates to perform was Indonesian pop.

On 19 June 2004, Indosiar broadcast the Grand Final of the popular television program *Akademi Fantasi Indonesia*, a national talent show that preceded the *Indonesia Idol* format (it had no phone-in viewer voting). Presidential candidates Wiranto and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono performed that night as special guests. A jury of celebrity-performers—Trie Utami, Harry Roesli and Erwin Gutawa—offered comments on the candidates’ pitch control, choice of material and so forth before making their elimination decisions. Wiranto’s and SBY’s performances were treated in the same manner as the other participants; neither was placed in the final round.

Performers now became trainers of the politicians, and commentators on their performances. Newspapers reported Wiranto taking singing lessons with pop star Ahmad Dani from DEWA. Even when the candidates were not engaged in singing or reading poetry, performers offered comment on their delivery. The deadly-serious presidential debate, for instance, broadcast nationally on Metro TV on Metro TV 30 June and 1 July, featured a panel of artist commentators—Butet Kartaredjasa (actor), Arsendo Atmowiloto (writer) and Harry Roesli (musician)—who jocularly commented to viewers on the ‘performance’ of the presidential hopefuls, discussing their pitch control, body language and believability.

The climax of the presentation of presidential candidates as performers occurred in a broadcast shown on national TV on July 4, less than 12 hours before the polls opened. Metro TV featured a program “Tribute to Indonesia” hosted by well-known performer and celebrity, Butet Kartaredjasa. All the presidential and vice-presidential candidates were invited to appear on this program, where they were asked to sing, perform and tell stories about themselves. Remarkably, at the end of an exhausting campaign, six agreed to take part: Amien Rais, Agum Gumelar, Wiranto, Jusuf Kalla, Salahuddin Wahid and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Hasyim Muzadi appeared via video link-up; notably, the incumbent Megawati declined. Amien Rais opted to read a poem; the others performed Indonesian pop songs accompanied by the resident band (*Sinten Remen*, led by Djadug Ferrianto). They all had their material well prepared, with their songs

memorised and ready in advance. They performed as professionals, with only a brief run-through with the band before each “take”.

This television appearance was the last of the campaign performances. A few days later, the outcome of this first stage of the election was clear, and Megawati and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono moved on to the “finals” in September. Celebrities who had openly supported presidential/vice-presidential teams that had now been eliminated did not publicly switch their allegiance to the remaining candidates. Public interest both in the remaining candidates’ artistic performance and in celebrity choice virtually evaporated. The field had narrowed, and with only two performers left there was no longer an *Akademi Fantasi Indonesia* or *Indonesia Idol* sense of competition. The emphasis shifted to photo opportunities of candidates interacting with performers, such as Megawati’s invitation to street musicians to perform for her, or her appearance at the national summit of the Association of Singers, Composers and Arrangers of Indonesian Recorded Music (*Persatuan Artis Penyanyi, Pencipta Lagu dan Penata Musik Rekaman Indonesia*), held at the Presidential Residence (*Istana Negara*) on 23 August. The real fun was over.

## Conclusion

The 2004 elections in Indonesia saw a marked increase in celebrity involvement, and will surely come to be seen as the first “celebrity elections”, perhaps an early sign of the Philippine-isation of Indonesian politics. As the line between celebrities as politicians and politicians and celebrities becomes increasingly blurred in the showbiz of campaigning, we can surely expect more celebrity candidates—perhaps even a celebrity president—in the future. For this reason alone, the phenomenon of celebrity involvement should not be dismissed as just an electoral sideshow.

This celebrity involvement is significant in other ways. Firstly, as indicated earlier in this essay, the increased intersection between politics and popular culture via the mass media is contributing to a status distinction between those performers and performances at the “celebrity” level of national mass media, and those at the entertainer (*artis/hiburan*) level of live, local appearance. This status differentiation takes place through the commodification of the celebrity. With names to sell, their endorsement of political parties and candidates effectively downgrades the hired rally acts to generic “artists” or “entertainers”. The new-found freedom of local artists to flit between parties at campaign times, performing for all and pledging allegiance to none, has also become a

sign of their '*kampungan*', non-national, traditional, or low-class status. To have a name to sell, to be sought after by political parties and candidates for their exclusive endorsement, is one sign of the "celebrity", who is synonymous with showbiz, popularity, national familiarity and trendiness. The participation of celebrity-artists in election campaigns is thus changing the Indonesian map of artist involvement in elections, and also contributing to the ongoing process of separation between popular arts and popular mass media culture.

Finally, the question has been asked as to what this phenomenon means for Indonesian attitudes towards elections. Does the new crossing between celebrities and politicians in the world of popular culture mean that voters do not take elections seriously? Are performances a substitute for policies? Such was the reaction of an Australian audience when I presented this paper in Melbourne in July 2004. The implication was that this phenomenon trivialized the elections and indicated that voters were not politically conscious.

Writing on the 1982 elections in Solo, Pemberton described a similar reaction at the height of the New Order to descriptions of elections in "ritualistic" terms, when the results were manipulated and fixed in advance. Pemberton looks elsewhere for political agency. "The problem with this kind of ritual interpretation, however compelling it may be", he writes "is that such a reading tends to de-'politicize' its subject. What is lost by treating Pemilu (national election) as if it were a ritual is the sense that Pemilu is political, in part, precisely *because* it is treated by the New Order government as a ritual." (Pemberton 1986:19). Pemberton points out the performative nature of the engineered elections of the New Order, the so-called "*pesta demokrasi*" (which he translates as "formal democracy reception"), when predictability was celebrated and the uncertainty of the masses was domesticated.

Since the end of the New Order in 1998, general elections have certainly become less predictable, for politicians and voters alike. The performative element has shifted to a celebration of this unpredictability. Rather than being a domestic "formal reception" with choreographed moves, viewers now know that they have the power to vote candidates out, as they did with *Indonesia Idol*. This was particularly true of the 2004 presidential election, where for the first time a limited number of candidates competed as individuals and personalities rather than (primarily) as representatives of political parties.

While the dovetailing of the celebrity industry with politics is an increasing worldwide phenomenon, celebrity participation in Indonesia's elections and the fascination with the candidates as performers needs to be seen within the specific Indonesian context. It takes place against the historical backdrop of both artist involvement in politics and performer participation in election campaigning. One might be tempted to see this new trend as mere frivolity, dumping the legacy of the Indonesian political-cultural debates of the past on the trash-heap of contemporary *sinetron*. The point must briefly be made that this essay has purposely focused on only one area of artistic participation in contemporary politics. There were certainly many other 'serious' areas of activity, even in this arena: artists demanding that candidates explain their party's policies on art and culture—for instance, Islamic approaches to performance and visual representation that have profound implications for the future—or provide statements on specific issues such as the protection of the Indonesian film industry and film piracy. These aspects cannot be addressed here. But the Indonesian 2004 election celebrity whirl cannot be dismissed as mere trivialising of elections, or political immaturity. The intersection of celebrities, performers and politicians on the mass media stage is also a celebration of empowerment. The presidential candidates had their singing, poetry reading, and debating skills assessed and commented upon by professional performers. Viewers could send in comments on their performance. Celebrity-artists stood as candidates and viewers also judged their new political performance. Artists declared support for parties and candidates and appeared in debates and public performances where they defended and argued their chosen team. In all this activity, the performative aspect of the election itself is highly foregrounded. The election is political, one might say, in part precisely *because* the viewers treat it as a performance.

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<sup>ii</sup> 2004 was the year of the international craze with the "Idol" TV programming format, a US franchise, whereby singer-hopefuls compete before a jury of commentators, and viewers send in their votes by phone and text messages. The format was repeated the world over. Winners became instant stars and secured lucrative recording contracts.

<sup>iii</sup> Interview with Bambang Murtijoso 02/07/04, Solo.

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<sup>iv</sup> They were: PDIP, Deddy Sutomo (actor) PDIP Jateng II; predictably, Guruh Soekarnoputra (impresario) Jatim VI; Marissa Haque (film and sinetron actor) Jabar II; PAN, Dede Yusuf (actor) Jabar IX; Partai Demokrat: Ajie Massaid (sinetron actor) Jatim II; Angelina Sondhaq (beauty queen, model) Jateng VI; Komar (comedian) Jabar.