

Aceh Pilkada Dynamics Update

Up until 10 November 2006



FORBES DAMAI
ACEH



Forbes Damai/DSF

The upcoming *pilkada* (local executive) elections are a crucial part of the Helsinki peace process.¹ Understanding Aceh's post-conflict elections are crucial to ensuring their success as well as to the longer-term transition from violent conflict to peaceful democracy. To this end, many agencies and non-government organizations are undertaking analytical work. As part of a joint UNDP-World Bank elections study, sponsored by the Decentralization Support Facility (DSF), *Forbes Damai* (Aceh Joint Forum for Peace) will disseminate bi-weekly updates as a way of summarizing and documenting *pilkada* dynamics and developments. This inaugural Update draws on the findings of a number of organizations: the UNDP/World Bank *pilkada* conflict monitoring of four local newspapers (Aceh Kita, Aceh Rakyat, Serambi, and Waspada) and preliminary field work in ten districts; the USAID-funded IFES survey of Acehnese opinions and information on the elections; and the Jurdil (a civil society coalition) voter registration audit supported by NDI, AusAID and USAID.²

To date, there have been no serious election-related conflict incidents and there is currently no alarming evidence to suggest that widespread conflict or violence is likely. That said, latent tensions exist and isolated incidents are possible. For example, in Bener Meriah, where electoral competition is magnifying ethnic, GAM and anti-separatist divisions, tensions are increasing amongst candidates from these different elements of society. Less drastic, non-violent conflict incidents suggest disputes have been predominant amongst three groups: parties/individuals and the state; within political parties; and between various government agencies. These disputes flag specific institutional weaknesses. Funding delays and shortfalls for electoral institutions, particularly KIP (Independent Elections Commission) and *Panwas* (Election Supervisory Committee) has necessitated these agencies to focus on core logistical and administrative activities at the expense of establishing mechanisms and relationships to prevent and manage conflict. Similarly, as the latest IFES survey indicates, the lack of socialization and voter education activities has meant the electorate is aware of the election but has little information about how it will work. These weaknesses are unlikely to prevent the implementation of elections, but they could diminish their quality and potentially delegitimize the elections if serious problems do occur.

These general findings suggest four implications. First, although election monitors will be spread thin, they may be called upon to receive complaints in the field and informally resolve local problems (given the history of AMM, communities may well expect them to perform these tasks). This is, of course, beyond their mandate, but an arrangement with *Panwas* whereby problems can be forwarded on would be useful. Second, election monitors will need to have some understanding of the history of local conflict in the areas they are working, in order to understand the problems that may potentially occur and how they might be handled. Third, donors and civil society groups should, where time permits, commit extra resources to socialization and voter education, particularly in rural areas. Fourth, where they have not already, local election institutions should hold a coordination meeting between the KIP, police, *Panwas*, and civil society groups. Preferably, this meeting would be held more than once to help establish trust and facilitate coordination.

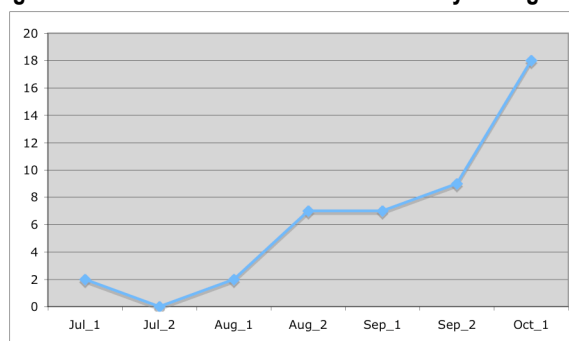
¹ The preamble of the MoU commits the parties to create conditions for "fair and democratic" government and clause 1.2.2 specifies that elections be held by April 2006 at the latest. This deadline was missed due to delays in finalizing the Law on Governing Aceh (LoGA).

² We acknowledge and thank IFES and Jurdil Aceh for allowing us to utilize some of their key findings.

Pilkada-related conflict incidents increase but remain non-violent

The *pilkada* conflict monitoring dataset indicates, somewhat unsurprisingly, that the number of *pilkada*-related conflict incidents has increased dramatically since monitoring began in July.³ Figure 1 indicates that in the first two weeks of July only two incidents were reported compared to 18 in the first two weeks of October.⁴ More positively, however, no violent *pilkada*-related conflict incidents have been reported.

Figure 1: *Pilkada*-related conflict incidents by fortnight



Source: UNDP/WB pilkada dataset

Highest pilkada tensions in central highlands, particularly Bener Meriah

Preliminary fieldwork carried out for the UNDP/WB elections study and the USAID-funded IFES survey both suggest that the potential for serious conflict is highest in the central highlands. Table 1 maps *pilkada* conflict tensions in each district. Although the trend of increasing election-related disputes is likely to continue as the elections approach, it is still difficult to determine whether conflict generally, and violent conflict in particular, will peak before or after the elections.⁵

Table 1: Conflict potential by district

Conflict Potential	District
High	Bener Meriah Aceh Tengah Aceh Tenggara
Medium	Aceh Utara Gayo Lues Pidie Aceh Singkil
Low	Aceh Timur Aceh Tamiang Aceh Barat Daya Nagan Raya Aceh Barat

Source: UNDP/WB Fieldwork

³ The Pilkada Conflict Dataset tracks conflict incidents as reported in regional newspapers. There are limitations to using newspapers to map conflict, for more analysis of the methodology see: Patrick Barron and Joanne Sharpe (2005). “Counting Conflict: Using Newspaper Reports to Understand Violence in Indonesia”, *Indonesian Social Development Paper No. 7*. Jakarta: World Bank.

⁴ Due to the Idul Fitri break and staff holidays, the dataset has not yet been fully updated. The next Update, scheduled for release the week ending the 24 November, will include the most up-to-date data.

⁵ Beginning the week of the 13 November, UNDP and WB will undertake a second round of fieldwork in eight districts: Aceh Tengah and Bener Meriah (highlands), Aceh Utara and Aceh Timur (east coast), Aceh Barat and Nagan Raya (west coast) and Pidie and Aceh Jaya (tsunami-affected). The results of this more in-depth fieldwork will be reported in the next Update.

The IFES survey and other analysts have identified four main sources of violent conflict in the upcoming elections: political party supporters, anti-separatist groups, security personnel, and GAM supporters and personnel, including former combatants. Indeed, violent conflict is most likely where competition between these groups is high. As Box 1 highlights, preliminary fieldwork indicates that this is beginning to occur in the Aceh highlands.

Box 1: Vertical conflict and electoral competition in the Aceh highlands

Whilst conflict dynamics are similar in Bener Meriah and Aceh Tengah, including ethnic distinctions and the unique history of GAM-Gol conflict,⁶ elections-related tensions are more acute in Bener Meriah where personal grievances are converging and being magnified by electoral competition. In this district, which has been the site of serious post-MoU tensions,⁷ two of the main candidates are widely known to be former anti-separatist leaders who cooperated during the vertical conflict but who are now contesting the elections on separate tickets. Both have their own support bases within the anti-separatist vote that they are using to mobilize broader community support. They are both vying for absolute control of the anti-separatist factions as well as the ethnic Gayo vote. In addition, one GAM/KPA-affiliated candidate—the former regional commander—is also contesting the elections. This has resulted in high tensions within anti-separatist groups, and between these groups and GAM/KPA. Facilitated dialogue, much like the Redelong agreement,⁸ may be required to diffuse tensions; one anti-separatist candidate has threatened to murder those former colleagues supporting the other anti-separatist candidate. In neighbouring Gayo Lues, GAM/KPA is internally split between two non-GAM/KPA affiliated candidate pairs reflecting tensions between the regional GAM/KPA leadership and Banda Aceh.

Institutional weaknesses

Institutions responsible for the implementation of the elections can both cause conflict and play an important role in managing and preventing more serious violent conflict.⁹ Unfortunately, the UNDP/WB fieldwork indicated that for a variety of reasons institutional preparations were generally low across the province, and particularly in those areas with high conflict potential (Table 2 summarizes).¹⁰ At a similar stage of preparations for the 2004 elections, and particularly in post-

⁶ In 2000-2001, the TNI allegedly gave weapons to militia, or groups supporting them, in Central Aceh with the aim of combating the growth of GAM. This quickly resulted in communal violence along ethnic lines and subsequently the TNI took the arms back. However ethnic tensions and distrust remain. For a description and analysis of these violent reprisals, see ICG (2002), *Aceh: A Slim Chance for Peace*, ICG Asia Briefing Paper, Brussels/Jakarta, pp. 6-8.

⁷ Unlike others parts of Aceh that are largely ethnically homogenous (i.e. Aceh Besar, Pidie) or ethnically heterogeneous (i.e. Aceh Tamiang, Aceh Tenggara, Aceh Selatan), the highlands are divided into three main ethnic groups: the Gayo, Javanese and Acehnese. These ethnic distinctions hardened during the conflict and tensions have intensified since the MoU, most notably in Bener Meriah when thousands of ethnically Acehnese IDPs began to return in December 2005. See the Conflict Monitoring Update for December 2005, available at www.conflictanddevelopment.org.

⁸ On 28 July, local representatives of KPA/GAM and the anti-separatist group PETA (Defenders of the Motherland) signed the five-point Redelong peace accord in Bener Meriah. The pledge commits the groups to support democratic governance in Aceh, adhere to the Helsinki MoU, to avoid mutual suspicion, to cooperate, and to use traditional and national law to punish violations of the accord. The meeting was facilitated by local parliament members and attended by the Minister of Communications, the acting Governor, the military and police regional commands, and local authorities. See 'Peaceful Elections for Peaceful Aceh: Conflict Management Findings from 2004 and Implications for Aceh 2006', *Forum Bersama Discussion Note No. 1*. Banda Aceh: Forum Berama/DSF.

⁹ This includes KIP, *Panwas*, and also the police, the parties themselves, and civil society.

¹⁰ This fieldwork was undertaken in late September. As such, the table is only indicative.

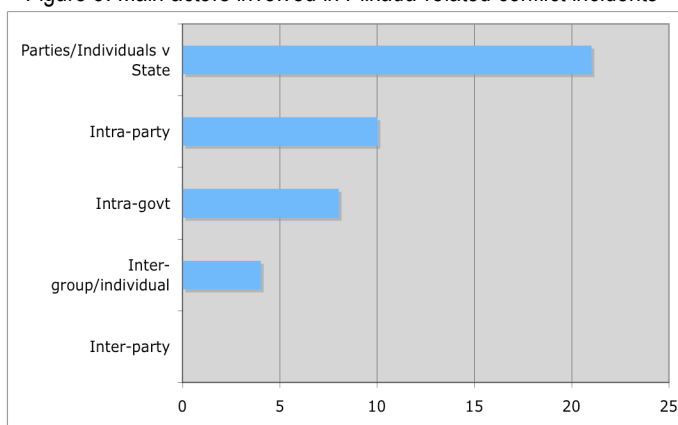
conflict/conflict-prone regions, electoral-institutions and multi-stakeholder coalitions were already engaged in conflict prevention and peace-building initiatives. Analysis of the *pilkada*-related conflicts that have already occurred indicate conflict has been between three main combinations of actors: between parties/individuals and the state (18), within political parties, including GAM (10), and between various government institutions involved in the implementation of elections (8) (Figure 3).

Table 2: Institutional preparations by district

Institutional Preparations	District
Weak	Bener Meriah Aceh Tenggara Aceh Tamiang Nagan Raya
Mediocre	Aceh Tengah Aceh Timur
Okay	Aceh Utara Aceh Barat Aceh Barat Daya Aceh Selatan Gayo Lues Pidie

Source: UNDP/WB fieldwork

Figure 3: Main actors involved in *Pilkada*-related conflict incidents



Source: Pilkada newspaper dataset

Parties/Individuals vs. the State: parties and civil society in conflict with electoral institutions

Conflicts that have involved parties or individuals taking action against the state were predominately of two types. In September a number of incidents involved civil society groups questioning the credentials and neutrality of certain *Panwas* and KIP commissioners selected by local and the provincial parliaments. In Aceh Barat, for example, civil society groups held a demonstration to oppose the selection of one *Panwas* commissioner who is reportedly linked to a political party and is not considered sufficiently neutral. More recently, a number of incidents have involved candidates questioning the decisions and transparency of the *Quran* reading examinations. For example, in Banda Aceh one female governor candidate who failed the *Quran* reading test reported KIP to the Department of Home Affairs claiming that the process for determining one’s ability to read the *Quran* was unclear and requested that the Department dissolve KIP. Similarly, two candidates who failed the *Quran* reading test for candidature in Banda Aceh reported KIP to *Panwas* and questioned the legality of the examiners. Indeed, some have questioned the ability of the examiners to “sing” the *Quran* themselves. Most recently, KIP’s rejection of the independent KPA/GAM-affiliated candidate in Aceh Utara has caused a stir. However, concerns that this would result in a serious public backlash have not materialized thus far because the candidate in question, Amni, chose to withdraw from the race and accept KIP’s decision. Another GAM/KPA-affiliated candidate is running in his place so GAM supporters have been mollified and a potentially serious confrontation has been averted.

Intra-party disputes: weak party leadership and decision-making mechanisms

Almost all political parties have experienced intra-party conflict at either the provincial level or in specific districts. Predominantly these conflicts relate to the selection of party candidates from different factions within parties, the majority of which took place back in August and September. Table 3 shows incidents of intra-party conflict as reported in our four newspaper sources.

Table 3: Intra-party conflicts (July – 15 October)

Party	Date	District	Description
PPP	13 July	Aceh Utara	Party tensions over whether a local <i>Bupati</i> candidate would in fact run as a Governor candidate.
PPP	14 August	Aceh Tengah	The district head of PPP freezes local office and reports eight party colleagues to the police for defiling his name during negotiations to select local party candidates.
PPDI	28 August	Aceh Tenggara	Two factions claim party leadership and attempt to register candidates with KIP.
Democratic Party (PD)	3 September	Aceh Barat Daya	Provincial office freezes local office resulting in two leadership factions claiming leadership and proposing <i>Bupati</i> candidates.
PDI-P	25 September	Aceh Barat Daya	Six <i>kecamatan</i> offices protest to the party's central office the decision of the provincial office to pair with a Golkar representative without local consultation.
Golkar	1 October	Langsa	Local party officials threaten to discharge two party members reluctant to support the party's chosen candidates.

Source: UNDP/WB Pilkada newspaper dataset

In addition, and also coded as an “intra-party” conflict, the running of two gubernatorial candidates with KPA/GAM credentials has caused significant splits within KPA/GAM at both the local and provincial leadership level. Back in August, the two KPA/GAM-affiliated pairs (Humam-Hasbi and Irwandi-Nazar) claimed to have the support of the organization’s leadership in Sweden. On the 10 October the matter seemed to be clarified with the “discovery” that the letter of support for the Irwandi-Nazar candidate was in fact a forgery. This internal conflict seems to be resulting in shifts in KPA/GAM leadership. Irwandi Yusuf’s position as Senior GAM Representative to AMM has recently been handed over to Muzakir Manaf. Given the current dissatisfaction at the pace of reintegration assistance to combatants, these leadership splits appear to have divided and weakened the organization. It also remains to be seen whether the gubernatorial contest and associated tensions will play out at the local level—preliminary fieldwork indicates that the district elections are deemed to be more significant to voters than the gubernatorial race.

Intra-government disputes: insecure funding compromises the performance of electoral institutions

Disputes between the various government institutions responsible for the implementation of the elections have been the third most prevalent type of conflict. Most common, particularly in September, was conflict between KIP and *Panwas*, with local parliaments responsible for providing operational funds. Indeed, preliminary fieldwork undertaken in late September indicated that in ten districts KIP and *Panwas* have not received their budgets with many of them running their current operations with the personal funds of commissioners. Further, in some locations where funds had been released, the amounts were significantly less than KIP and *Panwas* had requested and reportedly need to finance their activities.

Although all KIP and *Panwas* offices were confident they would implement the elections on schedule, these issues over funding and, more generally, the tight time-frame, seems to have forced electoral institutions, especially KIP and *Panwas*, to focus on “core” activities necessary to ensure that the elections can proceed, at the expense of the more “optional” activities that are necessary ensure a high quality and legitimate election. Such activities include developing institutional cooperation, multi-stakeholder “ownership” of the elections, socialization and voter education which are crucial elements in any conflict prevention strategy.

Low cooperation between government institutions

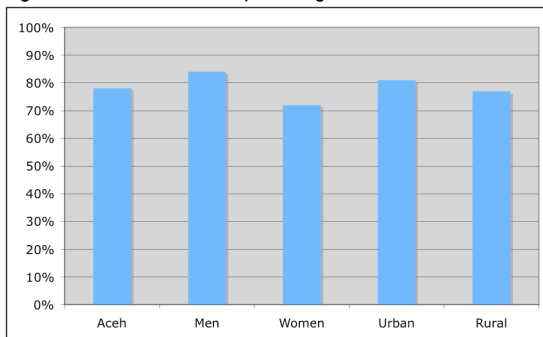
Observations from the 2004 elections have highlighted the importance, particularly in post-conflict contexts, of developing strong cooperation between those institutions responsible for electoral implementation.¹¹ Institutions need to establish communication and outreach channels to community leaders and organizations that are often more capable at preventing conflict and responding to conflict when it does occur.

However, preliminary fieldwork in Aceh indicates that little time and effort has been spent on initiating and developing channels to ensure cooperation generally, let alone in response to the different outbreaks of conflict that are bound to occur. There are exceptions: the police in Pidie have indicated that they will establish communication channels and facilitate regular coordination meetings of candidates, community members, GAM/KPA, KIP, and themselves. Competing candidates and their campaign teams meet to coordinate and discuss problems encountered. The candidates have also publicly announced that they will accept the outcome of the elections and have exhorted their supporters to do likewise. However, such activities are not widespread across the province.

High awareness of election, but low understanding of electoral process

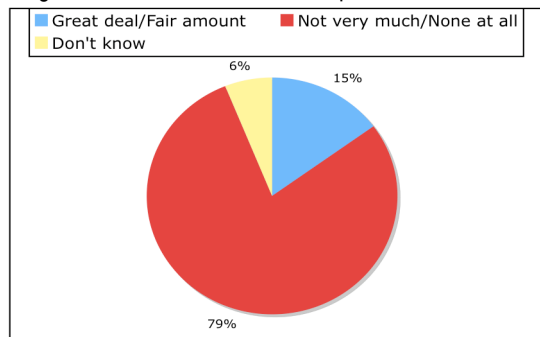
Other “optional” activities that have received less emphasis relate to socialization and voter education. The IFES survey indicated that the vast majority of the population is aware that there is to be an election, but are less familiar with key aspects of the electoral process and with the role of electoral institutions (see Figures 4 and 5)

Figure 4: Awareness of upcoming Pilkada elections



Source: IFES Survey

Figure 5: Information on election process



Source: IFES Survey

Voter Registration generally high but voter awareness of registration low

An independent audit of the voter list conducted by Jurdil Aceh on 8-10 October in 384 sample villages in all districts/municipalities found that 87% of eligible voters in Aceh are registered. This compares favourably with 91% voter registration for the 2004 elections, bearing in mind the challenges posed by both conflict and post-tsunami conditions. However, even though the level of registration is high, it is significant that only 66% of the respondents are aware that they have been

¹¹ For example, in Maluku Election Crisis Centres were established in order to bring together the KPU (national KIP equivalent), *Panwaslu* (national *Panwas* equivalent), party leaders, and the police. This initiative facilitated a rapid response to election-related disputes, allowed the various actors to draw on each other's expertise and authority, ensured that common understandings of rules and regulations prevailed amongst these institutions, and that these were disseminated to the public. See 'Peaceful Elections for Peaceful Aceh: Conflict Management Findings from 2004 and Implications for Aceh 2006', *Forum Bersama Discussion Note No. 1*. Banda Aceh: Forum Berama/DSF.

registered; the temporary voters list was not publicly available in 28% of audited communities and 11% of registered voters could not be found by Jurdil Aceh. These findings underscore that whilst the voter registration drive has been successful, voter education has been neglected and could result in eligible voters failing to exercise their vote either because they do not know they have been registered or because they do not know where they should cast their vote.

Conclusions

With the exception of tensions in Bener Meriah, there have been no serious election-related incidents to date. In Aceh Utara, conflict between GAM supporters and KIP has been averted by the decision of the GAM-affiliated candidate to withdraw from the contest to be replaced by a GAM candidate who meets the stipulated criteria. However, three forms of latent tensions—between parties/individuals and the state, within parties, and between government institutions—point to institutional weaknesses. There is a risk that electoral institutions will fail in managing conflict and preventing violence should tensions escalate. Funding shortfalls have prevented KIP and *Panwas* developing capacity to focus on these issues, with limited resources concentrated on logistics and administrative matters. For example, whilst the successful voter registration drive has increased the likelihood of legitimate elections, the lack of voter education could lead to many eligible voters failing to exercise their vote, diminishing the quality of the elections. Lack of voter awareness also opens the door to voter manipulation. Election monitoring missions could assist by focusing more on these institutional shortcomings and facilitating cooperation amongst elections-related institutions.