

## WHY DO ELECTIONS MATTER? ANALYZING THE 2019 ELECTIONS IN INDONESIA, INDIA, TUNISIA, AND TURKEY

A LECTURE SERIES ORGANIZED BY THE FREIGEIST RESEARCH GROUP "SECULARITY, ISLAM, AND DEMOCRACY IN INDONESIA AND TURKEY", CO-SPONSORED BY THE LEIBNIZ-ZENTRUM MODERNER ORIENT

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2019 is a year of giant elections. The Indian general election was held in seven phases from April to May. About 900 million people were eligible to vote. Turnout was more than 67 percent. In Indonesia, over 190 million were eligible to vote, and the turnout was a record 80 percent. Indonesia carried out the presidential and general elections in a single day on 17 April, a huge logistical exercise for the vast archipelago. Elections were also, inter alia, held in Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Senegal, Thailand, Tunisia, and Turkey.

At the IAAW, a series on elections brought together country specialists to discuss the elections in Indonesia, India, Turkey, and Tunisia. In our first session, Dr. Gülay Türkmen (University of Göttingen) and Dr. Ergün Özgür (ZMO) discussed the municipal elections in Turkey. Many, including President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, saw these elections as a test for the popularity of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). The elections hurt the AKP more than many anticipated, but they also highlighted the fragmentation of the opposition. Nevertheless, different factions put their differences aside and managed to wrestle Istanbul from the AKP, which after 25 years of ruling was so unwilling to give up the city that they cited irregularities. They repeated the election in June. The support for the candidate from the opposition was even higher, so that the AKP finally felt forced to concede Istanbul. It was Erdoğan himself who once famously said "Whoever wins Istanbul, wins Turkey". Hence, this defeat was a particularly bitter one.

In our discussion of the elections coming up in Tunisia, Dr. Eva Schmidt (FU Berlin) explained how trust in the electoral system has eroded. PD Dr. Nora Lafi (ZMO) emphasized the influence of global network of Islamists in national elections.

Discussing the general elections in Indonesia, Dr. Luthfi Assyaukanie (Paramadina University Jakarta) and Dr. Saskia Schäfer (HU) highlighted the rise of religious actors. Prof. Dr. Claudia Derichs (HU) cautioned against premature enthusiasm about the gender quota. Prof. Vincent Houben (HU) contextualized the elections historically.

In the session on India, Dr. Anandita Bajpai (ZMO/HU) analyzed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign and Prof. Dr. Nadja-Christina Schneider (HU) emphasized the crucial role that fake news and digital networks played in shaping Modi's success. Visitors and students evaluated the analytical usefulness of the concept of populism and concluded that more comparative efforts to understand the dynamics and diverse meanings of elections are necessary.

Where would be a better place than the IAAW?

### About the Author:

Saskia Schäfer works on religion and politics with a regional focus on Malay-speaking Southeast Asia. At the IAAW, she is currently establishing a research group on "Secularity, Islam, and Democracy in Indonesia and Turkey," funded by a Freigeist Fellowship from the Volkswagen Stiftung.



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