

Reality shows take political turn on Indonesian TV
In Italy, religion plays big, outdraws the local 'Big Brother'
By Magz Osborne and Eric J. Lyman

Reality shows continue to fascinate TV audiences in the U.S., but viewers in other countries see reality a little differently.

As Indonesia gears up for its first direct presidential elections next year, the new hit program is "Who Wants to Be the President?" Each hour-long weekly show features a different presidential hopeful, who is grilled by a panel of politicians and prominent businessmen as two cohosts moderate. Viewers' votes, by phone or text messages from cell phones, determine each contestant's popularity.

The show's contenders have included Indonesia's former president Abdurrahman Wahid, a few second tier politicians and a businessman who is a comedian.

"Seeing politicians interviewed like this is a new concept to Indonesians who have never had much say in the country's fate," said a Jakartabased media buyer.

While Indonesians delve into politics, for Italian TV viewers there is no reality programming like religious programming. Over the first two months of 2003, religious programs drew more TV viewers than highly touted reality shows, Hollywood blockbusters, and imported U.S. sitcoms.

Nearly 36% of all Italian viewers, or 10 million households, watched a made-for-TV film about the life of relatively unknown St. Maria Goretti. That's 25% more viewers than tuned in to Italy's version of "Big Brother," called "Grande Fratello," and four times as many as watched the latest episodes of "Friends."

Last year, the highest-rated non-sports show was another made-for-TV film dubbed into Italian that starred Ed Asner as Pope John XXIII, a particularly popular pope. The movie was seen in more than half of all Italian homes.

Advertising Age
March 24, 2003