

ISSN 0219-3213

2017 no. 2

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Southeast Asia

INVESTIGATING THE POPULARITY OF  
SURABAYA'S MAYOR TRI RISMAHARINI

ULLA FIONNA

**ISEAS** YUSOF ISHAK  
INSTITUTE

# Trends in Southeast Asia

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Published by: ISEAS Publishing  
30 Heng Mui Keng Terrace  
Singapore 119614  
publish@iseas.edu.sg <http://bookshop.iseas.edu.sg>

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### **ISEAS Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data**

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Fionna, Ulla.

Investigating the Popularity of Surabaya's Mayor Tri Rismaharini.

(Trends in Southeast Asia, 0219-3213 ; TRS 2/17)

1. Tri Rismaharini, 1961–
2. Women mayors—Indonesia—Surabaya.
3. Elections—Indonesia—Surabaya.
4. Surabaya (Indonesia)—Politics and government.

I. Title.

II. Series: Trends in Southeast Asia ; TRS 2/17.

DS501 I59T no.2(2017)

March 2017

ISBN 978-981-47-8604-1 (soft cover)

ISBN 978-981-47-8605-8 (e-book, PDF)

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Typeset by Superskill Graphics Pte Ltd

Printed in Singapore by Mainland Press Pte Ltd

## FOREWORD

The economic, political, strategic and cultural dynamism in Southeast Asia has gained added relevance in recent years with the spectacular rise of giant economies in East and South Asia. This has drawn greater attention to the region and to the enhanced role it now plays in international relations and global economics.

The sustained effort made by Southeast Asian nations since 1967 towards a peaceful and gradual integration of their economies has had indubitable success, and perhaps as a consequence of this, most of these countries are undergoing deep political and social changes domestically and are constructing innovative solutions to meet new international challenges. Big Power tensions continue to be played out in the neighbourhood despite the tradition of neutrality exercised by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

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# Investigating the Popularity of Surabaya's Mayor Tri Rismaharini

By Ulla Fionna

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Indonesia's decentralization and direct local elections have produced several credible popular local leaders. One of them is Surabaya's mayor, Tri Rismaharini (Risma), who gained much attention for her impressive work ethics and her commitment in improving the city. Together with new vice mayor Whisnu Sakti Buana, she was successfully re-elected for the second term in 2015.
- Examination on the perception and support for her policies on cleanliness, the closure of Dolly (Surabaya's main red light district) and the management of education reveals that Risma is perceived as a capable leader.
- However, Surabaya residents still want Risma to do more on those particular fronts. This finding signals maturing voters who are not only aware of their needs and what their government does, but also are able to push their leaders to develop their successful policies further.
- Risma's success in Surabaya showcases an effective combination between an electorate that is politically savvy and a bold local leader with a clear and sustained focus in the implementation of her policies.





# Investigating the Popularity of Surabaya's Mayor Tri Rismaharini

By Ulla Fionna<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's decentralization — with which some authority has been passed to the regions<sup>2</sup> — has produced popular leaders such as the current president Joko Widodo (Jokowi), Jakarta governor Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok), Bandung mayor Ridwan Kamil, and Surabaya mayor Tri Rismaharini (Risma). This new breed of Indonesian leaders are popularly elected in direct elections, unlike their appointed predecessors under Suharto's New Order. These appointed local leaders were essentially individuals chosen by the Ministry of Home Affairs with the approval of local legislatures. Often, they were retired military generals or former bureaucrats who were appointed as extensions of the central administration.<sup>3</sup> Now held regularly, direct elections often see the rise of ambitious rich individuals with questionable leadership skills, but they

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<sup>1</sup> Ulla Fionna is a Fellow at the ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, Singapore.

<sup>2</sup> For a full discussion on decentralization, see Edward Aspinal and Greg Fealy, eds., *Local Power and Politics in Indonesia: Decentralisation & Democratisation* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2003); and Vedi Hadiz, *Localising Power in Post-Authoritarian Indonesia: A Southeast Asia Perspective* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> In essence, in the highly centralist New Order regime, local leaders were appointed by the central government and were therefore responsible to it. Local governments had strong budgetary and political dependence on the central. For detailed discussion on the changes that direct local elections brought to Indonesian politics, see, for example, Maribeth Erb and Priyambudi Sulistyanto, eds., *Deepening Democracy in Indonesia? Direct Elections for Local Leaders (Pilkada)* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009).

have also elected self-made leaders with a strong track record in either the government bureaucracy or as professionals.

Among those who rose from bureaucratic circles is Surabaya's mayor Tri Rismaharini (fondly known as Bu Risma). This article investigates her popularity by looking at how her policies have been perceived by the Surabayan voters. Risma's popularity is fascinating and important to investigate, particularly as Jokowi himself launched his presidency based on his credentials first as mayor of Solo and then as governor of Jakarta. Such a trajectory has amplified the positions of local leaders and meant that they are closely watched as possible upcoming national leaders.

This paper selects specific policies in certain areas under Risma's administration, and investigates how they have been perceived by voters. By doing so, it aims to formulate an informed answer on what voters want, and the extent to which a leader's popularity would translate to votes. It is argued here that the case of Risma in Surabaya points to the positive outcome of direct local elections when voters are presented with candidates with a good track record. Cases such as in Surakarta where Jokowi was re-elected with more than 90 per cent of votes in 2010,<sup>4</sup> and Ridwan Kamil who won the Bandung mayoralship in 2013 by more than 27 per cent of the votes, show that voters do scrutinize their potential leaders. The success of Risma demonstrates that beyond the aspects of popularity and celebrity status, many more voters inspect the track records of candidates closely. This development may lessen the influence of money politics and vote-buying in elections, and in turn lessen the preponderance of personality cults.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arguably an extension of the Jokowi effect, his vice mayor FX Hadi Rudyatmo successfully won the subsequent election in 2015 after Jokowi decided to leave his mayoral position to compete for the Jakarta governorship.

<sup>5</sup> Notably, a recent survey has confirmed the same trend: that voters tend to look at track records and are less persuaded by money and party machinery. See "Money, political machinery can't buy votes in Jakarta: Researcher", *Jakarta Post*, 7 May 2015 <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2015/05/07/money-political-machinery-can-t-buy-votes-jakarta-researcher.html>> (accessed 21 October 2016).

The following section outlines a short history of Surabaya before dealing with some of the city's public policies and assessing their popularity among voters.

## **SURABAYA: A HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL POLITICAL PROFILE**

Surabaya, the second largest city in Indonesia today,<sup>6</sup> started out its economic role in the 1920s as an important hub for the East Java lowlands, producer of 75 per cent of the Dutch colony's sugar. It hosted an expanding network of goods, roads, and tramlines, and also major trading firms. Surabaya has an important port in Tanjung Perak, which still serves as a centre for shipping in Eastern Indonesia. While Surabaya was once bigger than Jakarta (previously called Batavia) in the nineteenth century, plantations investment moved to western Java at the turn of the century, primarily as the result of the Dutch acquiring more wealth from the outer Islands and thus needing some centralization in Batavia. Spurred by its economy, Batavia's population growth was also faster, eventually leaving Surabaya, once on par with Singapore, Hong Kong, and Bangkok as great port cities, lagging behind (see Dick 2003, Peters 2013).

It took many decades before Surabaya recovered. Surabaya was also hit badly by the great depression in the 1930s which significantly reduced the demand for sugar. Following this blow to its economy, during the years of revolution in the 1940s, the city saw significant fighting and suffered great devastation.<sup>7</sup> While the people of Surabaya quickly rebuilt the city, only around the 1970s did Surabaya slowly bounce back from the long economic hiatus — when urbanization and development *à la* New Order trickled down to areas outside Jakarta. Slowly but surely, malls

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<sup>6</sup> Indonesia's five most populated cities in 2016 were: Jakarta (9,992,842), Surabaya (2,806,306), Medan (2,467,183), Bandung (2,341,097), and Makassar (1,652,305).

<sup>7</sup> Dick noted that while it may have been easy for the Dutch to subsequently occupy a destroyed Surabaya in 1946, they nevertheless lost their economic hegemony by 1949 (2003, p. 84).

and housing estates sprung up around the city as its industrial expansion continued. It was also the first period in a long time that its population grew faster than Jakarta's, although the annual rate of migration to Jakarta has meant the steady enlargement of the latter. Yet, limitations in administrative status (unlike the special capital region of Jakarta) and other resources ensured its spot as the second and less developed city instead. As such, the gap between Jakarta and Surabaya became too difficult to close. In other words, although Surabaya at some points was close to rivalling the role of Jakarta as the economic capital, this potential was never realized. Still, its geographical position, as well as physical and population size, ensures its economic importance.

Surabaya also holds political importance. Indonesia commemorates 10 November as Heroes Day and Surabaya as the City of Heroes (Kota Pahlawan), to remember the three-week battle (between late October and early November 1945) that was fiercely fought there.<sup>8</sup> Indeed in the 1940s and 1950s, Surabaya often served as an important node for a range of political organizations, from youth associations to political parties.<sup>9</sup> Indonesia's first president Sukarno was born and had his early years of education in Surabaya, where he lived with Tjokroaminoto, the leader of Syarikat Islam, an Islamic trade and political organization that boosted many prominent political figures — which served as early indication of Surabaya's tolerance and open-mindedness. Sukarno is regarded as a native son, and his role as the first president cemented the city as a bastion for his support. The city still maintains its role as an important stronghold for his daughter Megawati Sukarnoputri's party, PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia – Perjuangan, or Indonesian Democratic

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<sup>8</sup> Surabaya's strategic trade and defence position was established during the colonial period. Dick noted that Daendels (Governor General of the Dutch East Indies in the early 1800s) recognized Surabaya to be more defensible than the open roadstead of Batavia or Semarang, and therefore built the fort and other arsenal that became vital during this battle (2002, pp. 40–41). For detailed discussion on the battle, see also Anthony Reid, *The Indonesian National Revolution 1945–1950* (Hawthorn: Longman, 1974), pp. 49–53.

<sup>9</sup> For a detailed discussion on this, see, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Java in A Time of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

Party – Struggle), the winner of the 2014 general election and the party of current President Jokowi.<sup>10</sup> Just as in Jakarta, students were mobilized in 1998 on campuses and there was a clear demand for *reformasi* (reform) which eventually ended Suharto’s authoritarian rule.

Yet, Surabaya’s importance goes beyond history and politics. Its socio-economic fabric warrants attention as well. During the New Order (1966–98), Surabaya developed into an urban society, with its population increasingly leaving the primary sector and working in manufacturing, services and trade. Although problems in housing, city development and infrastructure persisted, the city was showing strong signs of prosperity when the Asian crisis hit in 1998, followed by the fall of the New Order regime. While Jakarta (alongside Medan and Solo) were badly hit by racially motivated riots, Surabaya suffered much less in comparison. Dick explained that while there was violence, in general the security forces were more willing to intervene compared to those in other cities. Importantly, Dick noted that the intensity of riots was less in Surabaya perhaps because “there was less alienation, less pent-up rage among kampong dwellers” (Dick 2003, p. 114).

It is for another study to find explanations of why Surabaya has demonstrated better social cohesiveness. Suffice it to say that the Chinese and other ethnic groups seem to be pragmatically assimilated in Surabaya. It is one of a handful of cities where a non-halal stall can be located next to a halal one in a mall’s food court without attracting public protest.

Surabaya is a provincial city with a strong Javanese identity. As evidence, while by 1995 nearly 97 per cent of Jakarta used Bahasa Indonesia as their vernacular language, only 17 per cent of Surabaya did so. Although it can be assumed that some of this 17 per cent are Chinese, many of them also speak fluent Javanese. It is “an essentially Javanese city”, with most of its migrants coming from the surrounding province of East Java (Dick 2003, pp. 128–31).

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<sup>10</sup> In Surabaya’s 2015 legislative elections the PDIP received 363,208 votes. Second ranked Gerindra Party received less than half of that, with 138,062. See “Suara PDIP Kuasai Kota Surabaya” [Votes for PDIP Dominate Surabaya], *detiknews*, 22 April 2014 <<http://news.detik.com/jawatimur/2562498/suara-pdip-kuasai-kota-surabaya>> (accessed 5 October 2016).

As host to around seventy universities and higher education institutions, Surabaya's population is well educated and it has Indonesia's second highest minimum wage (Rp3,045,000 per month or SG\$324/US\$233) after Jakarta (Rp3,100,000 or SG\$330/US\$237). The people of Surabaya are in general politically aware, and the city has a reputation of being a stronghold of major parties and is home to many active students associations — the latter dating back to the 1940s when the youth became one of the backbones of the revolution.<sup>11</sup> Figure 1 provides more details of the forms and level of engagement in political activities among 410 Surabayans surveyed.<sup>12</sup> It shows that Surabayans are active voters in national and local elections. Yet, they are less active in other forms of political participation. Only a handful attended street demonstrations or donated to parties — which signifies a community with rather selective political engagements. Less than 10 per cent of the survey respondents used private messaging and social media. On attending party-organized events and participating in party campaigns, again the numbers are relatively low. Overall, such figures and patterns are quite typical of cities in Indonesia. For instance, the same survey suggests that more than 85 per cent of eligible voters voted in Samarinda, while only less than 5 per cent have been engaged in street demonstrations. In Medan, more than 82 per cent voted in various elections, while only less than 2 per cent were involved in street demonstrations. As such, Surabaya represents a typical Indonesian city where the types of political participation most favoured evolves around voting; and little else is done beyond that.<sup>13</sup> As voting crucially indicates their decision, more needs to be known about the elements involved in the making of such a decision. The rest of this

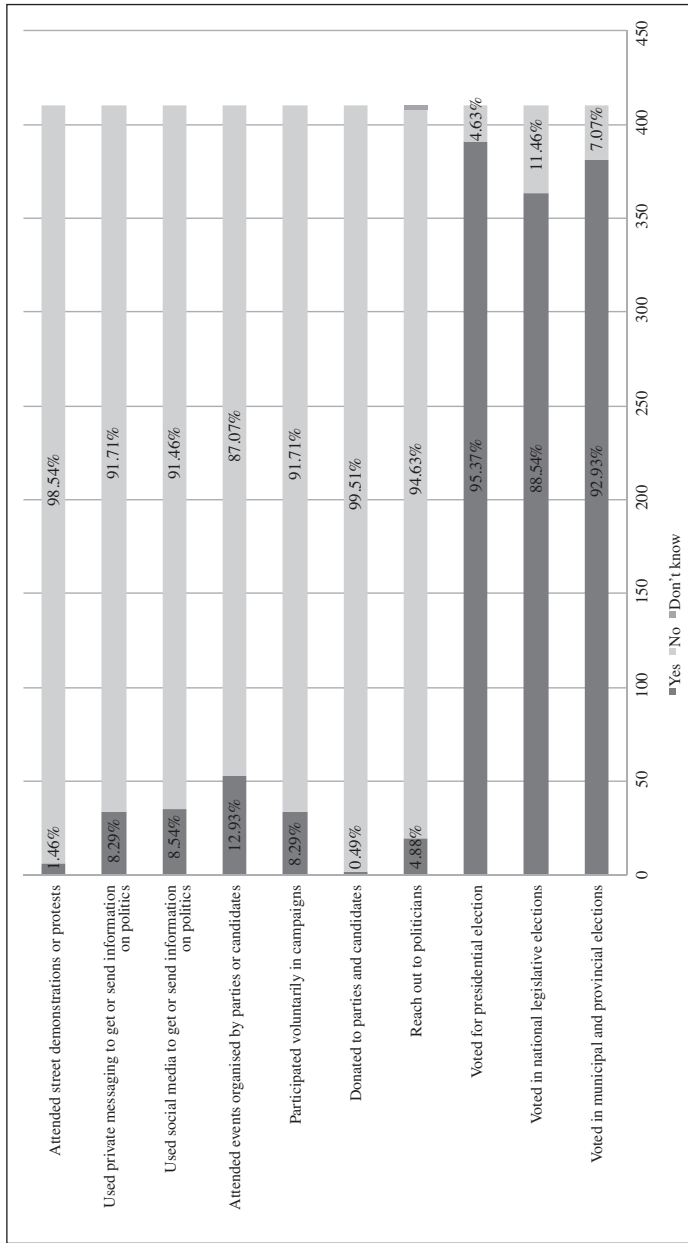
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<sup>11</sup> Reid noted that Surabaya became one of the major points for mobilizing the youth to rally against foreign troops. See Reid (1974), p. 50.

<sup>12</sup> For details of research design, see Appendix A.

<sup>13</sup> One of the most prominent reasons is that the New Order government discouraged and suppressed political participation beyond voting (which was also heavily controlled and manipulated). While Indonesia presently has greater political freedom, most Indonesians have not engaged in other forms of participation.

**Figure 1: Forms of Political Participation in Surabaya, 2015**





paper provides a short history of public service in Surabaya under the previous administration before delving into the policies under Risma.

## **PUBLIC POLICIES UNDER PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS**

While its economy and living standards have oscillated, the government's efforts to provide public service have overall continued to grow since the days when the Dutch controlled Surabaya. Under the colonial government, there were restrictions on what could be done with limited resources, and consequently provision of public goods suffered. Under Sukarno (1945–66), the country was embroiled in Cold War politics and post-colonial contradictions, with little progress beyond rhetoric. While Sukarno was focused much more on political and symbolic matters such as developing political participation and strengthening national unity, Suharto's New Order preferred order and stability to economic development. The New Order administration met the needs of a growing city much better, and various initiatives particularly on housing and public services were rolled out. As income levels rose, house ownership also increased as did living conditions, while the household size decreased. New housing developments reflected these shifts and were able to accommodate such needs. Similarly, access to health services and hospitals improved during the New Order. Indeed, rapid industrialization as a result of the New Order government's focus on economic development spurred the development of Surabaya into an urban industrial city with sprawling malls and housing estates that we see today.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, other limitations remain. As mentioned before, and unlike Jakarta, which has a special administrative status (Daerah Khusus Ibukota/Special Capital Region), Surabaya suffers from the fact that its municipality still belonged to the third tier of government. As such, it lacks autonomy as its mayor is subordinate to both the provincial

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<sup>14</sup> Surabaya's economic growth in 2014 was 6.73 per cent, exceeding East Java province's (5.85 per cent), Jakarta (5.95 per cent) and the national figure (5.02 per cent).

governor and the Department of Internal Affairs (Departemen Dalam Negeri). Still, there have been changes that have played in the city's favour. With local governments being given more authority in the 1980s, leadership served as an important factor in the subsequent development of Surabaya. In Dr Poernomo Kasidi who assumed the role of mayor in 1984–94, for example, Surabaya had a leader with practical approaches.

Notably, Dr Kasidi changed the image of Surabaya from being a sweltering and chaotic city to a regular recipient of Adipura Award, a prestigious New Order award launched in 1986 for clean cities.<sup>15</sup> Dr Kasidi's successors have had to shoulder the burden of repeating this success, and tried different ways in managing the metropolis. While cleanliness and orderliness are the focus of this award, efforts to maintain them would require broader efforts in city planning and management issues with which Surabaya still grapples. Throughout its history, Surabaya has faced problems of flooding, bad management of street vendors, and worsening traffic conditions — alongside issues of clean water, health service provision and education.

It was against such a backdrop and into such realities that Tri Rismaharini was elected mayor in 2010.

## **JUXTAPOSING RISMA'S POPULARITY WITH HER POLICIES**

Tri Rismaharini was born on 20 November 1961 in Kediri, East Java, as the third child of five. Her father Mochammad Chuzaini was a tax official who owns a grocery business. Risma suffered from asthma as a child, yet was not treated differently from her siblings. Her father encouraged her to help him with his business and paid her for her work. She studied architecture at the prominent 10 November Institute of Technology in Surabaya — where she met her husband Djoko Saptoadji.

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<sup>15</sup> In the past decade or so, the competition has increasingly received criticism as recipient cities are only being cleaned when it was time for the judging to take place, and the cleaning was usually superficial and temporary.

After graduation, she worked as a civil servant in Bojonegoro, East Java, and later moved to become the head of Surabaya's municipal parks office. It was in this role that she showed marked results. Apart from creating green open spaces, she reduced flooding. In 2010, Surabaya's rainy season's inundated area was reduced to 2,486 hectares from 3,016 hectares in 2005. Her educational background in architecture was crucial in landing her a leadership position in the city's park department, where she thrived and successfully transformed Surabaya's appearance by building many city parks.

She ran successfully for mayorship in 2010 with Bambang Dwi Hartono (himself a previous mayor) as her deputy. Initially, her victory in 2010 was regarded by many as a fluke as she was still relatively unknown and only received 3 per cent more votes than the second-placed candidates (Arif Afandi and Adies Kadir).<sup>16</sup> However just prior to the 2015 elections, her success and popularity had grown so much that other potential candidates had little chance, and political parties began to feel that it was pointless to groom a rival to replace her. Eventually, only one rival pair — Rasiyo-Lucy Rahmawati — registered, and almost at the last minute before the deadline.<sup>17</sup> Risma with her new deputy Whisnu Sakti Buana won convincingly with 86 per cent of the votes.

Risma's success in re-election in 2015 can be contributed largely to her image as a hard-working, no-nonsense, results-oriented mayor. She has been hands-on in her role, for instance, sweeping the streets herself and being regularly seen personally inspecting city clean-up initiatives.

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<sup>16</sup> Arguably, voters' familiarity with Bambang DH was also an important factor in the victory. There were five pairs of candidates in the 2010 elections: Tri Rismaharini–Bambang DH (38.55 per cent), Arif Afandi–Adies Kadir (32.25 per cent), Fandi Utomo–Yulius Bustami (13.90 per cent), BF Sutadi–Mazlan Mansur (6.63 per cent), and Fitradjaja Purnama–Naen Suryono (5.71 per cent).

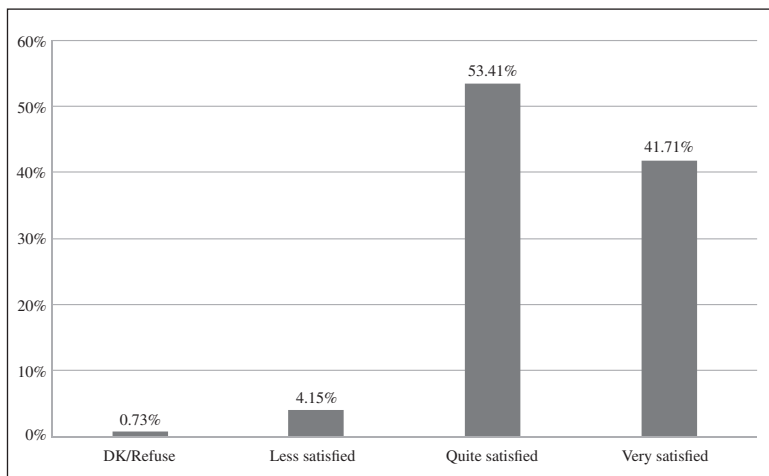
<sup>17</sup> Initially, the election was almost delayed as there were various verification problems with other candidates who registered to compete against Risma–Wisnu, threatening the postponement of the Surabaya election as the Electoral Commission initially required more than one pair of candidates for a local election to be conducted.

She has also — as explained in the following sections — spearheaded campaigns for education and bureaucratic reforms.

These personal and leadership traits have been highly regarded and are responsible for her popularity in Surabaya and beyond, enhanced further by the various international awards Surabaya has been winning. Among these were the “ASEAN Environmentally Sustainable City Award” in 2012, and the Adipura Kencana award yearly since 2006. The success in managing the environment has put Surabaya in UN-Habitat’s database for urban best practices as well. As a leader, she has also received a nod as the world’s third best mayor in 2015 from the World Mayor Project. The level of satisfaction shown by survey data strongly correlates with her overall success and popularity (see Figure 2), as more than 95 per cent respondents answered that they were either quite or very satisfied with her.

Besides her successful approach of creating a clean and green Surabaya, Risma has been noted for her decision to close down a local prostitution area. This was popular with the locals but the drastic move received criticisms for the lack of compassion towards the sex workers and concerns about follow-up policies.

**Figure 2: Overall Satisfaction with Risma**



Education was another of her priorities. Indeed, one of her first policies was to make education free of charge from elementary to high school, and to allocate 5 per cent of the seats of public schools for economically disadvantaged children.

The next part of this article investigates Risma's policies and cross-checks them with public assessment of them. The data used are part of a larger survey on public opinion and voting behaviour, conducted in December 2015.<sup>18</sup>

### *1. Clean and Green Surabaya*

Since the 2005 mayoral election for Surabaya, Risma has focused on order and cleanliness, operationalized in the form of new city parks and the planting of inner city greeneries. Surabaya now has eleven major parks,<sup>19</sup> and its greeneries have been well maintained.

The presence of well-maintained parks has been an interesting policy change from those of previous administrations which at one point were notorious for selling off empty spaces to private companies usually for conversion into *ruko* (*rumah toko*, or shophouses), malls, or housing estates.<sup>20</sup> On building more parks, Risma has personally pointed out that

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<sup>18</sup> See Appendix C for details on questions posed to assess Risma's policies.

<sup>19</sup> These parks have different themes, for instance: Friendship Park (Taman Persahabatan), Expression Park (Taman Ekspresi), Skating and BMX Park (Taman Skate & BMX) and Flora Park (Taman Flora). Some of these parks provide wi-fi access and include libraries, fitness and other sports facilities. See "Mayor of the Month for February 2014: Tri Rismaharini: Mayor of Surabaya, Indonesia", City Mayors, Mayor of the Month, <<http://www.citymayors.com/mayors/surabaya-mayor-tri-rismaharini.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> Risma's former vice mayor Bambang DH was a former mayor himself. He is currently facing allegations of illegal sale of land in Surabaya. See for example "Bambang DH Dilaporkan Korupsi Rp14 Miliar" [Bambang DH Reported for Rp14 Billion Corruption], *surabayapagi.com*, 19 November 2009 <<http://www.surabayapagi.com/index.php?read=Bambang-DH-Dilaporkan-Korupsi-Rp-14-Miliar;3b1ca0a43b79bdfd9f9305b81298296283826f63bc8fbc3fa925181466beace>> (accessed 17 October 2016).

it was a deliberate effort to change the city's image of being "dirty, hot, and its people are rough".<sup>21</sup>

Another integral aspect of maintaining cleanliness and order is waste management. Here, Risma improved and extended the waste management system. Under her leadership, the city that suffered from *bencana sampah* (waste disaster) in 2001,<sup>22</sup> has quite successfully overcome the problem. Some of her noteworthy policies in this area are: the purchase of a 34-hectare waste disposal site, encouragement of 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle) among the public, and introduction of a simple container for composting household waste. The implementation of these strategies has led to the reduction of household waste, which in turn has also reduced the waste transportation costs.<sup>23</sup>

The municipal government's innovative approach has been noteworthy, particularly as Surabaya has been notorious for its waste problems. Efforts to educate the public about the importance of 3R seems to have been effective. Calling on community groups and households to take charge of waste management in their areas was a much-needed break from the mainstream system where the local government was usually in charge. Special attention was given to educate the public in separating organic waste from the non-organic, and to process and sell recyclables for a profit. In being shown that such an effort can produce financial profit, the public has an extra incentive to take such initiatives

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<sup>21</sup> "Tri Rismaharini (Wali Kota Surabaya): Sumpah Menyejahterakan Surabaya" [Tri Rismaharini – Mayor of Surabaya: Vows to Make Surabaya Prosperous], *Republika*, 30 April 2015 <<http://www.republika.co.id/berita/koran/tokoh-perubahan-republika-2014/15/04/30/nny464-tri-rismaharini-wali-kota-surabaya-sumpah-menyjahterakan-surabaya>> (accessed 4 October 2016).

<sup>22</sup> The disaster resulted from poor management of general waste, resulting in the closure of the final processing location. Consequently, waste was piling up around the city and the municipal government were scrambling in managing the aesthetics and health problems caused by such mismanagement.

<sup>23</sup> "3R Pasar: Meraup Untung dari Sampah" [3R: Reaping Benefits from Waste], *suroboyo.id*, 17 August 2016 <<http://www.suroboyo.id/3r-pasar-meraup-untung-dari-sampah/>> (accessed 5 October 2016).

on board. A powerful spin-off from this is that problems such as diseases and aesthetics associated with mismanagement of waste also decreased.

Risma's personal involvement was a key contributor to her success in waste management programmes. As the head of the Cleansing and Landscaping Department, she was in charge of the 3R programme, and her subordinates have testified that she would personally collect rubbish and mop the streets a few mornings every week.<sup>24</sup> The image of a leader with a broomstick, as opposed to the traditional disposition of authority to order others to work, has proven attractive in gathering popularity in Indonesia. Certainly, President Jokowi's trait of *blusukan* (going to difficult passages to directly interact with people) has inspired many leaders to emulate him. The image of Risma not shying away from dirty work has definitely captured the same depth of public support.

Her popularity was such that she was seen by many as a worthy contender for the Jakarta governorship. Before the deadline of registration for candidates of the Jakarta election, there was growing public support for her to launch a campaign to compete against the current Jakarta governor Ahok (Basuki Tjahaja Purnama) in 2017.<sup>25</sup> A civil society forum called Jaklovers declared their support for Risma to run in Jakarta, choosing a broomstick as a symbol of hard work and of Risma's close association with it.<sup>26</sup> However, Jaklovers' campaign created concern among Risma supporters in Surabaya who preferred her to remain their mayor.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Bunnell et al., "Urban Development in a Decentralised Indonesia: Two Success Stories", *Pacific Affairs* 86, no. 4 (December 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Eventually Risma's party PDI-P decided to support Ahok instead.

<sup>26</sup> "Jaklovers Memanggil Risma dengan Simbol Sapu Lidi" [Jaklovers Call on Risma with Broomstick as Symbol], *tempo.co*, 31 July 2016 <<https://m.tempo.co/read/news/2016/07/31/083792000/jaklovers-memanggil-risma-dengan-simbol-sapu-lidi>> (accessed 5 October 2016).

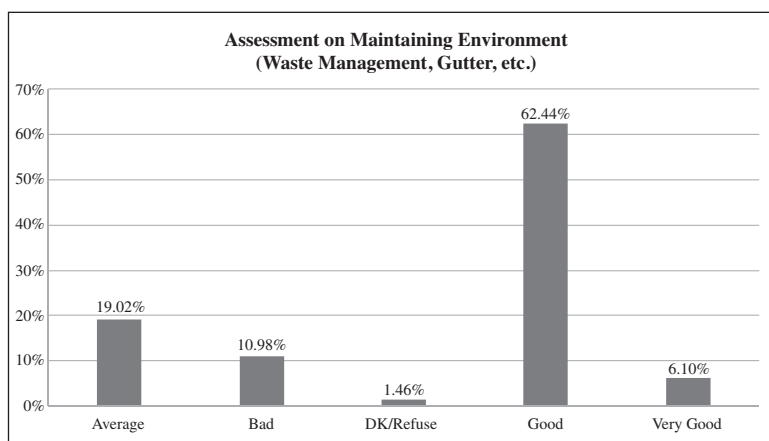
<sup>27</sup> "Jaklovers Minta Izin ke Warga Surabaya untuk Dukung Risma di DKI" [Jaklovers Asked Permission of Surabaya Residents to Support Risma for DKI/Jakarta], *kompas.com*, 1 August 2016 <<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2016/08/01/13455841/jaklovers.minta.izin.ke.warga.surabaya.untuk.dukung.risma.di.dki>> (accessed 5 October 2016).

Risma’s success is clearly captured in a survey conducted in 2015. As can be seen in Figure 3, more than 60 per cent of respondents agree that she has been successful in maintaining the overall quality of the environment in Surabaya, while another 6 per cent opined that she has done an exceptional job — in particular in waste management and cleanliness. However, around 19 per cent thought what she had done was just average, while around 11 per cent thought her policies poor or poorly implemented. All in all, about 30 per cent of respondents are still unimpressed with the efforts that have been made.

## 2. Closing Down Dolly

Another policy that consolidated Risma’s reputation was the closing down of Surabaya’s red-light district, locally known as “Dolly”. Before its closure, Dolly was one of Southeast Asia’s biggest red-light districts with 1,020 registered sex workers and 311 pimps.<sup>28</sup> Although other

**Figure 3: Assessment on Maintaining Quality of Environment**



<sup>28</sup> Other sources estimated that there were as many as 9,000 sex workers working there nightly. See Randy Ferdi Firdaus, “Sejarah Gang Dolly sampai terbesar di Asia Tenggara” [The History of Southeast Asia’s Biggest Red-Light District – Dolly Alley], *merdeka.com*, 17 November 2013 <<https://www.merdeka.com/peristiwa/sejarah-gang-dolly-sampai-terbesar-di-asia-tenggara.html>>.



previous mayors and governors had pondered closure, it was Risma who brought it about in June 2014. The area was established in 1967 by a sex worker named Dolly Khavit and used to have 52 brothels. Although some residents and workers tried to fight the decision, Risma went ahead with it. As legal basis of her action, she cited By-law No. 7, 1999, which bans the use of buildings as venues for prostitution. Although Dolly was just one of several such establishments to have been closed down,<sup>29</sup> it was nevertheless the one that received the most attention because of its size and notoriety.

Her decision was endorsed by Social Affairs Minister Salim Segaf Al Jufri, while the local assembly (DPRD, Dewan Permusyawaratan Rakyat Daerah) stayed split. Public support was also split, although appreciative overall. While there were clear socio-moral concerns in favour of the ruling, certain segments of the community felt that prostitution was just one profession on which many individuals, particularly poor mothers, depended for their livelihood. For support and assistance, specific initiatives and compensations were prepared: an offer of Rp5 million (around US\$380) for each of the workers and pimps. The government also initiated training programmes (mainly in handicrafts) to entice affected individuals to change professions. Risma has also threatened to act against those who continued to work in the area, and proclaimed that the government will buy buildings in Dolly and convert the area into a shopping centre.<sup>30</sup>

While some parliamentarians may have been worried about a reduction in contribution from prostitution to the local budget, the decision seems to have gained large popular support. After the 2015 Surabaya elections some of her voters applauded her as the only one who

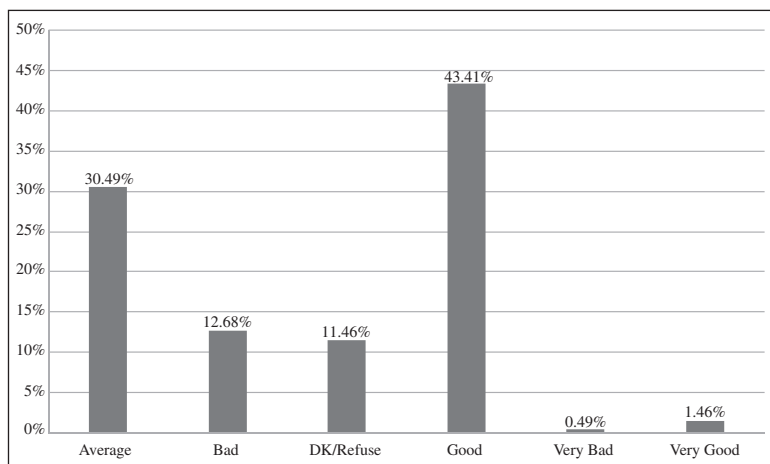
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<sup>29</sup> Other red-light districts that have been closed down are: Tambak Asri, Klakah Rejo, Dupak Bangunsari, Sememi, and Jarak.

<sup>30</sup> Fadli and Indra Harsaputra, "After closure, brothels brace for Dolly exodus", *Jakarta Post*, 20 June 2014 <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2014/06/20/after-closure-brothels-brace-dolly-exodus.html>> (accessed 6 October 2016).

was brave enough to close down Dolly. Her female supporters who are mothers believed that such a move was important for moral concerns, and student supporters opined that Dolly gave Surabaya a negative image and needed to be closed down.<sup>31</sup> Even some of the residents in Dolly voted for Risma as she was still seen as the better choice. Still, it must be noted that among her almost clean sweep in many polling booths that she recorded, there were two booths in Dolly where she lost to rival Rasiyo-Lucy.<sup>32</sup>

**Figure 4: Assessment on Law Enforcement**



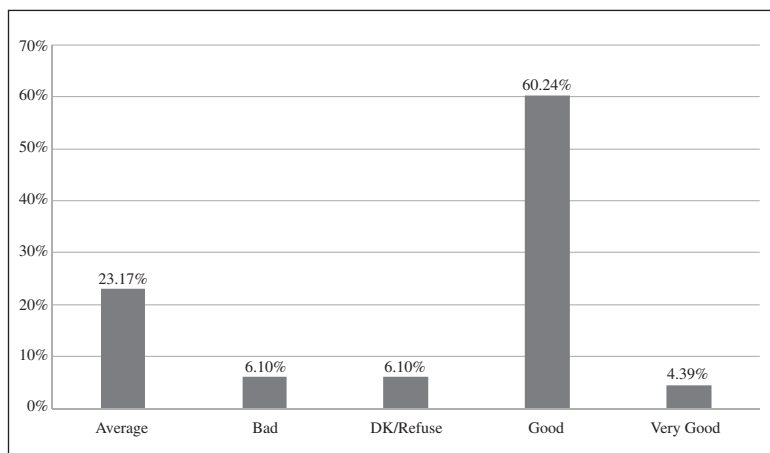
<sup>31</sup> Febriana Firdaus, “Pilkada Surabaya: Risma ‘meraup’ untung dari penutupan Gang Dolly” [Surabaya local elections: Risma reaping reward from Dolly’s closure], *rappler*, 9 December 2015 <<http://www.rappler.com/indonesia/115429-risma-pilkada-penutupan-gang-dolly-surabaya>> (accessed 6 October 2016).

<sup>32</sup> “Waduh, Tempat ini Bikin Risma Gagal Sapu Bersih Kemenangan” [Risma Denied a Clean Sweep Victory at This Location], *Surya Malang*, 9 December 2015 <<http://suryamalang.tribunnews.com/2015/12/09/waduh-tempat-ini-bikin-risma-gagal-sapu-bersih-kemenangan>> (accessed 6 October 2016).

Respondents demonstrated a higher level of satisfaction in assessing Risma on public orderliness (Figure 5). More than 60 per cent indicated that she had done well, as opposed to only 23 per cent who thought she was average in this aspect.<sup>33</sup> These data correlate positively with the notion that the public did not perceive Dolly’s closure as a legal issue, but more as a social order problem. On job provisions, Risma did not score well. The number of respondents who felt that she had done well, and those who think she was just average were about the same. Again in this category, some respondents may have used the issue of Dolly’s closure as a consideration, as the sex workers had lost their jobs and the subsequent training and other follow-up action had not been fully assessed.

Overall, the data suggest that the Dolly policy can be judged a success in attracting support. Some of the scepticism of respondents

**Figure 5: Assessment on Public Order**



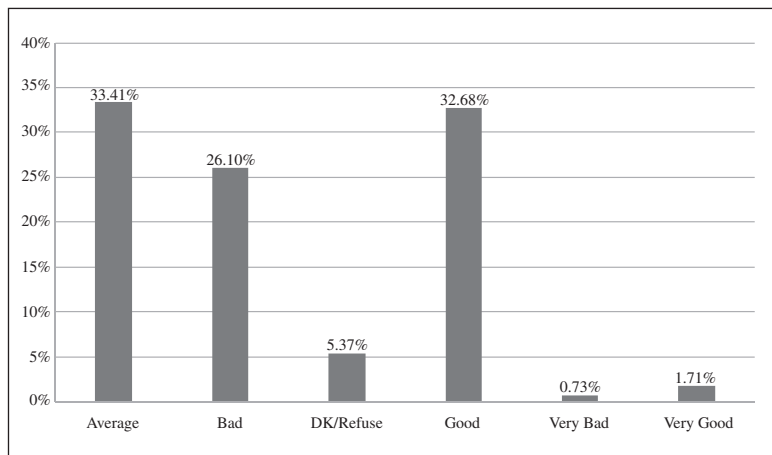
<sup>33</sup> According to Surabaya Police, the crime rate in the city has continued to decline in 2014–15. In 2014 there were 1,122 crime cases, while in 2015 there were 943. See Ragil Priyonggo, “Tahun 2015, Kriminalitas di Surabaya Turun, Narkoba Meningkat” [In 2015, Crime Rate in Surabaya Declined, (The Use of) Drugs Increased], *Berita Jatim*, 30 Desember 2015 <[http://beritajatim.com/hukum\\_kriminal/255640/tahun\\_2015,\\_kriminalitas\\_di\\_surabaya\\_turun,\\_narkoba\\_meningkat.html](http://beritajatim.com/hukum_kriminal/255640/tahun_2015,_kriminalitas_di_surabaya_turun,_narkoba_meningkat.html)>.

who thought that Risma's effort in job provision for the workers affected by the closure was lacking was also captured (Figure 6). This confirms another study which found that the people of Surabaya still believe that unemployment remains one of the city's biggest problems, and thus — moral considerations aside — taking away the jobs of the Dolly workers has worsened this particular problem.

### *3. Risma's Management of Education*

Risma has repeatedly claimed that education is her utmost priority — a conviction that seems to be influenced by her own experience of how her education had greatly helped her in her previous and current career. She believes that education is the main way to reduce poverty, and subsequently she has tried to make education in Surabaya free for the first twelve years. Despite her vow to improve education, she has faced many challenges. Firstly, although the municipal government has declared a first-12-years-free education policy, it has not been able to prevent schools from asking parents to pay for various miscellaneous

**Figure 6: Assessment on Job Provision**



fees. In one particular case, the amount of such fees were so astronomical that it attracted some public scrutiny.<sup>34</sup>

Secondly, although the implementation of first-12-years-free education policy has been problematic, Risma believes that the management of secondary education should be placed in the hands of the municipal government. At present, under Law 23 of 2014, secondary education is placed under the jurisdiction of the provincial government. She served as a witness in court to make the case for this transfer and she outlined some of her efforts to improve education in Surabaya to convince the Constitutional Court judge. Her policies include providing scholarships to deserving children, as well as improving educational means and infrastructure.<sup>35</sup>

Another initiative involved imposing study time in the evening around the home neighbourhood, which required individual communities to ensure that school-age children study every weekday evening.<sup>36</sup> At the

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<sup>34</sup> One such case received much public attention. SMA 15 — a public high school in Surabaya, demanded a parent to pay Rp40 million (more than US\$3,000) for a transfer fee, so that his son could transfer from another school in Jakarta. The case has been declared closed as there was no pressure involved and the suspect did not accept the money for personal benefit. See “Pungutan Liar di SMAN 15 Surabaya, Mutasi Siswa Dipatok Rp40 Juta” [Illegal Fees in SMAN 15 Surabaya, Student Transfer Fee Set at Rp40 Million], *jpn.com*, 3 January 2015 <<http://www.jpn.com/read/2015/01/03/279135/Pungutan-Liar-di-SMAN-15-Surabaya-Mutasi-Siswa-Dipatok-Rp-40-Juta>>, see also Polisi Tutup Kasus Pungli SMAN 15 Surabaya, *tempo.co*, 23 January 2015 <<https://m.tempoco.com/read/news/2015/01/23/058637017/polisi-tutup-kasus-pungli-sman-15-surabaya>> (accessed 10 October 2015).

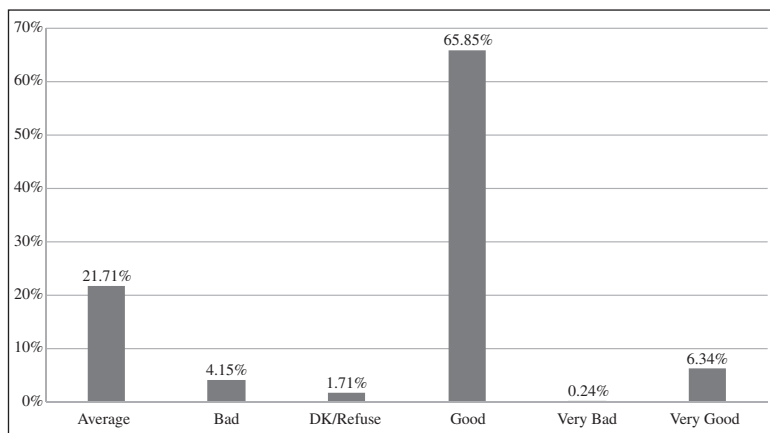
<sup>35</sup> “Risma Minta Kewenangan Pendidikan Dikembalikan ke Pemkot Surabaya, Ini Alasannya” [Risma Asked for Authority on Education to be Returned to Surabaya City Government, This is Why], *Surya online*, 8 June 2016 <<http://surabaya.tribunnews.com/2016/06/08/risma-minta-kewenangan-pendidikan-dikembalikan-ke-pemkot-surabaya-ini-alasannya>> (accessed 10 October 2016).

<sup>36</sup> One community claimed that because of such efforts, there are more students in the area who are accepted into good public schools. See “Risma launching Kampung Pendidikan Surabaya” [Risma Launched Surabaya’s Education Community], *encity.co*, 2 May 2016 <<http://www.encycity.co/risma-launching-kampung-pendidikan-surabaya/>> (accessed 10 October 2016).

time of writing, this particular legal case is ongoing, although it is hard to see her winning since it would at the very least create a precedent for local leaders to make similar demands for the transfer of authority in other policy areas. Nevertheless, it demonstrates her determination to see her campaign promise realized.

Despite her struggle to deliver free education, her electorate has been overall quite satisfied with her. The survey data (Figure 7) clearly show that more than 70 per cent believe that she has done well in this area, while around 26 per cent are less than satisfied. In fact, compared to the perception of her policies on cleanliness and orderliness and the closure of Dolly, the satisfaction level in education is higher. One possible explanation for this high rate of approval is that despite some cases that tarnished the overall approach for free education, most schools have been disciplined in implementing the policies. In comparison, some municipalities in West Java have received complaints from parents over the high cost of secondary education, the rectification of which was made an election promise by the elected governor, though not yet realized.

**Figure 7: Assessment on Provision of Educational Means**



## LIMITS AND SHAPES OF SUPPORT FOR RISMA

In Indonesia, the drivers for political support seem to revolve around religion, parties, and party leaders/candidates.<sup>37</sup> While other factors should not be dismissed, the electoral system in Indonesia has greatly encouraged a heavy emphasis on the candidates. Indeed, much of Risma's popularity is owed to her own efforts: the way she carries herself, her policies, her rhetoric — and how all these are perceived and assessed by the public.

The article has clearly outlined that generally Risma is a popular leader who has implemented various initiatives in the three focused areas of policies surveyed in this article. These policies are generally well perceived. Also, low electoral turnout may have little correlation with a leader's popularity or the success of his/her policies.

Firstly, as votes are the most obvious way of measuring support, we need to look into the phenomenon of low turnout. Although seemingly low, the 52.2 per cent turnout in the 2015 Surabaya election was actually higher than the one recorded in 2010 when only 41.3 per cent of eligible voters cast their votes. In this sense, it can even be assumed that Risma has enticed more voters to vote. The higher turnout is an indication that she had become more popular by the time of the 2015 elections.

Indeed, there was also a sense of disillusionment that needs to be taken into consideration as well. On the one hand, for many voters, politicians continue to be untrustworthy and thus they refrain from voting. On the other hand, popular politicians discourage electoral competition as it was seen to be pointless for parties to nominate a competing candidate who will most likely lose. The case of Risma reveals another twist concerning voter support for a popular candidate. While scholars have noted that Indonesians are generally turned off by the constant breaking of election

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<sup>37</sup> See, for example, William Liddle and Saiful Mujani, "Leadership, Party, and Religion: Explaining Voting Behavior in Indonesia", *Comparative Political Studies* 40, no. 7 (2007): 832–57; Dwight King, *Half-Hearted Reform: Electoral Institutions and the Struggle for Democracy in Indonesia* (Praeger, 2003).

promises and the frequent arrests of politicians for corruption and graft,<sup>38</sup> Risma was such a strong candidate that voters did not think their vote would matter and that she would get enough votes from others to be elected anyway.<sup>39</sup>

Secondly, a closer look into the data confirms the earlier notion that Surabayans are politically savvy and critical. Although there is a wide gap between the turnout rates recorded by the electoral commission (around 52 per cent) and the survey data (under 93 per cent), it can still be safely assumed that Surabayans pay attention to Risma and her policies. While overall they responded positively to Risma's major policies outlined in this article, they also believe that more can be done. The clearest example pertains to the survey data on employment, in which voters indicated that more jobs should be created in Surabaya. Beyond the simple explanation that Risma is seen as a capable leader and thus much was hoped from her, this data also show that Surabayans are demanding of their leaders. In this regard, Risma's case is important in assessing the phenomenon of low turnout in Indonesia. Risma and Whisnu Sakti Buana were elected for the second term in Surabaya (East Java) with an overwhelming victory of 86 per cent of votes in 2015. Yet, her staggeringly high votes came from a 52.25 per cent turnout. This supports the earlier notion that voters were so sure of Risma's victory, and that their votes would not have mattered either way.

Thus, for the broader electoral politics, the phenomenon of the likes of Risma provides an answer and a challenge for the further progress of direct elections. Although leaders like her who have a positive track record can help to increase electoral turnout, the case of Surabaya also

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Paige Johnson Tan, "Anti-Party Reaction in Indonesia: Causes and Implications", *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 24, no. 3 (December 2002): 484–508.

<sup>39</sup> Personal observation, Surabaya, December 2015. In fact, she was such a strong candidate that no other candidate registered until the extended period of registration was closing. It is beyond the scope of this article to weigh the higher turnout recorded against the extent of voter disillusionment and the notion that Risma was going to win anyway.



highlights the multi-faceted challenges a local leader faces. Even a capable leader has to juggle between implementing policies and keeping support in the government and among voters. It is also important to highlight that an electorate that is more aware is also more demanding. Again, even a capable leader will be challenged to take things to the limit to retain voter support.

## APPENDIX A

### Research Design<sup>40</sup>

The data for this article is a result of a survey on public opinion and voting behaviour that was done on three cities (Medan, Surabaya, Samarinda) shortly after the 9 December 2015 elections. To determine the population samples in the location, a multi-stage random sampling strategy was used, with villages as the primary sampling unit (PSU). First, the population of each city based on total population at the sub-district (*kecamatan*) level was stratified to obtain proportional samples in each of the sub-districts. Then the population was stratified further based on the area of domicile (rural vs. urban) to ensure a representative proportion between urban and rural residents in each sub-district. For this article, the respondents are completely urban residents as Surabaya is overwhelmingly urban. Finally, gender was stratified to have an equal number of female and male respondents.

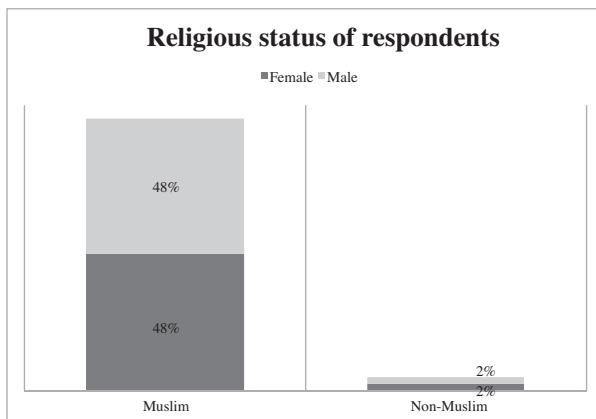
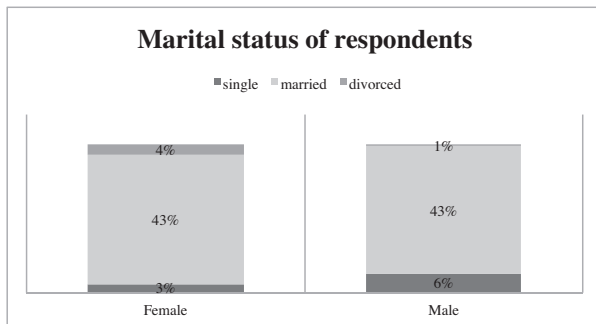
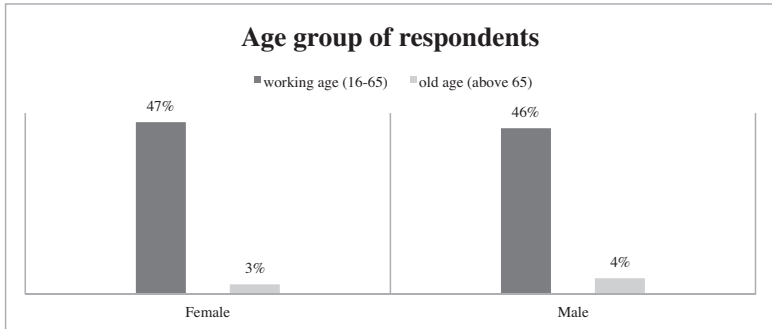
For each municipality, samples were drawn in proportion to the population size of each sub-district, and the randomization process followed these main steps. First, *kelurahan* (the urban equivalent of villages) were selected in each sub-district according to the sub-district's respective proportion of population. Second, all neighbourhood organizations (*rukun tetangga* or RT) in each PSU were listed and five of them were selected at random for each unit. Third, two households were selected at random in each RT. Finally, in each selected household, all household members aged 17 years or older were listed, and one person selected with the aid of the Kish Grid. If a female respondent was selected from one household, a male respondent would be selected from another household. In case the selected respondent could not be interviewed (not available after two visits during interview time in the village, refused to be interviewed, etc.), the respondent was substituted by repeating stages three and four above.

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<sup>40</sup> This description of research design is drawn heavily from Diego Fossati, *The State of Local Politics in Indonesia: Survey Evidence from Three Cities*, Trends in Southeast Asia no. 5/2016 (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, 2016), pp. 7, 10.

## APPENDIX B

### Demographic Composition of Respondents (N=410)



## APPENDIX C

Questions posed for the assessment of Risma's policies:

Bagaimana penilaian Ibu/Bapak atas kerja pemerintahan Kota Surabaya selama ini dalam menangani persoalan-persoalan berikut:

Masalah	Sangat buruk	Buruk	Sedang	Baik	Sangat baik	Tidak tahu/tidak menjawab
Menjaga lingkungan hidup (membersihkan sampah, got, dll)						
Menegakkan hukum						
Menjaga ketertiban umum						
Menciptakan lapangan kerja						
Menyediakan sarana pendidikan						

What is your assessment of the performance of Surabaya's municipal government in handling these issues?:

Issues	Very poor	Poor	Moderate	Good	Very good	Do not know/no answer
Maintaining the environment (waste management, gutter, etc.)						
Law enforcement						
Maintaining public order						
Providing jobs						
Providing means for education						

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ISBN 978-981-47-8604-1



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