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Trends in Southeast Asia

THE STATE OF LOCAL POLITICS IN
INDONESIA: SURVEY EVIDENCE FROM
THREE CITIES

DIEGO FOSSATI

ISEAS YUSOF ISHAK
INSTITUTE

Trends in Southeast Asia

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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).

The **Trends in Southeast Asia** series acts as a platform for serious analyses by selected authors who are experts in their fields. It is aimed at encouraging policy makers and scholars to contemplate the diversity and dynamism of this exciting region.

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The State of Local Politics in Indonesia: Survey Evidence from Three Cities

By Diego Fossati

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Decentralization reforms in Indonesia have empowered local government with substantial powers. Local politics therefore constitutes a privileged arena for the study of democratic consolidation in this country.
- Research on local Indonesian politics is based almost exclusively on case-study analysis and qualitative work. As a result, while we have accumulated considerable knowledge on political elites, we know little about ordinary voters.
- This paper analyses a rich, original dataset with survey data from the cities of Medan in North Sumatra, Samarinda in East Kalimantan, and Surabaya in East Java. These three surveys, fielded shortly after the implementation of local direct elections on 9 December 2015, offer an unprecedented opportunity to learn about how various aspects of local politics are experienced by voters.
- After an introduction on local direct elections and the three field sites, I focus on the main themes emerging from survey data, namely evaluation of local government, experience of electoral campaigns, and voting behaviour.
- Findings reveal commonalities and differences in local politics across the three cities. Voters in Medan, Samarinda and Surabaya are rather similar in their evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of local government performance, in their experience of electoral campaigns, in how they account for voting choices and evaluate candidates. However, they also differ in their satisfaction with and

trust in local institutions, and in their degree of political interest, participation, and knowledge.

- The paper concludes with a discussion of the relevance of the finding for our understanding of Indonesian politics.

The State of Local Politics in Indonesia: Survey Evidence from Three Cities

By Diego Fossati¹

INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of decentralization laws in 2001, local governments have maintained a crucial role in advancing social welfare in Indonesia. Indonesian districts, cities and provinces currently enjoy substantial autonomy in several fields, ranging from development policy to public works, environmental protection, and the provision of social services such as education and healthcare. Understanding how local politics works is therefore of primary importance in appreciating the state of democracy in Indonesia.

For several years after the breakdown of the New Order regime, a critical view of Indonesian politics prevailed in the literature. From this perspective, democracy in Indonesia is systematically prone to oligarchic domination and elite capture, with meaningful democratic advancement being thwarted by powerful local interests (Hadiz 2010; Hadiz and Robison 2005; Winters 2011). More recently, however, scholars have studied the emergence of new actors in Indonesian politics, showing that democratization has provided unprecedented opportunities for civil society mobilization and political change (Aspinall 2013; Mietzner 2013a; Rosser 2015; Pepinsky 2013).

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Against this mixed picture of the democratization process, the introduction of local direct elections for district heads and governors in 2005 has received particular attention. While local direct elections, known in Indonesia as *pilkada*, are overwhelmingly supported by Indonesians (Gabrillin 2014), scholarly work has highlighted their limitations, casting doubts on their ability to enhance accountability (Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009).

New research has provided valuable insights into *pilkada* elections, but this is almost exclusively based on case-study analysis and qualitative work, and the findings have not been triangulated with the help of alternative approaches. This bias in the literature has had an important, unfortunate consequence for our understanding of Indonesian local politics: while we know a great deal about political *elites*, we know very little about *voters*. We have a fairly clear picture of interactions among key political actors, of the role of political parties, of the importance of political finance, and of how local leaders mobilize ethnic and religious identities to their own advantage. We know little about how common people acquire information on local politics, use this information to orient their voting choices, evaluate candidates, participate in political campaigns, and assess the performance of elected politicians, local government and local institutions.

This paper attempts to improve our understanding of local government and politics in Indonesia by focusing on voters rather than on political elites. It exploits original survey data on public opinion and voting behaviour to study how Indonesians perceive local government and politics, acquire information and participate in local politics, and decide whom to vote for. These data were collected from three surveys fielded shortly after direct elections (*pilkada serentak*) were held on 9 December 2015, in three major cities, namely Medan in North Sumatra, Samarinda in East Kalimantan, and Surabaya in East Java.

My analysis finds that while voters in Medan, Samarinda and Surabaya report similar campaign experiences and use similar criteria in judging political candidates and parties, they differ in their evaluation of local government performance, in how they acquire information on politics, and in their degree of political knowledge, interest and participation. Overall, the data suggest that local government is performing well in key

policy areas such as the delivery of social services like education and healthcare. Most crucially, Indonesian voters are more engaged in local politics and trustful of political institutions than typically believed.

In the next section, I outline the historical background of the implementation of local direct elections in Indonesian regions, and I discuss the recent wave of *pilkada* elections in 2015. In the section following that, I introduce the three field sites where the survey was implemented and present the survey methodology. I then use the empirical evidence to discuss three main aspects of Indonesian local government and politics: evaluations of local government performance, experiences in the electoral campaign, and political behaviour. I conclude with some observations about the relevance of the findings, and with some suggestions for further research.

***PILKADA SERENTAK* IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In the first few years after the breakdown of the New Order regime and the promulgation of decentralization laws, district heads, mayors and provincial governors in Indonesia were elected by local legislative councils (DPRD, or Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah). Since 2005, however, local leaders have been chosen through direct popular elections, known in Indonesia as *pilkada langsung* or simply *pilkada*.

Since their introduction, a debate about *pilkada* elections has raged in the mass media. One point of view sees *pilkada* elections as a cornerstone for democratic consolidation because they enable citizens to choose their representatives directly, and to vote them out of office when they do not perform adequately. Voters themselves seem to be strong supporters of this perspective, overwhelmingly preferring *pilkada* to the indirect election of district heads (Gabrillin 2014). However, some crucial weaknesses have been identified both by scholars and political elites, such as the prevalence of clientelistic practices, vote-buying, the auctioning of party endorsements to the highest bidder, illicit political financing, the prevalence of personal networks and ethnic politics over programmatic factors, and the entrenchment of local political dynasties (Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009; Mietzner 2011; Buehler 2009, 2013; Buehler

and Tan 2007; Aspinall, Dettman and Warburton 2011). Prominent political actors such as former Minister of the Interior Gamawan Fauzi and presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto have also advocated against *pilkada* elections, arguing that the excessive cost of campaigning represents a threat to democracy.

In September 2014, the Indonesian National Assembly passed legislation to revert to the old system of indirect elections through local legislative councils. The bill was later amended after unprecedented public uproar against it, and a new wave of *pilkada* elections were held in 2015. While the implementation of local direct elections was staggered between 2005 and 2013 (elections used to be held at the end of local incumbents' terms in office), all elections held in 2015 were scheduled on the same date to increase implementation efficiency. As shown in the map in Figure 1, a total of 269 regions (224 districts, 36 cities, and 9 provinces) held simultaneous direct elections; although *these* were cancelled in five locations due to legal issues.²

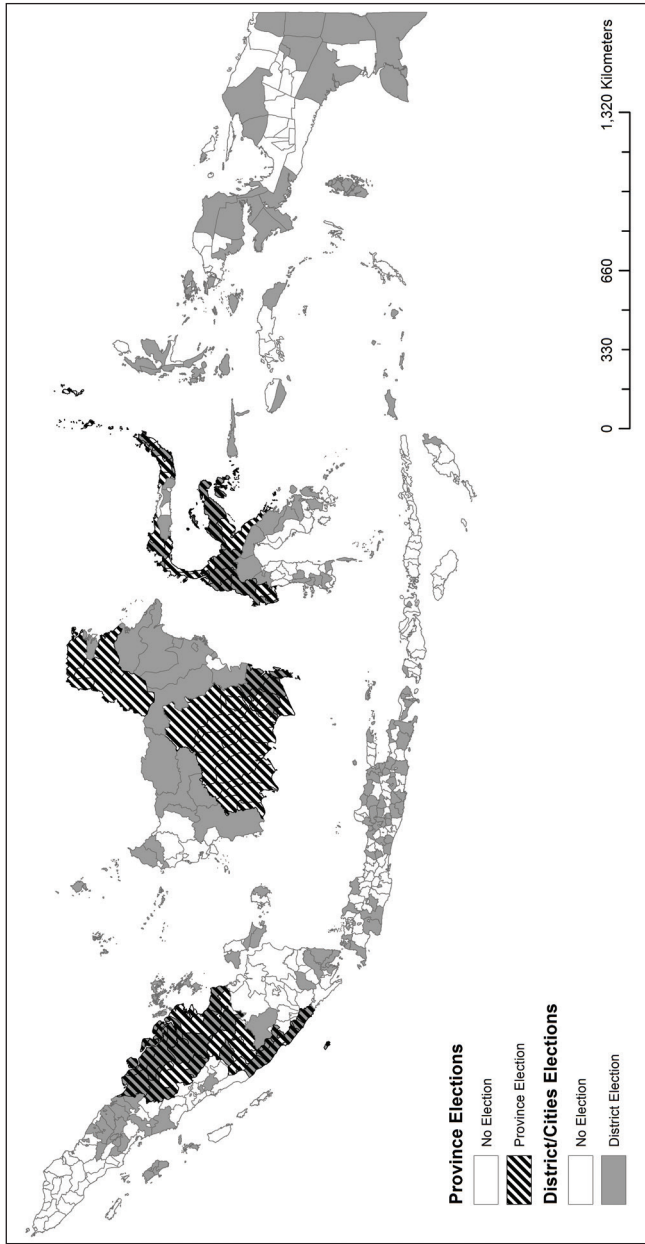
In the immediate aftermath of the elections, reports in the media, based on preliminary and partial data, identified two main trends emerging from this wave of *pilkada*. First, local elections appeared to be dominated by incumbent politicians, which was widely interpreted as a sign that local political elites were firmly establishing their rule in most Indonesian regions, where the competitiveness of local politics remained low (Jong, Halim and Sundaryani 2015). Second, *pilkada* elections seemed to be compromised by low levels of electoral participation (Bachyul, Gunawan and Parlina 2015). This confirmed fears about increasing disaffection with democracy among voters, an issue widely discussed in the press in the lead up to the elections (Ramdhani 2015).

As data on electoral returns are now final and available for all regions concerned, a more complete picture of electoral outcomes can be drawn.³

² The five regions were the districts of Fak Fak (Papua) and Simalungun (North Sumatra), the cities of Manado (North Sulawesi) and Pematangsiantar (North Sumatra) and the province of Central Kalimantan.

³ The author is very grateful to Melisa Bintoro for graciously sharing these data.

Figure 1: Regions Holding Pilkada Elections on 9 December 2015



Source: GIS, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute.

The figures in Table 1 suggest that indeed, most *pilkada* elections in 2015 were not highly competitive. With an average share for the winning candidate of 51.5 per cent and an average of three candidates running for office, most district and city elections featured a dominant candidate whose election was quite predictable. However, the extent to which the lack of competition was actively encouraged by incumbent politicians, is not entirely clear. On one hand, seats for which incumbents ran do appear to have been less competitive, with an average vote share for the winner of 53.8 per cent against 48 per cent for open elections. On the other hand, many incumbents actually failed to secure re-election, suggesting that the incumbent advantage in local elections may not be as large as commonly thought. Overall, a total of 158 incumbent district heads and mayors ran for office, but only 102 of them, or 64.6 per cent were elected for a second term.⁴ As for participation, the data in Table 1 show that

Table 1: Key Electoral Outcomes of *Pilkada Serentak* 2015

	District type		Incumbent running?		Total
	Kabupaten	Kota	Yes	No	
Average number of candidates	3.11 (n=224)	3.06 (n=36)	3.01 (n=156)	3.26 (n=102)	3.10 (n=258)
Average vote share of winning candidate*	51.0% (n=220)	54.7% (n=35)	53.8% (n=155)	48% (n=100)	51.5% (n=255)
Turnout	70.3% (n=220)	64.0% (n=34)	68.9% (n=153)	70.2% (n=101)	69.4% (n=254)

Note: Kab. Tasikmalaya, Kab. Blitar and Kab. Timor Tengah Utara were dropped because they only had a single candidate running.

⁴ There is a substantial difference, however, between urban and rural areas: while 62.9 per cent of district heads were re-elected, the same share increases to 73.1 per cent for mayors. This suggests that elections dominated by incumbent politicians are more common in cities than in districts.

voter turnout was very high, averaging 70.3 per cent in districts and 64 per cent in cities. This is strong evidence that the large-scale exodus from civic engagement prophesied by many observers did not take place.

RESEARCH DESIGN


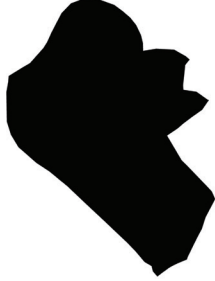

To investigate public opinion and voting behaviour, a survey was designed and fielded in the cities of Medan, Samarinda and Surabaya, three cities that are important economic and political centres in their respective regions, namely Sumatra, Kalimantan and Java. While this strategy does not allow us to draw inferences that can be generalized to the whole country, it is suitable for exploring in depth some key political dynamics in these three locations. Table 2 summarizes background information about the three cities. The cities may differ remarkably in ethnic and religious make up, but they enjoy similar levels of socioeconomic development, being substantially better off than the national average. In fact, GDP per capita in Surabaya is especially high.

Pilkada elections in these three cities possessed a key similarity, namely that they were not very competitive. The three incumbent mayors won re-election with very high shares of the total votes — 71.7 per cent in Medan, 75.4 per cent in Samarinda, and 86.2 per cent in Surabaya. However, the degree of popular participation differs substantially. While the electoral turnout in Medan was one of the lowest in Indonesia at 24.9 per cent, figures for Samarinda and Surabaya are much closer to the average in city elections.

To determine the population samples in the three locations, a multistage 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. 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 four main steps. First, villages or *kelurahan* (their urban

Table 2: Background Information on the Three Field Sites

	Medan	Samarinda	Surabaya
			
<i>Demographics</i>			
Population (2011)	2,120,235	760,043	2,783,422
Ethnic groups (Census 2010)	Batak (35.2%) Javanese (33%) Chinese (9.7%) Minangkabau (7.8%) Malay (6.9%)	Javanese (36.6%) Banjar (24.5%) Bugis (14.6%) Kutai (6.4%)	Javanese (80.4%) Madurese (10.4%) Chinese (5.3%)
Religious groups (Census 2010)	Islam (68.8%) Protestant (20.3%) Buddhist (8.8%) Catholic (2.8%)	Islam (90.9%) Protestant (5.3%) Catholic (2.1%)	Islam (86.5%) Protestant (8.1%) Catholic (3.2%)

<i>Development (INDO-DAPOER, 2011)</i>				
GDP per capita (rupiah million)	18.194	16.556	33.941	
Human Development Index	77.36	78.85	74.85	
<i>Politics</i>				
Main parties in local legislative council	PDI-P (9) Golkar (7)	Golkar (10) PDI-P (8)	PDI-P (15) Demokrat (6)	
(number of seats, legislative elections of 2014)	Gerindra (6) PKS (5) Demokrat (5) PPP (5) PAN (5)	Demokrat (6) Gerindra (5)	Gerindra (5) PKB (5) PKS (5)	
Number of candidates (<i>pilkada</i> 2015)	2	2	2	
Turnout rate (<i>pilkada</i> 2015)	24.9%	46.9%	48.8%	
Share of votes for the winner (<i>pilkada</i> 2015)	71.7%	75.4%	86.2%	

equivalent) were selected in each sub-district according to the sub-district's respective proportion of population. As a result, two villages and 39 *kelurahan* were selected using systematic random sampling in Samarinda, while in the two other locations all units were *kelurahan* (41 in each city). 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 the case that 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. As a result, from each PSUs, ten respondents were selected, for a total of 1,230 respondents.

EVALUATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Scholars of Indonesian politics are often critical when assessing local government performance. The academic work that emphasizes continuities with the authoritarian past, such as elite domination and the entrenchment of narrow economic interests, points to a key challenge in young democracies that is often discussed in the comparative literature. Decentralization reforms, in theory, are expected to strengthen accountability, because they bring the government closer to the people: as constituencies are smaller and more homogeneous, and local officials have a better knowledge of local preferences, decentralized governance should increase government responsiveness (Hayek 1945; Oates 1999). In practice, however, low levels of socioeconomic development can impede accountability (Bardhan 2002). Citizens in low- and middle-income countries are often poorly informed about politics, and public participation in civic and political life is lacking. As a result, elite capture often prevents local government from implementing widely supported policies (Keefer and Khemani 2005; Bardhan and Mookherjee 2000).

The survey data collected in the three field sites allows me to contribute to this debate with an analysis of public opinion on the current state of local government in Indonesia. The key question we can answer with this data is one of representation and accountability: how satisfied are Indonesians with how local government works?

Respondents in our survey were asked this question directly, and they provided an assessment of the quality of local government along various policy dimensions. The battery of questions reported in Table 3 asks respondents to evaluate local government using a scale that ranges from 1 (“very bad”) to 5 (“very good”), with 3 being neutral (“average”). The first row reports evaluation scores for overall local government performance, and it shows that there are substantial differences across the survey sites. While negative evaluations prevail in Medan (average score of 2.87), positive evaluations are predominant in Samarinda and Surabaya (average scores of 3.45 and 3.82 respectively).

The data reported in the remaining rows allow a more fine-grained analysis of public opinion on local government performance by disaggregating the overall evaluations discussed above into different policy areas. Respondents were asked to provide their views on how well their city government is doing on a host of key issues, including ensuring order and justice, enforcing the law, fostering economic development, creating jobs, supporting small business, helping those in need, providing education and healthcare services, building infrastructure, supplying public utilities, preserving a clean urban environment, fighting corruption, ensuring transparency and efficiency, and maintaining harmonious relations among ethnic and religious groups. The disaggregated average scores reported in Table 3 allow us to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses of local government performance in the three cities. As expected, respondents in Medan are the most critical overall, expressing more negative opinions than in the other two cities on most issues. However, the data show that there are substantial commonalities across the three field sites. First, respondents appear overall to be satisfied with how their cities are delivering social services. Education and healthcare are two policy areas evaluated positively in all surveys, although the average scores are higher in Samarinda and Surabaya than they are in Medan. Similarly, respondents express satisfaction for their local government’s

Table 3: Evaluations of Local Government Performance, by Policy Area and City

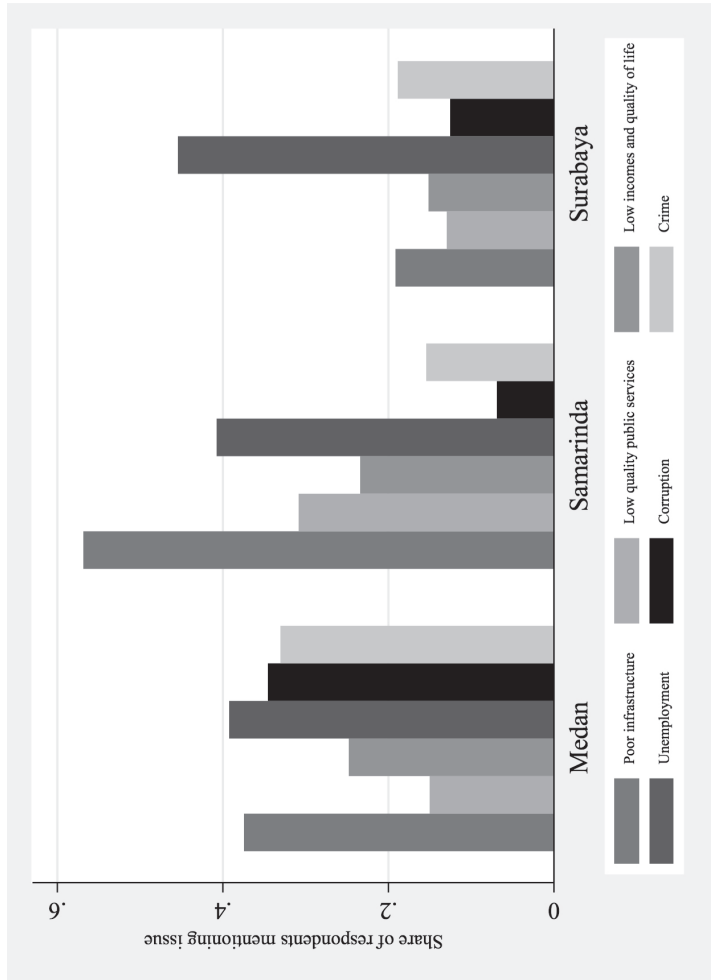
	Medan	Samarinda	Surabaya	Number of respondents
Overall	2.87	3.45	3.82	1,201
Order and justice	2.92	3.31	3.67	1,198
Rule of law	2.79	3.18	3.37	1,152
Economic development	2.85	3.25	3.51	1,180
Jobs	2.46	2.84	3.09	1,189
Small business	2.79	3.06	3.34	1,161
Helping those in need	2.78	3.04	3.4	1,181
Education	3.37	3.62	3.75	1,212
Healthcare	3.4	3.73	3.79	1,214
Infrastructure	3.02	3.28	3.75	1,217
Utilities	3.1	3.31	3.66	1,221
Environment and cleaning	2.96	2.99	3.65	1,214
Corruption	2.47	2.84	3.06	1,047
Transparency & efficiency	2.88	3.09	3.51	1,030
Religious/ethnic harmony	3.64	3.6	3.82	1,156

ability to foster harmonious relations among ethnic and religious groups. Second, two areas consistently had the lowest average evaluation scores. The average scores for “fighting corruption” are the lowest overall, ranging from 2.47 in Medan to 3.06 in Surabaya, and “creating jobs” is also overwhelmingly negatively evaluated, positing average scores of 2.46 in Medan, 2.84 in Samarinda, and 3.09 in Surabaya. As for the other policy fields, variation across survey sites mirrors the overall evaluation of local government performance discussed in the previous paragraph.

Our survey data also allow an investigation of the problems that are perceived as the most salient for local government. One question in the survey asks respondents to indicate the issues in their city which they are most concerned about, listing a range of 14 choices and allowing respondents to identify up to three main problems.⁵ Overall, the top five issues identified as problems are unemployment (mentioned by 42 per cent of respondents), poor infrastructure (38 per cent), crime (22 per cent), low incomes and low quality of life (21 per cent) and low quality of public services (20 per cent). However, Figure 2 shows that variation across survey location is substantial. The bar chart shows the share of respondents who identify a given issue as being a key problem in one of their three answers. In Medan, corruption and crime are much more salient than they are in other surveys. For instance, 33 per cent of respondents are concerned about crime, while this figure drops to 15 per cent and 19 per cent in Samarinda and Surabaya, respectively. Similarly, corruption is a rather marginal issue in Samarinda (7 per cent) and Surabaya (12 per cent), but a very important one in Medan (34 per cent). In Samarinda, the figures for “poor infrastructure” and “low quality of public services” are significantly higher than in the other two surveys. For instance, while only 19 per cent of respondents in Surabaya are concerned about low-quality infrastructure, this figure jumps to 57 per cent in Samarinda. Finally, respondents in Surabaya are overall less likely to mention a “most important problem” in their city, plausibly an indicator of the higher levels of satisfaction with local government performance in this

⁵ A total of 1,162 respondents has indicated at least one issue they are most concerned about.

Figure 2: Perceptions of the Most Important Problems by City



city, where unemployment is the only issue mentioned by more than 20 per cent of respondents.

ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS AND THE QUALITY OF LOCAL DEMOCRACY

The survey questionnaire includes questions that allow us to draw inferences about several facets of democracy in the three cities surveyed. In particular, I discuss in this section a number of issues that are crucial for the consolidation of democracy in Indonesia, such as the extent of voter interest and information on local politics, the sources of information, and the degree of satisfaction with various aspects of the electoral campaign.

Political Interest and Knowledge

To gauge engagement and interest in local politics, survey respondents were asked to report how much information they had acquired about the local mayoral elections. The data suggest that there is a split in the electorate with respect to how much information was gathered during the electoral campaign. While 54 per cent of respondents reported getting little or no information on the *pilkada* elections, the remaining 44 per cent assesses the information they acquired as sufficient or more than sufficient. These figures, however, vary substantially across the field sites, as the share of respondents acquiring at least sufficient information is much lower in Medan (30 per cent) than in Samarinda (51 per cent) and Surabaya (57 per cent). As the data show, this indicator is closely correlated with official electoral turnout figures in the three cities, suggesting an organic relationship between political interest and participation in local elections.

While data on acquired information are a good indicator of the degree of political interest among voters, it is not a sufficient measure of how informed they are about local politics. To measure political knowledge more accurately, we asked survey respondents a battery of ten questions about politics in their city, ranging from very simple ones (for instance, “name one of the candidates running for mayor”) to more complex ones (such as a question asking respondents to identify the speaker of the

local legislative council). We have used the answers to these questions to count the number of correct answers for each respondent, thus creating an index of political knowledge. Figure 3 groups respondents into three main categories of political knowledge (low, medium, high) and plots the distribution of this variable in the three cities.⁶ Again, the charts show substantial differences between Medan and the other two sites. While only about 4 per cent of respondents in Medan are classified as “high-information” voters, this value increases dramatically to 29 per cent in Samarinda and 20 per cent in Surabaya. Conversely, the share of “low-information” voters is about 40 per cent in Medan, but only 13 per cent in Samarinda and 24 per cent in Surabaya.

As for sources of information on local politics, television is the most important for about 39 per cent of the respondents, followed by posters, billboards and pamphlets (26 per cent), local government officials such as the head of the local neighbourhood organization or *rukun tetangga* (RT, 15 per cent), family and friends (10 per cent), and newspapers (6 per cent). Despite the recent growth of internet and social media as channels for political communication, only about 2 per cent of the sample identifies internet and social media as their primary source of information on local politics. The pie charts in Figure 4 show variation in main sources of information across the three cities, and reveal some interesting patterns. In Medan, direct communication by candidates through billboards, posters, and electoral pamphlets appears to be much more important than in the other two cities (39 per cent of respondents cite this as their primary source of information, against 29 per cent in Samarinda and 12 per cent in Surabaya), and only 6 per cent of respondents rely on RT heads and other local officials, against 17 per cent in Samarinda and 21 per cent in Surabaya. The role of television as the main source of information on local politics also varies substantially across city, as respondents in

⁶ Respondents are classified as low-information voters if they answered fewer than five questions correctly, medium-information if they answered correctly five to seven questions, and high-information if they answered at least eight questions correctly. With this categorization, 316 respondents are classified as low-information, 692 as middle-information, and 221 as high-information.

Figure 3: Political Knowledge

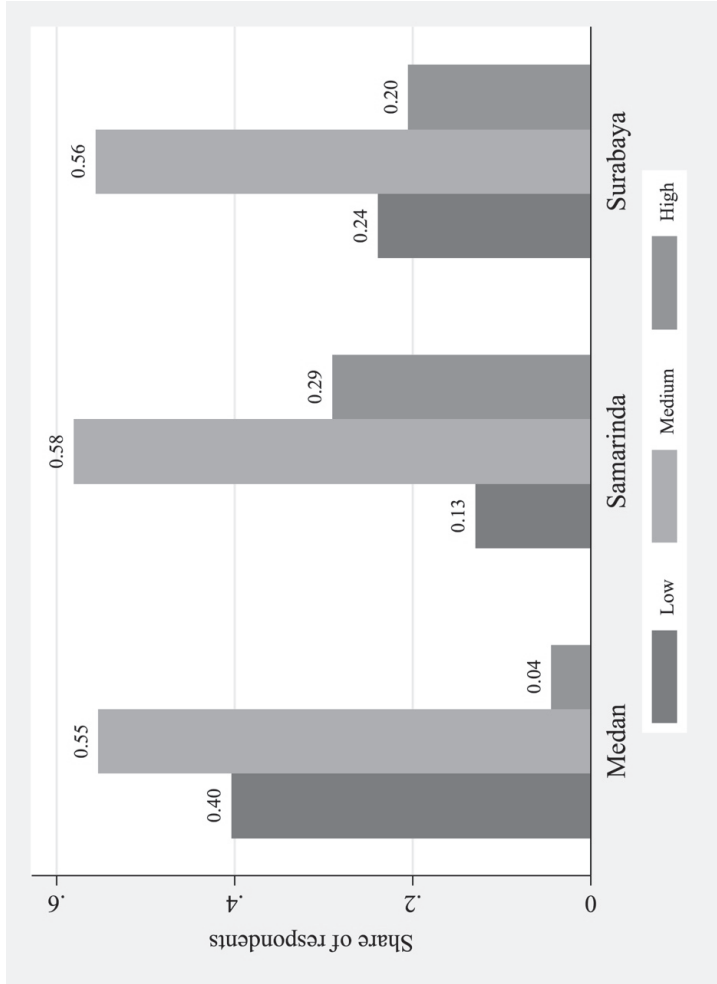
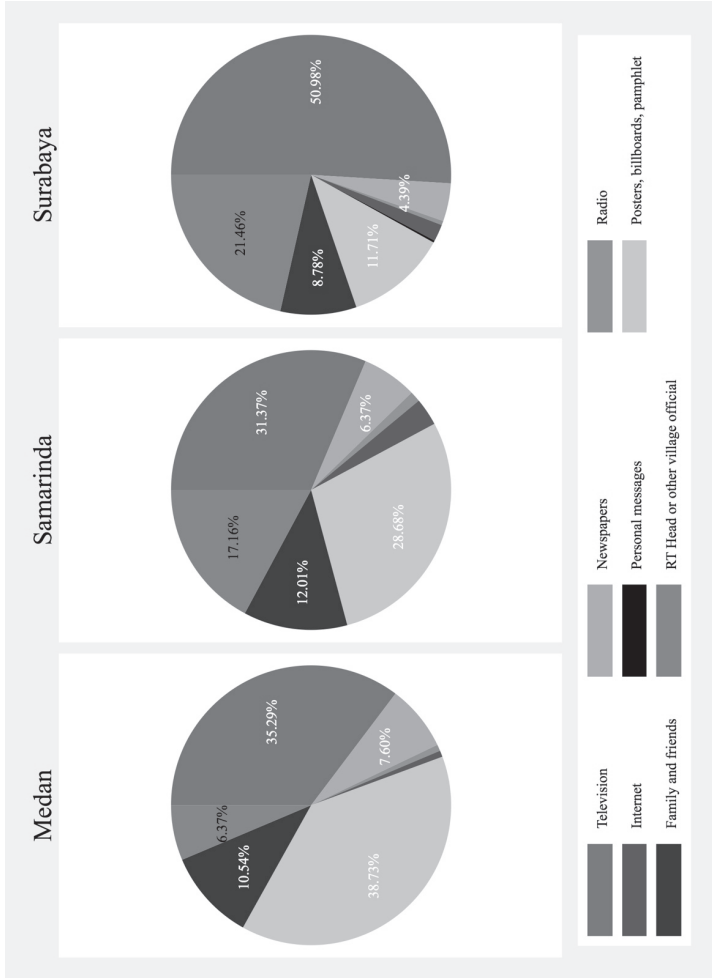


Figure 4: Sources of Information



Surabaya are much more reliant on television (the primary source for 51 per cent of respondents) than their counterparts in Medan (35 per cent) and Samarinda (32 per cent).

Voter-Politician Relations

Linkages between politicians and voters are a key aspect in people's experience with politics. During electoral campaigns, candidates and political parties reach out to voters to muster support for their election bids, and they do so by employing various strategies. In an early analysis of selected electoral campaigns in the recent wave of *pilkada serentak* (Fossati, Simandjuntak and Fionna 2016), it was shown that candidates at local elections typically emphasize personal traits such as leadership, competence and integrity to win votes, although programmatic platforms sometimes play an important role. With the survey data we collected, we can now complement the findings from qualitative research by focusing on how voters perceive and experience electoral campaigns in *pilkada* elections.

Only about 7 per cent of respondents in our sample, with little variation across the sample sites, report having been directly contacted by a candidate, their campaign, or a political party supporting them. These 84 respondents were asked to list all the ways in which they were contacted. In Medan, visits to their home were by far the prevailing mode of voter contact during electoral campaigns (57 per cent of contacted respondents mention this mode of contact), followed by phone calls (14 per cent) at a distant second. In Samarinda as well, most respondents (64 per cent) report being contacted at home, but phone calls were much more common here (39 per cent) than in the other two sites. Finally, respondents in Surabaya were mostly contacted at home (30 per cent), by phone (23 per cent), and at events in their neighbourhoods (23 per cent).

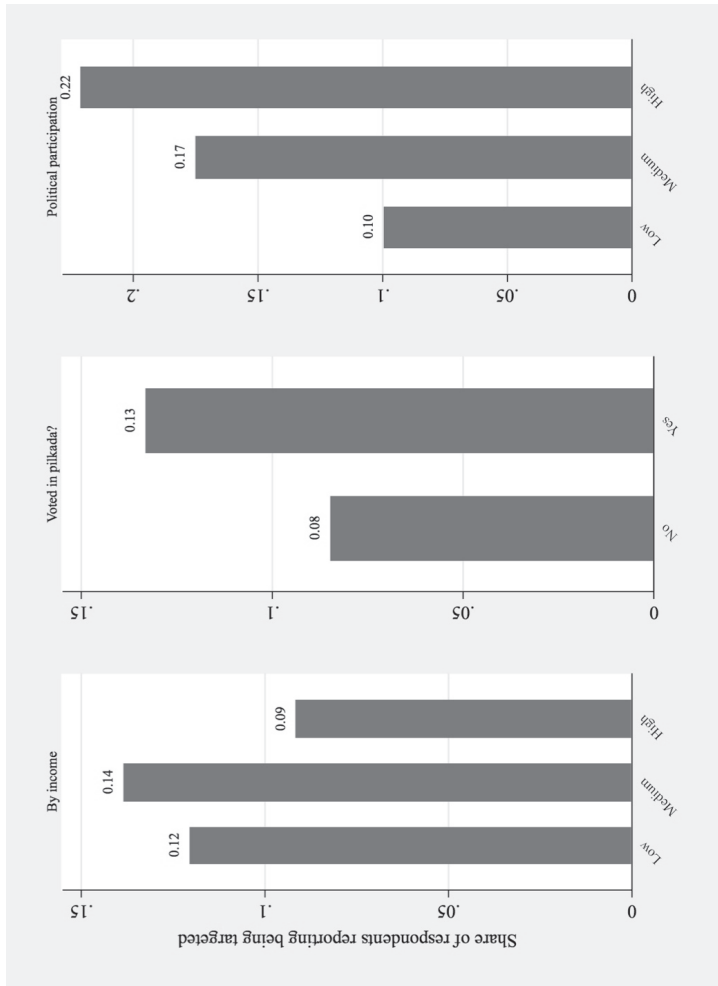
A much-discussed mode of relationship between voters and politicians is the pernicious practice of vote buying, in which voters commit to supporting a candidate in exchange for material gifts such as small amounts of money. While this is a phenomenon that is not easy to pick up in survey responses due to the social stigma attached to it, we have asked two questions about "money politics". The first

asks if the respondent has heard about vote buying occurring during the electoral campaign, and it was answered affirmatively by 43 per cent of the respondents. The second asks if respondents were directly targeted with an offer from vote-buyers. About 13 per cent of our sample (a total of 155 respondents), with little variation across the field sites, reported receiving an offer of material benefit in exchange for their vote. These results suggest that vote buying is still occurring, to a certain degree, in local elections. However, additional research is needed to ascertain the incidence and the effectiveness of this electoral strategy, and how it has evolved since the introduction of local direct elections in 2005.

While the data collected are not sufficient for an exhaustive analysis of vote buying in Indonesia, they can provide some insights on the motivations and the strategies of those who engage in such an approach. More precisely, we can study if certain population segments are more likely than others to be targeted by vote-buying brokers. The key hypothesis suggested by literature on the subject is that vote-buyers disproportionately target low-income voters, as they are a group that is particularly responsive to monetary incentives (Stokes 2005). The data reported in the left panel in Figure 5 show that this is not the case in Indonesian *pilkada* elections, as only 12 per cent of low-income voters reported having been offered financial benefits in exchange for their votes, a figure lower than the average in the sample.⁷ Voters in the middle-income category are slightly more likely to be targeted (14 per cent), while high-income voters are less likely to experience being contacted by vote-buyers (9 per cent). These figures suggest that the primary rationale for distributing monetary or material gifts during electoral campaigns is not vote-buying per se, as the segment of the electorate that should be more vulnerable to the lure of such hand-outs is not targeted more aggressively. Rather, as recent research suggests (Aspinall et al. 2015),

⁷ Respondents were grouped into three main categories according to their reported income level. Low-income respondents report incomes below Rp1.6 million, middle-income respondents between Rp1.6 million and Rp4 million, and high-income respondents above Rp4 million. Of the respondents reporting being targeted by vote-buyers, 46 are in the low-income bracket, 89 middle-income, and 16 high-income.

Figure 5: Targets of Vote Buying by Income, Participation



“money politics” in Indonesia may be better understood as an “entry ticket” purchased by candidates to increase visibility and goodwill, after which they are still evaluated by voters on other grounds, such as their personality, experience, and policy proposals. If this is true, vote-buying brokers should target voters who are more likely to participate in local elections, as they are plausibly more interested than non-voters in receiving information about candidates and their programmes. The second and third panels in Figure 5 provide some evidence that this is the case in the three cities we surveyed. The central panel compares respondents based on whether they voted in the recent *pilkada* election, and it shows that voters are more likely to be targeted by vote-buying brokers than non-voters, as the share of respondents reporting being targeted is about 5 per cent higher for the former group than for the latter. When a broader range of modes of political participation is considered, including non-electoral participation such as contacting a politician, donating towards a candidate or a party and using social media to engage in political debate, the differences across voter groups are even more evident. In the right panel of Figure 5, voters based on an index of political participation built from the survey data are compared, and we find that there is a strong positive association between political engagement and the likelihood of being offered material benefits in exchange for one’s vote.⁸ While only 10 per cent of low-participation voters reported being targeted by vote-buyers, the figure increases starkly to 22 per cent for the sector of the electorate that is most engaged in politics. These results indicate that

⁸ Respondents were asked to report if they have engaged in a series of political activities, ranging from voting in various kinds of elections to less common activities such as volunteering for a campaign, attending a political rally, participating in a protest initiative, and so forth. These answers were used to build a simple additive index, ranging from zero to ten which tracks the number of questions that were answered affirmatively. Respondents were then categorized as low-participation if they had scores lower than four, medium-participation for scores of four and five, and high-participation for scores higher than five. Of the respondents who reported being offered material benefits in exchange for their vote, 82 were classified as low-participation, 56 as medium and 17 as high-participation.

the link between “money politics” and electoral outcomes may be more complex than is often assumed, as financial incentives may interact with candidate evaluation in ways that are not yet fully understood by researchers.

Satisfaction with Local Politics

As mentioned above, a recurring theme in the study of Indonesian local politics is that democratization in general, and local direct elections in particular, have failed to provide voters with meaningful alternatives. From this perspective, local politics in Indonesia is typically dominated by local elites who hijack the political selection process, preventing high-quality challengers from competing. If this account were accurate, we should expect Indonesians to be mostly dissatisfied with the overall quality of the candidates running for office in local elections. The survey data we have collected in Medan, Samarinda and Surabaya, show that this is not the case in these three cities. When asked to evaluate the quality of candidates with a five-point scale where higher numbers correspond to more favourable evaluations, the average score in the sample is 3.42 (3.04 in Medan, 3.32 in Samarinda and 3.90 in Surabaya). Even in Medan, the location where citizens are most dissatisfied with local government and politics, evaluations of election candidate are neutral on average.

Respondents were also asked how satisfied they were with the quality of electoral campaigns. More precisely, they were asked to assess if the most important issues in their city had been sufficiently discussed during the campaign. Answers to this question show widespread dissatisfaction in all three cities about the quality of campaign debates. In fact, a majority of respondents (65 per cent in Medan, 67 per cent in Samarinda, and 72 per cent in Surabaya) feels that such issues were not adequately discussed. While such discontent may be related to the implementation of the new campaign regulations, which significantly curtailed opportunities for political communication, it could also have resulted from the fact that local electoral campaigns in Indonesia have traditionally neglected the discussion of policy-related issues, focusing more closely instead on candidate traits, patronage considerations and ethnic politics.

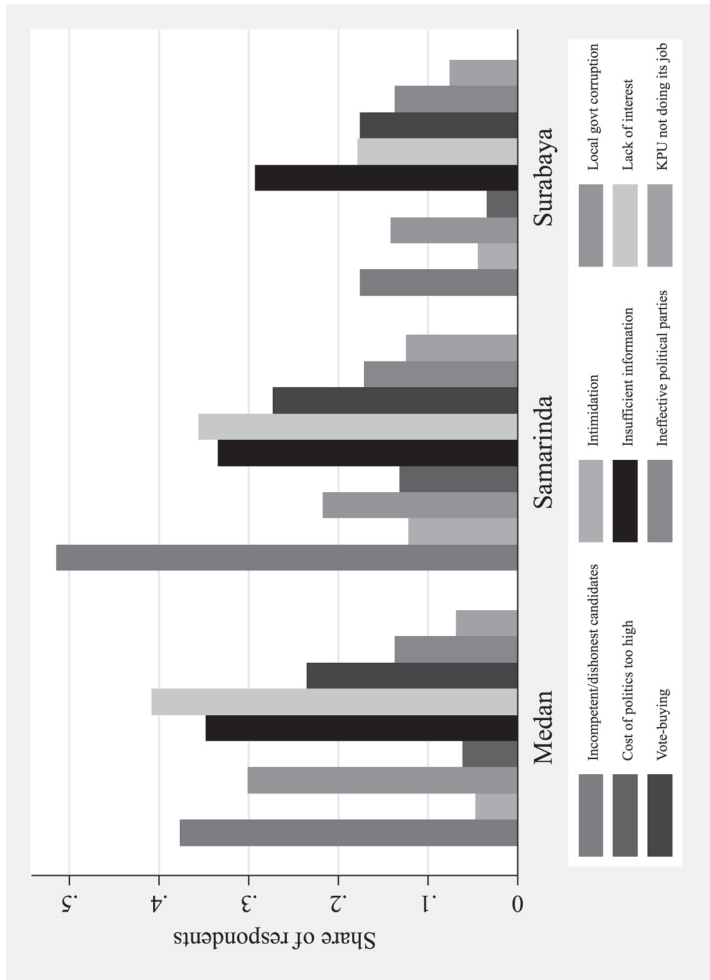
Due to the lack of strong electoral institutions that can operate independently from social pressures, young democracies often encounter

challenges in implementing elections. While national policy-makers typically formulate guidelines to ensure that elections are free and fair, the implementation of such “good practices” can vary substantially, as the capacity to enforce national regulation is not uniform within a country’s territory. To explore perceptions about the legitimacy of local electoral institutions, we have asked respondents in our survey to evaluate if elections in their city were free and fair. The results show a high degree of consensus that they were, as 90 per cent of respondents answered this question affirmatively. While there is a certain degree of variation across the cities (this figure ranges from 81 per cent in Medan to 94 per cent in Surabaya), these results suggest that the danger of electoral fraud is not a concern for voters in these three localities.

The fact that the Indonesian voters surveyed did not perceive electoral fraud as being widespread, however, does not imply satisfaction with the implementation of local direct elections. In a related question, we asked respondents to identify the main problems that characterized the recent electoral campaign, and allowed them to mention up to three issues. Possible answers included a range of problems that have been known to be a challenge for democratic consolidation in Indonesia, such as corruption of local government officials, vote-buying, and the lack of civic engagement. The chart in Figure 6 plots the answers to these questions, showing the share of respondents that, in each city, mention the nine issues included in the survey as a problem during the electoral campaign.⁹ While there is some variation across the field sites, the overall most reported problem is the presence of incompetent or dishonest candidates (reported by 36 per cent of respondents), followed by lack of information (32 per cent), lack of interest and engagement among voters (31 per cent), vote-buying (23 per cent), corruption of local government (22 per cent), and ineffective political parties (15 per cent). These results indicate that while voters agree that *pilkada* elections are “free and fair” in general, they also identify several areas in which local democracy has yet to meet their expectations.

⁹ A total of 955 respondents indicated at least one problem related to the implementation of *pilkada* elections.

Figure 6: Problems in Local Elections



VOTING BEHAVIOUR

In the previous two sections, the survey data were analysed to study perceived local government performance in a host of policy areas, and I explored how electoral campaigns were experienced by voters. In this section, I exploit the data to study voting behaviour in local elections. I focus in particular on three crucial aspects: the way in which citizens participate in local politics; the factors that matter the most to voting choices and to the evaluating of candidates, and the role of partisanship.

Participation

The issue of political participation was widely discussed in Indonesian media during the run up to the first wave of *pilkada* in December 2015. After very high levels of electoral participation were recorded in the first years of democratic politics, some observers pointed to increasingly strong signs of disaffection towards democratic institutions. As noted above, the three cities we have surveyed vary dramatically in the degree of political participation. While turnout rates in Samarinda and Surabaya at 50.4 per cent and 52.2 per cent respectively are fairly representative of average turnout rates in large Indonesian cities, in Medan only 26.9 per cent of voters cast a ballot. These figures are closely related to some of the survey results discussed above, such as variations across cities in political interest, knowledge, and evaluations of local government performance.

The data collected provide some novel insights on why Indonesian voters participate in local elections, or refrain from doing so.¹⁰ Respondents were asked to provide the reason why they voted, choosing among four alternative answers. The most common reason why voters participated in local elections is that voting is perceived as a civic duty (87 per cent). Only about 8 per cent of respondents reported to have voted because of a belief that their vote can influence policy-making, 6 per cent mentioned the desire to vote for a specific candidate as the primary reason

¹⁰ The data discussed in this and the following two paragraphs are weighted to match the official turnout rates, as voting in local elections was substantially over-reported by survey respondents. Overall, only 179 respondents reported not voting, while 42 reported having cast a white ballot, and 1,007 reported voting.

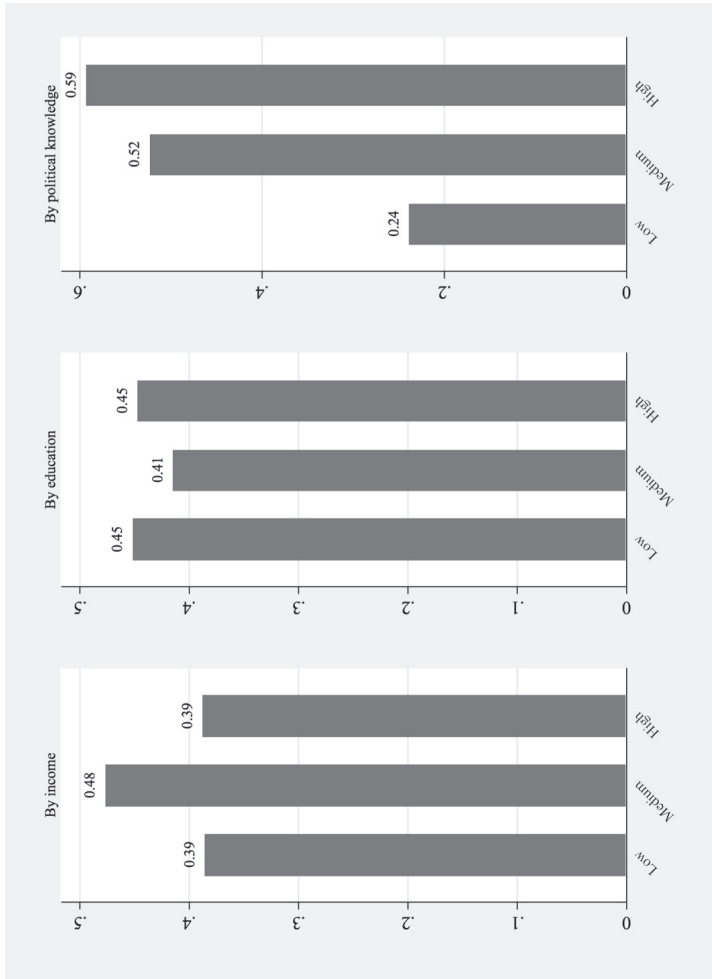
for participation, and almost nobody reported voting to support a specific political party. These results suggest that turnout is driven primarily by deep-seated beliefs about the role of citizens in civic life, rather than by a sense of empowerment brought about by the introduction of democratic elections, or by the belief that some candidates or political parties could have a transformative, reformist role in local politics.

As for the reasons why voters do *not* participate in local politics, most of what is known is based on evidence provided by informed respondents in qualitative interviews. The survey asked voters directly why they refrained from casting a vote. The findings show that there are important differences across cities in the explanations provided for the lack of electoral participation. In Samarinda and Surabaya, most respondents (58 per cent and 63 per cent, respectively) reported that lack of time was the reason they did not vote. In Medan, only 34 per cent of non-voters provided this explanation, while most respondents listed factors that are more closely associated with dissatisfaction with local politics, such as not caring about politics (22 per cent), not thinking that their vote matters (18 per cent), dissatisfaction with the candidates running for mayor (15 per cent), and not knowing who to vote for (11 per cent). This suggests that there is truth to the dominant narrative on the lack of participation as a tool to express discontent over local politics: turnout is lower where people are most dissatisfied with local government performance and hold the most negative views of local politics.

The survey data also allows us to explore how various factors are related to patterns of electoral participation. Income and education, in particular, are factors that are often mentioned as drivers of political behaviour, as they are conceptualized as resources that can be employed by citizens in civic engagement (Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995). Figure 7 uses bar charts to show the breakdown of electoral participation by income and education groups in the left and centre panel, respectively.¹¹ The data reported in the graphs show that the relationship

¹¹ Low-education respondents are defined as having only primary education, if any; medium-education respondents have completed middle-school or high-school; high-education respondents have at least some college education, a college or a postgraduate degree. A quarter of the sample falls into the first category, 60 per cent in the second and 16 per cent in the third.

Figure 7. Participation by Income, Education, and Political Knowledge Groups



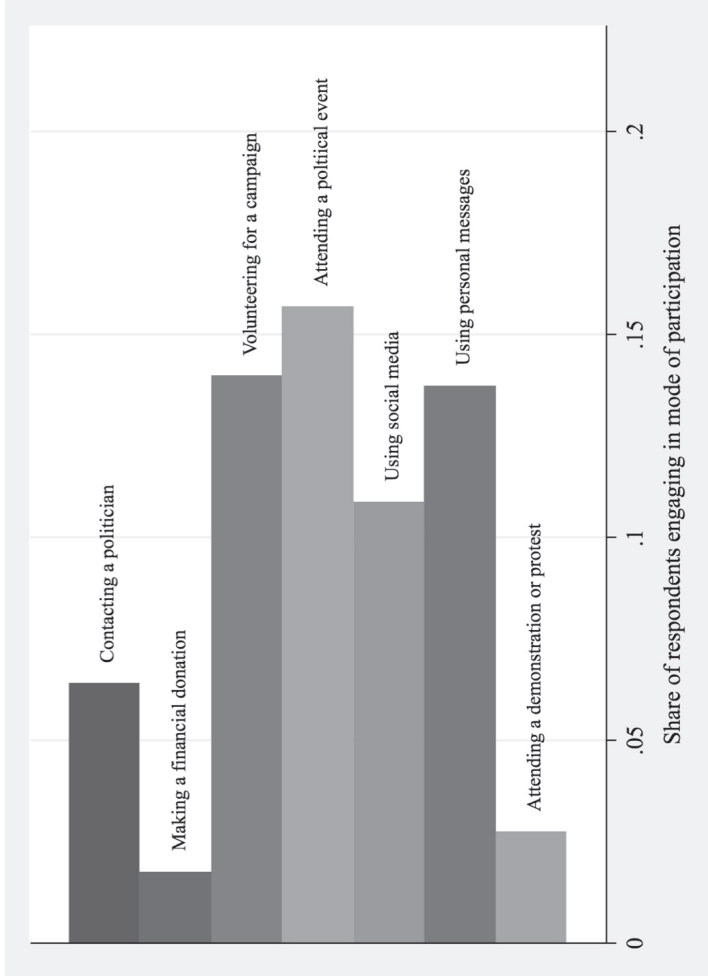
between participation in *pilkada* elections and these two variables is very weak: low-income respondents are as likely to vote as high-income ones, and a similar pattern is observed for education. By contrast, electoral participation is strongly correlated with the political knowledge index previously discussed, displayed in the right panel of the figure. While low-knowledge respondents show a particularly low turnout rate of about 24 per cent, participation increases substantially to 52 per cent for medium-information and 59 per cent for high-information respondents. The correlations presented in Figure 7 suggest that socio-demographic factors, and socio-economic status in particular, are weak predictors of participation in *pilkada* elections if compared with political information and interest. As previously discussed, there is substantial variation across field sites in the degree to which citizens are interested in and informed about local politics, which suggests that context-specific factors may be a more powerful determinant of electoral participation than individual-level demographics.

To explore non-electoral forms of participation, interviewees were also asked to list various ways in which they have been active in politics. In this respect, no systematic differences across the three field sites emerge. To be sure, there is some variation in the prevailing modes of participation. For instance, respondents in Medan are the most active in engaging with politics through social media and personal messaging, while voters in Samarinda are more likely to attend political rallies and to volunteer during electoral campaigns. However, the overall picture that emerges from these data is that of a fairly active electorate, as about 36 per cent of the respondents reported engaging in at least one non-electoral mode of participation. Figure 8 summarizes the data, showing on the horizontal axis of the chart the overall share of survey respondents who reported engaging in each of the seven modes of participation. The data displayed in the figure suggest that voters engage with politics in a variety of ways that go beyond participation in formal electoral processes.

Voting and Candidate Evaluation

One of the key findings in the literature on local direct elections in Indonesia is that candidates, rather than political parties, play a decisive

Figure 8: Non-electoral Participation



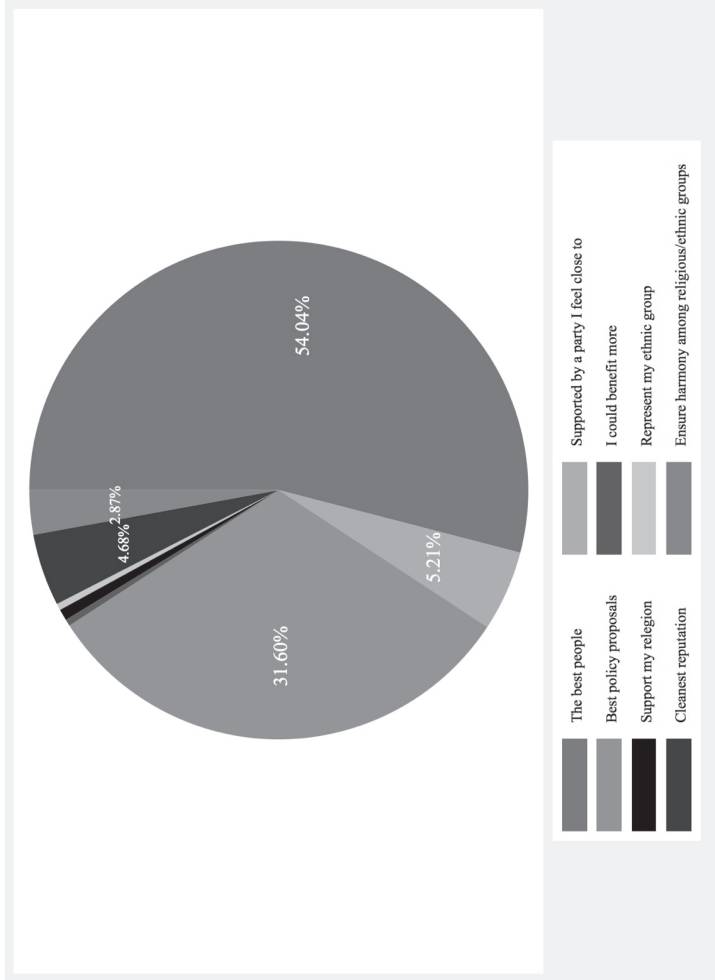
role in shaping voting behaviour. When it comes to choosing who to vote for, political parties are believed to play a marginal role, as electoral competition is dominated by prominent social figures who command high prestige and name recognition. Our survey explores this insight by asking three direct questions on the factors that matter in shaping the voting decisions of respondents. The first question we ask is a normative one: in *pilkada* elections, what should be the most important factor in choosing among the different alternatives on the ballot?

Overall, the two main factors identified by respondents are policy platform (46.7 per cent of respondents say that voters should choose the party or candidate with the best policy proposals) and candidate quality (43.7 per cent agree that voters should choose the best candidate, irrespective of their partisan affiliation). Only a handful of the interviewees say that people should choose primarily on the basis of their partisan affiliation (5.7 per cent), and even fewer support choosing according to ethnic or religious identity (2.2 per cent) or expected material benefits (1.7 per cent).

The second question asked respondents whether the candidate or the supporting political parties were most important in orienting their voting choice. To some extent, the results offer further empirical support to the thesis that candidate personalities are pivotal in voting behaviour, as about two thirds of respondents stated that the candidate was the most important factor. However, while only 5 per cent of respondents reported deciding primarily on partisan considerations, the remaining 28 per cent answered that both party and supporting candidate contributed to the outcome of their decision. This finding is somewhat surprising, given the widespread belief that partisanship is a negligible factor in voting behaviour at *pilkada* elections, and it might be a sign of the increasing importance of political parties for at least some segments of the electorate.

Finally, respondents were asked to recall their own voting decision in the recent mayoral elections, and to state the factors that mattered the most in deciding which pair of candidates to vote for. With little variation across field site, the answers provided are consistent with those reported in the previous paragraphs. As the pie chart in Figure 9 shows, an absolute majority of respondents, 54 per cent, reported choosing according to candidate quality (“I thought they were the best people”). This figure

Figure 9: Main Reason for Choosing a Candidate Pair

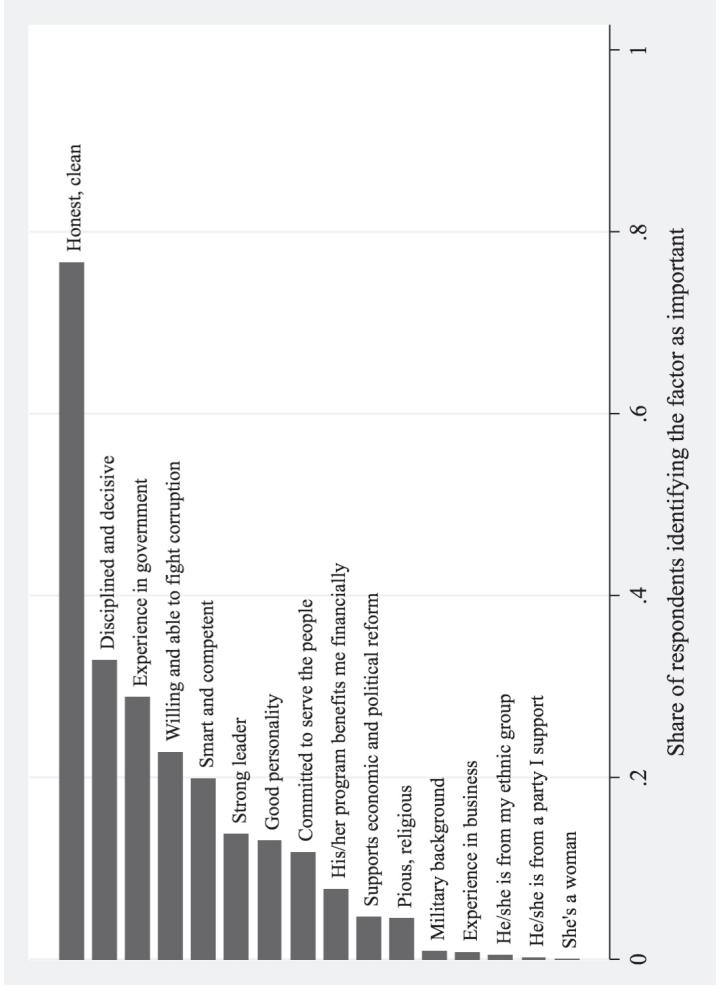


is significantly higher than the corresponding share in the “normative” question (43.7 per cent), suggesting that candidate traits may be more important in voting decisions than voters think. An additional indicator of the centrality of candidate qualities in voting behaviour is that a further 4.7 per cent of the respondents surveyed reported choosing a specific pair of candidates because of the belief that they were the “cleanest”, or the most honest, among those running. As for programmatic and partisan factors, 31.6 per cent of respondents reported choosing a specific candidate pair based on their policy proposals, and 5.2 per cent stated that the supporting political parties were the key determinant of their decision. Finally, 2.8 per cent of the interviewees mentioned the promise of equality and harmony among religious and ethnic groups as a key factor in voting choice, while other variables that were included as possible choices were rarely mentioned, as shown in Figure 9.

Given the pivotal role of candidates in *pilkada* elections, understanding the process by which voters evaluate candidates for leadership positions is of primary importance for the study of democratic consolidation in Indonesia. Our questionnaire investigates candidate evaluation with a question asking respondents to list what they consider to be the most important qualities for a candidate running for office. The question enumerates a total of sixteen possible choices, and it allows respondents to select up to three of them in their answers. Figure 10 displays the answers to this question by showing the share of respondents in the sample mentioning each of the sixteen options in one of their three answers.¹² For the voters we surveyed, honesty is by far the most important quality a candidate should have, as it is mentioned by an average of 77 per cent of respondents. Other crucial qualities are being “disciplined and decisive”, indicated by 33 per cent of respondents, having experience in government

¹² The chart displays aggregate figures for the whole survey, as variation across cities is quite limited. There are a couple of candidate traits, however, that do vary across the sites. For instance, voters in Samarinda were more likely to mention experience in government (38 per cent) than respondents in Medan and Surabaya (27 per cent and 22 per cent respectively). A total of 1,195 respondents answered this question.

Figure 10: Candidate Evaluation



(29 per cent), being willing to fight corruption (23 per cent), being smart and competent (20 per cent), being a strong leader (14 per cent), having a good personality (13 per cent), and being willing to serve the people (12 per cent). Figure 10 also provides some insights on the candidate qualities that are least likely to be an asset in electoral competition, as they are almost never mentioned as determinants of candidate evaluation. Such factors include having experience in the private sector, having a military background, being a woman, being a member of a supported political party, and being a member of the respondent's ethnic group.

Partisanship

A crucial aspect of democratic accountability is the role of political parties. Although recent research has argued that Indonesian political parties have become more institutionalized in the last few years, especially in comparative perspective (Mietzner 2013*b*), they are typically portrayed as lacking programmatic differentiation and strong links with society. The weaknesses of Indonesian parties are especially evident in local politics, where partisan affiliations among political elites are very volatile, and political parties often endorse candidates who are not their own members in exchange for generous campaign contributions. Our survey data allow us to investigate in greater detail the issue of partisanship in the electorate, and the reasons that are driving party choice.

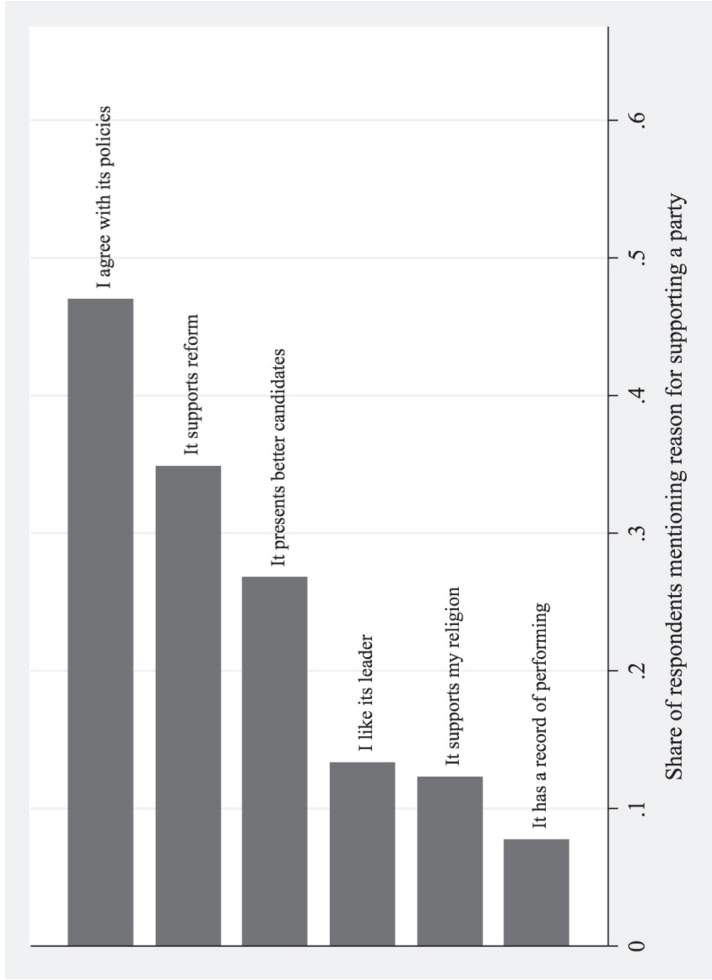
When asked if they feel close to a specific political party, only a minority of the respondents in our sample answered affirmatively. In Medan and Surabaya, 10 per cent of respondents reported feeling close to a political party, while the share increases to 18 per cent in Surabaya. These figures are consistent with previous research using national samples to investigate the same questions (Mujani and Liddle 2010), and they suggest that only a few Indonesians hold deep-seated partisan preferences. However, even in the absence of stable partisan affiliations, voters may still have short-term preferences over political parties. Respondents were asked to choose the political party they would vote for if (legislative) elections were held on the day they were interviewed. The share of voters reporting the intention to vote for a specific political party increased to 62 per cent on average, although there were substantial

differences across city.¹³ In Medan, only 47 per cent indicated a political party they would vote for, but the same figure increases to 60 per cent in Surabaya and 80 per cent in Samarinda. While this finding is not immediately relevant for our analysis of *pilkada* elections, as it is based on a hypothetical legislative election, it suggests that there is substantial subnational variation in how party labels are perceived by voters, and in the value voters attach to them.

To analyse the factors driving party choice among voters, we included two additional questions in the survey questionnaire. The first asks voters who have identified a political party they support to explain the reason for their choice, listing a total of 14 possible choices and allowing respondents to identify up to three. As we usually think of Indonesian political parties as showing only negligible differences in terms of policy platforms, this question can shed light on a crucial issue that has mostly been neglected in the literature, namely the origins of party attachment among Indonesian voters. Figure 11 shows how plotting the share of respondents who identified the top six factors in at least one of their three choices helps answer this question. Surprisingly, the data reported in the chart show that there is a strong programmatic component in party choices. With little variation across cities, the two most cited factors influencing the decision to vote for a specific political party are: agreement with its policy platform, mentioned by 47 per cent of respondents, and that a party is identified as supporting “reform” (35 per cent). This suggests that, to a considerable degree, Indonesian voters do perceive differences in policy proposals across political parties, and that such differences may be playing an important role in the development of partisan affiliations. Other factors that are not closely related to policy platform also figure prominently. For example, 27 per cent mentioned the ability of the party to attract higher-quality candidates as a reason why they were supporting it, 13 per cent reported their positive evaluation of the party leader as an important factor in party choice, and 12 per cent reported religion as being important.

¹³ The remaining 38 per cent of the sample did not know what party they would vote for, or declined to answer this question.

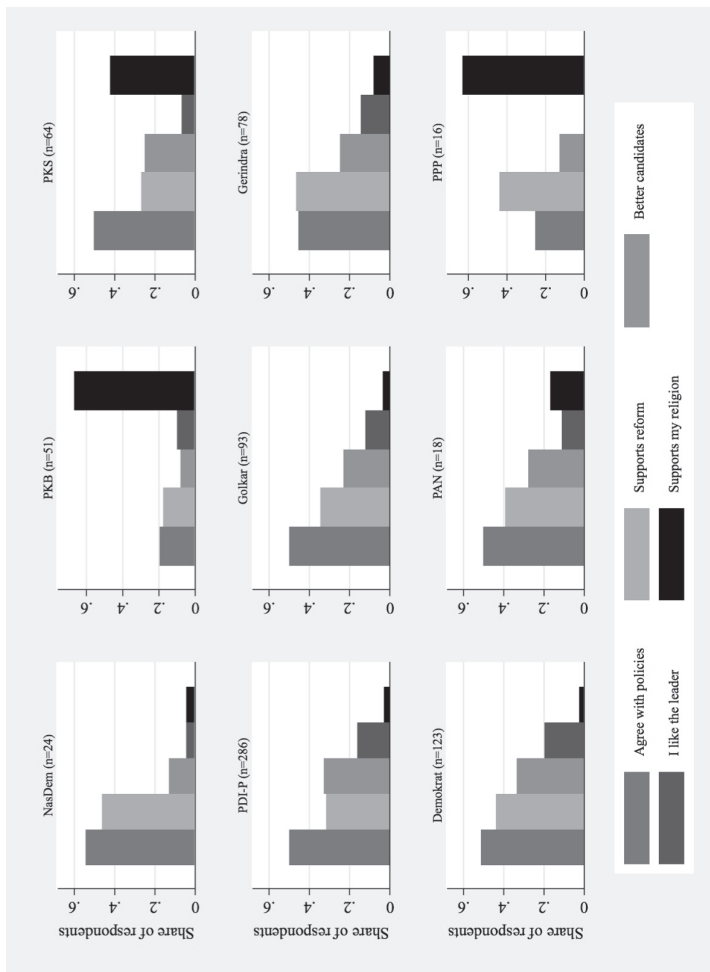
Figure 11: Reasons to Support a Political Party (Top Six Choices)



A closer look at the same data offers additional insights into the development of political parties in Indonesia. By looking at how each party is perceived by voters, we can learn more about whether Indonesian political parties are different from one another, and speculate on what strategies they are employing to strengthen and differentiate their respective brands. In Figure 12 we show how the five top factors discussed in the previous paragraph are distributed over each of the main political parties chosen by respondents in our sample. The figure shows that there are some similarities and differences in voters' perceptions of political parties. The four main parties (PDI-P, Demokrat, Golkar, and Gerindra) show a remarkably similar profile that does not differ substantially from the averages reported in Figure 11, as their support depends on a mix of programmatic factors (agreement with policies and support for reforms), their ability to attract better candidates, and the positive image of their leaders. The NasDem party displays a similar profile, only with much lower shares of respondents choosing this party for the quality of its candidates or leadership. This is perhaps a sign that this party, if compared with others, is more closely associated with a specific policy platform than with its standard bearers. As for Islamic parties, the charts in Figure 12 show substantial variation within this category. Two of them, PKB and PPP, are "typical" religious parties, in that they are mostly chosen because they are perceived to be supporting their religion. The PKS party has differentiated itself from this profile with a stronger emphasis on policy programmes: as a result, more respondents mention agreement with policies (50 per cent) than support for Islam (42 per cent) as a reason for choosing this party. Finally, only 17 per cent of respondents inclined to vote for the PAN party report choosing this party for its support of their religion, suggesting that this party is not clearly perceived as Islamic. Overall, these results indicate that there are strong commonalities in the drivers of party choice across political parties in Indonesia, especially for the larger, mainstream political parties.

The second question on party choice explores the lack of party choice among those who do not indicate a party preference by asking respondents to name the most important reason they do *not* support any political party. According to the responses, the most common reason for the lack of party preferences is that all political parties were perceived as

Figure 12: Drivers of Party Choice, by Political Party



having the same policy proposals (44 per cent), followed by a belief that all parties are equally corrupt (34 per cent). Fewer respondents, about 18 per cent, stated that the reason they do not support political parties is that there is no party that represents and supports their own opinions, while a much smaller share of respondents, only about 3 per cent, hold the more critical view that political parties are a threat to democracy.

CONCLUSION

Since the breakdown of the New Order regime in the late 1990s, local politics has served as a bellwether of the state of democracy in the country. As the sweeping processes of democratization and decentralization have proceeded along parallel trajectories, local government has been a crucial arena where increased political liberties have translated into desirable policy outcomes, or have failed to do so. The importance of local government for democratic consolidation in Indonesia has been acknowledged in the scholarly literature, and a large body of work has critically examined the weaknesses and the prospects of democracy in regional parts of Indonesia. While this literature has provided valuable insights about local political elites, much less is known about how Indonesian voters approach and experience local politics, especially during electoral campaigns.

This paper addresses this lacuna by analysing an original dataset of survey data from three major Indonesian cities. It advances our knowledge of Indonesian politics by switching the focus of research from political elites to ordinary voters, and by asking them a series of questions about their attitudes on and experience of local politics in Medan, Samarinda, and Surabaya. As discussed, the research design was not intended to draw inferences that were generalizable to the whole country. However, by studying in greater depth public opinion and voting behaviour in three key Indonesian cities, the article offers a novel view of the relationship between voters and elected officials, of key patterns in Indonesian political participation and voting behaviour, and of broader issues of democratic accountability in this young democracy.

The empirical sections in this paper have highlighted commonalities and differences across the three cities. On one hand, people in Medan,

Samarinda and Surabaya are similar when it comes to evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of local government performance, as they express higher levels of satisfaction for social services than for efforts in fighting corruption and unemployment. They also report similar experiences with electoral campaigns and similar levels of satisfaction with the candidates running for office. Finally, they appear very similar in the way they account for their voting choices, and in how they evaluate political candidates. On the other hand, local politics differs substantially across the three survey sites in other respects. Overall, Medan appears markedly different from Samarinda and Surabaya, as it shows substantially lower levels of satisfaction with local government performance, political interest and participation, knowledge about local politics, trust in local institutions, and party identification. The issues that are perceived as salient in local politics also appear to vary significantly across the cities. These results suggest that significant subnational variation in key aspects of local politics is still characteristic of Indonesian politics.

These findings offer two broad implications for the study of local politics in Indonesia. First, the overall picture of local democracy in Indonesia that emerges from the survey is a rather positive one. With the exception of Medan, a national outlier for its exceptionally high levels of political apathy, a majority or at least a plurality of the citizens surveyed held positive views of the performance of local government in most policy areas, spent time and effort in acquiring information about local politics, were satisfied with election candidates, had developed at least short-term preferences for political parties, and almost unanimously trusted that local *pilkada* elections are free and fair. Second, and related to this, the characterization of Indonesian local politics as being completely dominated by patronage politics, corruption, and special interests offers an inaccurate description of Indonesian voters. To be sure, some critical areas remain, such as the overall dissatisfaction with the quality of electoral campaigns. However, as the findings show, Indonesian politics is a far cry from the gloomy caricature that is often found in academic and policy circles. When we study voters rather than interest groups and political elites, we find that they are rather well informed about local politics; they can differentiate across policy areas when they evaluate local government; and they have well-defined views on the challenges

of local politics in their respective cities. In addition, corruption, when compared with specific policy areas such as the quality of infrastructure and public utilities, and policies to support employment and wages, is simply not a salient issue in local politics. These findings suggest that the Indonesian electorate may be more sophisticated and active than it is usually given credit for, and that we need better models to account for the political experiences of Indonesian voters.

While the data collected in our survey project shed light on many important questions, there are others that have not been adequately addressed. First, longitudinal studies are needed to identify and account for developments in voting behaviour and public opinion. By designing and implementing similar surveys in the future, researchers will be able to establish the pace and the degree to which Indonesian local politics is tackling the key challenges it has been struggling with since the end of authoritarianism. Second, additional empirical research is needed to verify the extent to which these findings are generalizable to the whole archipelago, especially to rural areas where local political dynamics may differ substantially from those observed in the three cities covered. Third, this paper has not discussed ethnic politics, which has been a prominent paradigm in the study of Indonesian local politics. The survey data indicate that ethnic considerations are marginal in voting behaviour. However, the research design is inadequate to explore exhaustively the role of ethnic identities in voting behaviour and electoral campaigns.

Additional research based on experimental survey designs and a thorough investigation of electoral campaign dynamics is needed to establish if, and most importantly in what respects, ethnicity still matters in local Indonesian politics. Finally, the approach followed was primarily aimed at analysing descriptive statistics emerging from the surveys, and at comparing proportions in the population across the three cities. Additional research can build on these findings by testing various hypotheses about the micro-level dynamics of voting behaviour, focusing in particular on identifying if, and under what conditions, Indonesian voters are keeping elected politicians accountable for their performance while in office.

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