

Reckoning Informal Politics: Expands the Logic of Survival and Failure of Regional Heads

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Abstract

The qualitative research addresses the political logic of why and how the incumbents succeed and fail in direct election for regional heads (pilkada) in emerging democratic Indonesia. De Mesquita et al. (2003) believe that, to survive in office, a leader needs to offer a benefit at least equal to the greatest possible benefit offered by a potential challenger. Particular to the pilkada cases in Indonesia, Erb and Sulistiyanto (2009) elaborate several factors connected to "reward and punishment" logic that may lead to the incumbents' survival and failure in re-election bids. This study expands the logic by revealing that populism, rivalry, and tangibility are the core strategies for the successful incumbents in retaining their offices in four rural and urban regions in East Java. Particularly, the survival of an incumbent hinges on his capacity to manage rivalry risks, namely the capability to manage support and opposition both from formal and informal actors through fair or unfair means. These strategies, then, foster the success of patronage-based winning tactics to retain public office in the pilkada. To better assessment, it calls for the importance of democratic accountability as a complementary perspective (to consolidology) in measuring the progress of democracy in the country.

Keywords:

Political Survival; Pilkada; Democracy; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Absolute access, wide personal networks, and rampant power abuse are common perceptions of incumbents¹ in

contemporary local politics in Indonesia.

Incumbents have direct access to local policy making as well as local budgeting processes. They can drive budget allocation and disbursement in favour of their own interests. Incumbents also have greater opportunities to link with many influential people, organisations, and communities and undertake intensive communication to develop political alliances.² Incumbents can act as patrons

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¹ Throughout the study, the term incumbent refers to the regional head (regent or mayor) occupying the office during a re-election bid.

² As remarked by some political observers, see Yuwono (*Suara Merdeka*, 21 September 2010), Yazid (*Rakyat Merdeka*, 21 January 2011)

by disbursing exclusive benefits to their clients. Moreover, incumbents have the influence to mobilise bureaucracy³ as well as to intervene in regional election commissions (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Daerah/KPUD) and regional election supervisory committees (Panitia Pengawas Pemilu/Panwaslu) to support their candidatures.⁴

³ As remarked by some political observers, see Harun (*Rakyat Merdeka*, 26 September 2010), Sobari (*Jawa Pos*, 18 May 2010). Also, Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW) revealed 54 cases of bureaucracies' involvement in the 2009 *pilkada* in four regions (*Jawa pos*, 18 May 2010). General Elections Supervisory Board (*Bawaslu*) found also 1,751 violations in the 2010 *pilkada* (Source: <http://us.nasional.news.viva.co.id/news/read/195259-2010--ada-1-751-pelanggaran-di-pilkada> accessed on 31 May 2013) and 1,221 violations in the 2011 *pilkada* (Source: <http://news.detik.com/read/2011/06/16/175735/1662013/10/bawaslu-terima-1221-pelanggaran-selama-pilkada-2011> accessed on 31 May 2013). Relating to the bureaucracies' involvement, *Bawaslu* revealed two main modus, namely bureaucracy's mobilization to support the incumbents and the deployment of state owned facilities for the incumbents' campaigns. According to the existing regulations, the involvement of civil servants in *pilkada* is strictly prohibited. The government issued two regulations relating to this restriction, namely the Instruction of Administrative Reform Minister No. 7/2009 on the Neutrality of Civil Servants in Election and the Instruction of Home Minister No. 270/4627/SJ on Instruction to Governor and Regional Head to Assure Civil Servants' Neutrality in *pilkada*.

⁴ As remarked by some political observers, see Rangkuti (*Koran Jakarta*, 30 June 2010), Badoh (*Media Indonesia*, 8 January 2010). Some recent legal evidence of local election commission's violations was proven by the Election Organizers Ethics Council (*DKPP*). For instance, the council dismissed all of the Pamekasan General Election's Commissioners due to impartiality violation (Source: <http://www.antarajatim.com/lihat/berita/100318/ku-pamekasan-hormati-keputusan-dkpp> accessed

Four previous studies of direct election for local leaders (Pemilihan Kepala Daerah/Pilkada) in Indonesia confirm these points. The incumbents have remained longer in office than the contenders, have control over the bureaucracy, policy formulation and program implementation and gain better mass media self-coverage. These privileges advantage the incumbents when running in the *pilkada*. Besides, the incumbents gain benefits from their position to build personal patronage networks with informal actors, namely business communities, religious leaders, partisan mass media, local politicians and/or local legislators, gangsters, partisan NGOs, and mass-based organisations (Sulistiyanto, 2009; Schiller, 2009; Ratnawati, 2009; Hidayat, 2009).

As office holders, incumbents have access to complete information about government finance and budgets. This privilege is an important resource for tax-setting that is useful for incumbents to boost their performance credit amongst

on 31 May 2013). The council dismissed also three of five commissioners of the Municipality of Gorontalo General Election Commission due to similar violation (Source: <http://www.jpnn.com/read/2013/03/07/161669/DKPP-Copot-Tiga-Komisioner-KPU-Kota-Gorontalo-> accessed on 31 May 2013).

voters (Besley and Case, 1995). In addition, incumbents' governments can play power games to set grant policies as a vote-purchasing effort (Dahlberg and Johansson, 2002).

Although incumbents⁵ have advantages during office, the re-election results do not automatically favour them. According to the Indonesia Survey Circle (LSI)'s compiled reports, the number of failed incumbents in the *pilkada* has increased in the first five years (2005-2010). From June 2005 to December 2006, 87 of 230 incumbents (37.83%) did not succeed in retaining office as a result of the provincial and regional elections (LSI 2007, 4).⁶ Five years later (2010), this number rose moderately to 44% (64 of 146) (*Rakyat Merdeka*, 26 September 2010).⁷

⁵ In this research, an incumbent is a person who holds the office as a regent or mayor (not as deputy of regent or mayor) in 2005. Thus, when they contested in the 2010 *pilkada*, these incumbents had stayed in office for 5 years.

⁶ Incumbents are regional heads and governors who run for a second election. Indonesia had held 296 regional and provincial elections from June 2005 to December 2006. 230 regional heads and governors ran for *pilkada* as the candidate of regional heads and governors. Also, 63 incumbents of deputy of regional heads and governors competed for regional head and governor positions in the 2005-2006 *pilkada*.

⁷ These data refer to a review of Lembaga Survei Indonesia (The Indonesia Survey Institute) published in *Rakyat Merdeka*, 26 September 2010.

The last two waves of simultaneous *pilkada* show similar trend. In 2015, 42.1 per cent of incumbents failed to retain their offices contested in 260 *pilkada*.⁸ In 2017, Research and Development Division of KOMPAS also reported a slight increase of the incumbents' failures to 43.53 per cent (of 101 *pilkada*).⁹

Inconsistencies between the advantages of the incumbents' favourable position and the re-election results, then, sparked a set of questions to address this political conundrum. What are the factors that lead to re-election? Why are the incumbents, who have access to local government resources and control over bureaucracy, unsuccessful in securing their posts in a re-election? What are the implications of surviving and non-surviving strategies for democracy? A more detailed understanding of local politics is revealed by examining populist policies and informal politics associated with the incumbents.

East Java Province: The case studies

⁸ Source: <http://print.kompas.com/baca/2016/01/06/Petahana-Tetap-Kuat-di-Pilkada-2015> accessed on 7 January 2016.

⁹ Source: <http://suarajakarta.co/news/politik/4353-persen-petahana-kalah-di-pilkada-2017-berlanjut-ke-jakarta/> accessed on 3 March 2017

The study was conducted in East Java Province. It took four regions representing rural and urban areas, namely Blitar Regency and Trenggalek Regency (rural) and Probolinggo Municipality and Madiun Municipality (urban). The analysis is focused on the *pilkada* that took place in 2010 in Blitar and Trenggalek and in 2008 in Probolinggo and Madiun.

This study applied qualitative research principles by interviewing the incumbent regional head, heads of local government offices, NGO activists, women activists, journalists, academics and female voters in two villages, through semi-structured interviews in each region. Specific to voters, the study interviewed about their reasons in the voting process for the incumbents. It also analysed local official documents and local budgets (Anggaran Perencanaan dan Belanja Daerah/APBD) in each regional government.

Blitar Regency and Trenggalek Regency are located in the southern part of East Java. The former has 1,116,010 people living in an area of 1,588.79 km² in 2010. The later covers an area of 1,261.40 km². The majority of the population in both regencies is Muslim.

Blitar held the first *pilkada* in 2005. The pair of candidates Herry Noegroho

and Arif Fuadi had won the first *pilkada* with 42.18% of the votes. Five years later, Herry Noegroho and Arif Fuadi ran separately in their re-election bid (the 2010 *pilkada*). The incumbent Herry Noegroho succeeded to retain the office with 59.70% of the votes.

The *pilkada* in Trenggalek Regency was a battle between two incumbents. In the first *pilkada* in 2005, the incumbent Soeharto¹⁰ (2005-2010) defeated the former incumbent Mulyadi WR (2000-2005). Then, in the re-election bid held on 2 June 2010, the incumbent gained the least votes, only 22.4% (71.818). Mulyadi collected 174,656 votes (54.4%) and regained the office (Trenggalek Election Commission, 2010: 79).

Probolinggo and Madiun municipalities are two regions in East Java with small area coverage and less populated. The population in Probolinggo municipality was 226,643 in 2008, living in a total area of 56,667 km². Madiun Municipality is surrounded by the area of Madiun Regency. The population was 201,619 people in 2008, living in a total area of 33 km². The majority of the

¹⁰ The incumbent has exactly the same name as the former Indonesian president Soeharto (1966-1998). So, the name Soeharto throughout this article refers to the former regent of Trenggalek (2005-2010).

population both in Probolinggo (96.08%) and Madiun are Muslim (88.78%).

Probolinggo and Madiun Municipality were two of the regions in East Java which held the *pilkada* in 2008. In this *pilkada*, the incumbent mayor of Probolinggo, Buchori defeated two other challengers. The incumbent regained the office by a landslide victory (72.55% of the votes). In contrast, the incumbent mayor of Madiun, Kokok Raya, experienced a crushing defeat in re-election bid on 23 October 2008. He gained only 22,521 ballots (25.69%). The winning challenger, Bambang Irianto, defeated him with the most votes, 53.51% (46,900 ballots).

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Political Survival

The *selectorate* theory of Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al. (2003) is an outstanding work in researching the political survival of national leaders in many countries. De Mesquita examines the groups which exist in all polities, namely the *selectorate* (the set of people with a say in choosing leaders and with a prospect of gaining access to special privileges doled out by leaders), the *winning coalition* (the subgroup of the *selectorate* who maintain incumbents in

office and in exchange receive special privileges), *leadership* (the smallest set of individuals which actually makes decisions about gathering and allocating resources), and the *challenger* (national leadership and prospective substitute leaders). The position of these groups is changeable related to the leader's political survival. Moreover, the relationship between leaders, followers, and supporters is connected by *affinity*, or the bonds between leaders and followers that both can use to anticipate each other's future loyalty. The bonds can be influenced by several clustered factors, namely ethnic or religious preferences, personality, ideology, political party identification, experience, family ties and charisma (de Mesquita et al., 2003).

The dynamics of leader tenure in office are reflections of selection institutions driven by the provision of public and private goods. The *selectorate* theory first assumes the impact of the vagaries of the economy on the available resources allocated by the leader. The second argument focuses on the leaders as well as the competence of politicians and challengers in producing goods from the given resources. More competent leaders will produce more goods in the

future for members of their winning coalition.

The next arguments assume affinities between leaders and followers. The argument assumes that interactions between both parties can reveal their bonds and the future loyalties of the *selectorate*, based on the possibility of being included in or excluded from the winning coalition and the benefits of private goods for the winning coalition. The last argument assumes that all affinities are known by the *selectorate*, the winning coalition, the incumbent, and the challenger. The *selectorate* can calculate their chances of being included in the winning coalition of the challenger if it comes to power (de Mesquita et al. 2003).

Particular to the *pilkada* case in Indonesia, Erb and Sulistiyanto (2009) elaborate several factors that may lead to the incumbents' survival and failure, based on collective works covering Indonesia and specific works in six provinces and 13 regions. For the incumbents to survive, they need to do very well in their first term in office; gain support from a coalition of major political parties; organise campaign teams and grass-roots support groups during the campaign period; offer the best programs

and vision to the voters and achieve a level of popularity and trust in the eyes of local people. The non-surviving incumbents are considered to be punished by voters for failing to deliver public benefits in their first term; voters vote in a "rational" manner; major political parties' support does not guarantee a large number of votes for contenders; voters look to the leadership, personality and quality of the candidate and voters vote for local leaders who they know best and who deliver something back to society.

Linking to the relevant theory and previous studies, this study addresses a similar focus of inquiry, namely the incumbents' policy behaviour (populist politics) during their time in governing their regions, the informal actors and informal political practices (informal politics) attached to the incumbents, and voters' explanations of their reasons for voting and not voting for the incumbents.

CONTEXT: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Search for Political Credits

The case study in four rural and urban regions points out that all incumbents performed populist politics during the first term in office. Populist politics is divided into two categories,

namely populist policies and popular activities which are familiar amongst local elites and people. In the former category, the incumbents pursued similar policies delivering direct and tangible benefits, such as death benefits, free or cheap health services, free or cheap education fees, scholarships for poor pupils, infrastructure developments, mainly roads, at the neighbourhood level, city garden improvements, friendly policies for street vendors (PKL) and pedicab drivers (*abang becak*), cheap groceries markets, and huge infrastructure projects. The incumbent in Madiun Municipality even initiated the implementation of a local government-funded program of regional health insurance (*Jamkesda*) in 2008. The insurance covers the poor in the municipality who are not covered by the national health insurance (*Jamkesmas*). To finance these policy choices, local governments under the incumbents' leadership allocated higher budgets for education, health and public works compared to other regencies and municipalities in the province. Trenggalek Regency is an exception, allocating a lower local budget (*APBD*), spending 9.45% on average within five years (2006-2010) on public works compared to the regencies' average of 11.75%.

Populist policies are not merely intended to benefit the majority of local people. The incumbents also delivered direct benefits to bureaucrats. All incumbents disbursed additional financial incentives and rice benefits for bureaucrats, except the incumbent in Trenggalek. In addition, financial benefits were distributed to the heads of villages and the heads of hamlets (heads of neighbourhood units and community units) in Blitar Regency and Madiun and Probolinggo Municipalities. The incumbent in Blitar also provided service motorcycles for all heads of villages.

The impact on local development can be measured by human-related development achievements. The case study in four regions found a similar trend towards a lower infant mortality rate, better life expectancy index, economic growth, purchasing power parity index and finally the human development index (HDI). Nevertheless, these similar or even better wellbeing conditions did not assist incumbents to survive. Comparative assessments of HDI in the regions where the incumbents failed in the *pilkada*, indeed, were better than the regions where they survived. Blitar Regency under the surviving incumbent's leadership reduced the regency's HDI shortfall by

1.54 over 5 years (2006-2010), lower than Trenggalek Regency, which achieved 1.62. Nonetheless, the incumbent in Trenggalek Regency did not succeed in the re-election bid. Also, in the last year of the incumbent's office (2008), Madiun Municipality had a better HDI (75.89) than Probolinggo Municipality (73.29). However, this better wellbeing indicator did not help the incumbent to succeed in the 2008 *pilkada*.

In addition to carrying out popular policies, all incumbents were burdened by corruption cases alleged against them or their staff. An exception was the incumbent in Blitar, as corruption allegations were disclosed in 2012 or two years after he was re-elected for the second term.

Blusukan (impromptu visit; visiting community meeting points) was the most common popular activity of the incumbents in four rural and urban regions. They frequently visited community meeting points to directly connect with ordinary people in the regions, such as at traditional markets, mosques, and neighbourhoods. The incumbents directly interacted with local people to hear their problems and complaints on local government services or people's aspirations to develop their

neighbourhoods. The incumbent in Probolinggo Municipality performed *blusukan* almost every day, accompanied by a village head from where he visited. After praying *shubuh* (early morning prayers), he visited community spots to interact directly with local people. The incumbent in Madiun Municipality also performed *blusukan*, especially at traditional markets and neighbourhoods. Local people interviewed in both urban regions testified that both incumbents seemed to blend in with ordinary people. The incumbents dispensed with protocol and even frequently wore sportswear when interacting with ordinary people.

The incumbents in Blitar and Trenggalek Regency were also publicly known as down-to-earth figures. They interacted directly with villagers in non-formal activities, such as *pengajian*,¹¹ *wayangan* (shadow puppet show), sports events, harvest festivals, fishermen's festivals, and other popular activities. The incumbent in Blitar Regency even took on the post of manager and chair of PSBI (Blitar Soccer Association). This activity made him very popular amongst the youth or PSBI's supporters. They called

¹¹ A gathering at which Islam is discussed (Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings, 2010, p. 238)

the incumbent “*Bapake Singo Lodro*” (the father of cruel lion).¹²

Takziah (to visit, to deliver condolences) was another popular activity which is well-known amongst local people in Probolinggo and Madiun. In addition to paying condolence calls to bereaved families, both incumbents gave donations. *Blusukan* and *Takziah* are two of the most prominent popular activities amongst local people in the two municipalities.

Popular activities performed by the incumbents in all regions are one method to market the incumbents’ well-liked images amongst ordinary people. This could be called “egalitarian branding”. These local leaders attempted to counter the preceding elitist leadership style adopted by leaders under the new order (Soeharto) regime. Also, by their willingness to interact directly with ordinary people, the incumbents sought to blend their personal identities with the communal identity and expected to attract people’s sympathy.

Minimising Political Rivalry Risks

To perform the politics of particularism, the incumbents particularly utilised the local budget (APBD) as the

main instrument to provide incentives, mainly for informal actors. The case studies in four regions found six categories of actors involved in supporting as well as gaining benefits from the incumbents prior to the *pilkada*. These categories are based on two main indicators. *First* is the impact of relationships between the incumbents and informal actors on the incumbents’ survival. Informal actors’ activities to support the incumbents may impact on their electability. These include the donation and disbursement of campaign funds, campaign materials, and philanthropically biased activities by businessmen, which have an impact on the improvement of the incumbents’ electability. At the same time, businessmen have put the incumbents in transactional contracts to return what they have already spent by demanding rewards in terms of project implementation. Next is the degree of relationship between the incumbents and informal (or partisan formal) actors. A good relationship impacts on low political rivalry risks for the incumbents.

Relating to the *pilkada*, the impact of informal politics on voters (grassroots effect) is emerged in the electability effect. It is the result of informal political

¹² *Singo Lodro* is the nickname of PSBI.

practices undertaken by the actors for the incumbents' popularity as well as likeability amongst local people.

The *second* indicator shows the impact of informal politics on elites (elite effect). Rivalry risk is the result of informal connections between incumbents and actors. Supporting relationships between both parties could minimise the risks of political rivalry from informal actors to the incumbent. In this situation, incumbents could prevent potential resistance from actors as well as their impact on the grassroots. As part of the elite, actors have resources to discourage people to vote for the incumbents or to undermine the incumbents' electability.

Businessmen¹³ are the most common informal actors connected to the incumbents, pertaining to the *pilkada* in four regions. They are particularly local contractors who implement physical local government projects, such as infrastructure and local government funded buildings. The case study in four regions recognises these businessmen as *tim konstruksi* (the construction team). Local businessmen donated individually or in a group by participating in some charitable programs, both conducted by

the incumbents and local governments, such as cheap markets for groceries, incidental free health services, sports events, and religious events.

The *second* crucial actors are local bureaucrats. It is actually inappropriate to categorise bureaucrats as informal actors relating to the *pilkada*. Nonetheless, the case study asserts that not all informal actors are non-government persons. Partisan bureaucrats who supported the incumbents were found. They are categorised as informal actors' due to their role in supporting the incumbent by using formal institutions. However, their activities are not only intended to implement local government policy, but they also intentionally design policies favouring the incumbents. Thus, bureaucrats are included as formal actors playing informal politics to support or undermine the incumbents. Control over bureaucrats is very important for the incumbents to minimise the risk of political rivalry.

Comparative assessments of four regions explain a convergent fact that local legislators¹⁴ play an important role in supporting the incumbents in maintaining office. The legislators secure the

¹³ It is rare to find any businesswoman involved in supporting the incumbents in the four regions.

¹⁴ Like local bureaucrats, local legislators are formal actors who play incentives (local budget) to negotiate with the incumbent.

incumbents' policy choices in the local legislative body. They particularly support the incumbents' policy proposals in the budgeting process. The incumbents in Blitar and Probolinggo gained strong support from, mainly, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P)'s faction in the local legislature.

Partisan NGOs or grassroots organisations are also important informal actors that may support or undermine the incumbent in office. In order to counter critics, the incumbent's party backbone (PDI-P) in Probolinggo expanded its network to cover local NGOs, the street vendors' (*PKL*) association and the pedicab drivers' association. They collaborated to perform counter movements for every issue or organisation seeking to undermine the incumbent. To make these networks work, the incumbent created certain policies and programs which delivered direct advantages for them, such as friendly and charitable policies for PKL and pedicab drivers and opening opportunities for partisan NGOs to implement local government's social projects (project assistance). These networks were also effective in hampering the money politics undertaken by the challenger in the 2008 *pilkada*.

Finally, solid party support was also important for the incumbents prior to the *pilkada*. Less conflicting coalitions of parties succeeded in backing up the incumbents in Blitar and Probolinggo. Nevertheless, internal conflict amongst coalition party members in Trenggalek undermined the incumbent's control over party elites. The conflict, then, led to party elites shifting support to the winning challenger. Less supportive coalition party members also reduced the strength of the party machine in mobilising their followers to vote for the incumbent. In addition, limited party support (PDI-P only) for the incumbent in Madiun was not adequate to promote the incumbent's well-liked image amongst voters. A non-coalition party, such as in Madiun, also limited its capacity to detect and prevent the money politics disbursed by the winning challengers. Therefore, political parties' roles are not only limited to meeting candidacy requirements, but are also important to expand supporter bases and to maintain their loyalties, through implementing parties' policies to support incumbents.

In addition to these five categories of actors, the case study also identified other actors supporting the incumbents in the *pilkada*, namely *kia's* (Islamic religious

Table 1 Voters' Considerations

Reasons	Vote or not to Vote for the Incumbents		Tangible Aspects (or notes)
	Surviving	Non-surviving	
Tangible policy outputs	Yes	Yes	- Infrastructure - Goods - Money politics (undermines policy effects)
Popular image (clean and good person)	Yes	Yes	- Donations - Direct interaction or appearance
Competitive advantage	Yes	Yes (minus Madiun Municipality)	- To sustain tangible and direct policy benefits
Party ID/figure alignment	Yes	Yes	- PDIP and Democratic Party's loyalists - Emotional connection
<i>Anut grubyuk</i> (fitting in) and ignorance (rural regions)	Yes	Yes	To give both advantage and disadvantage to the incumbents

Sources: Analyze by author.

leaders), *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), and PKK (family welfare movement). Except in Madiun, all incumbents in Blitar, Trenggalek, and Probolinggo had close relationships with *kiaís* and *pesantren*. Nonetheless, not all incumbents retained their posts. Except in Probolinggo, the relationship between the incumbents and *kiaís* was not publicly apparent. There is insufficient academic evidence to support claims about transactional relationships between the incumbents and *kiaís* and *pesantren*.

Fast Food Politics

Voters' reasons to vote or not to vote for the incumbents can verify the logic of populism and informal politics for the incumbents' survival. However, the case study points out that these voter's

corroborations mainly address the tangible aspects of the policies and image of the incumbents.

The case studies in four rural and urban regions found five categories of motives that shaped voters' preferences to vote or not to vote for the incumbents. As seen in table 1, *firstly*, voters referred to the tangible policy outputs credited to the incumbent. Better infrastructure (roads) at the neighbourhood level was mostly recognised by voters in the four regions.

Secondly, complementary to the tangible and direct policy outputs are the popular images of the incumbents. The incumbent's activities of so-called *blusukan* and *takziah* in Probolinggo Municipality were clearly remembered by voters. They frequently mentioned them as extraordinary activities performed by a

person who held the most honourable and prominent position in the municipality. This admiration persuaded voters to vote for the incumbent.

Thirdly, voters compared the incumbent and the challenger before making decisions. The basis of comparison was the competitive advantage between candidates. This argument was mainly delivered by voters who possessed leadership positions in the community, namely hamlet heads, neighbourhood unit (RT) heads, community unit (RW) heads and village heads. They voted for the incumbents in Blitar Regency and Probolinggo because they perceived that the incumbents were more experienced and well-grounded than the challengers. Many of the incumbents' programs were not yet completed in the first term. They voted for the incumbents because they considered that the previous advantageous programs should be continued in the second term. By voting for the incumbents, these elite voters sought to minimise the uncertainty risks. The case study in Blitar found a Javanese proverb to express this consideration, "*timbanganne nggolek wong nembel* or *timbang bakal aluwung nambal*" (rather than finding a new leader).

Fourthly, some voters considered party loyalty (party ID) when deciding whether to vote or not to vote for the incumbents. Voters' alignment to a certain party that nominated the candidate shaped their preference. Voters obeyed the party's decision and voted for the nominated candidate. Finally, the case study in two rural regions (Blitar and Trenggalek) found voters practising *anut grubyuk* (fitting in) in the voting process. Voters adjusted their preference to the majority or growing opinion in the neighbourhood. Voters in Blitar mainly practised *anut grubyuk* to vote for the incumbent. Voters in Trenggalek performed *anut grubyuk* to vote or not to vote for the incumbent. Thus, *anut grubyuk* both favoured and disfavoured the incumbents.

These five categories of voters' explanations corroborate the logic of the incumbents' survival as explained by elites (local government officials, NGO activists, journalists, party activists, businessmen, political consultants and the former regents and mayors) interviewed in the case studies. Populist policies and activities giving direct and tangible benefits to voters shaped their decision to vote, including money politics disbursed by the winning challenger's

camp in Madiun Municipality. Nevertheless, voters could not identify the informal political actors who delivered benefits or goods to them. The benefits were usually distributed by the intermediary or in the name of the incumbent. Voters, then, praised the benefits given by the incumbents.

In these case studies, decisions to vote or not to vote for the incumbents in the *pilkada* are mainly encouraged by the tangible aspects of policy outputs. Voters were not likely to consider intangibles with long-term benefits or policy outcomes, such as the human development achievements of health, education, and economy (well-being). To develop a more abstract conception of this sort of voting behaviour, the analogy of consuming fast food can be applied. The food is usually served in a comfortable place, modern, of eye-catching appearance, put into a clear menu and creatively wrapped. Then, the main reason to buy fast food is because most of it tastes quite good, is inexpensive and convenient (giving a distorted sense of how much it actually costs), “without giving it much thought, rarely considering where this food comes from, how it was made, what it is doing to the community around them”. The consumer “just grabs

their tray at the counter, finds a table, takes a seat, unwraps the paper, and digs in” (Schlosser, 2002).

The analogy of consuming fast food is plausibly appropriate to explain voting behaviour (to vote or not to vote for the incumbents) in the *pilkada* in these four rural and urban regions. Firstly, the majority of voters quickly judged their decision to vote or not to vote for the incumbents, without much thought, based on superficial policy outputs (visible, noticeable, direct and short-term benefits). Secondly, they considered the eye-catching appearance of the incumbents, such as their generosity and humility. This demonstrates the importance of the incumbents’ personal marketing (image) and personalisation of policy outputs (political credit).

The Comparative Logic of Survival and Failure

There are three interrelated themes concerning the logic of the incumbents’ survival and failure in the *pilkada*. First is populism. This is not only about political ideas which are intended to represent ordinary people’s needs and wishes. This also covers populist policies and popular activities which the incumbents were praised for.

Populism works to construct a well-liked image of the incumbents amongst local people. In detail, populist ideas, policies and popular activities are personal marketing for the incumbents to make them appear as popular figures. They act apparently as figures who care or give very much attention to common people's concerns (problems, needs, and wishes). Moreover, populism functions as the result of the personalisation of (populist) policy outputs. The successful incumbents do solo runs to maximise public praise and develop their well-liked image via the implementation of populist policies.

Second is rivalry. Embracing informal actors and partisan formal actors was crucial for the incumbents to survive. They are a group of local elites consisting of businessmen, partisan bureaucrats, legislators, party elites, and partisan NGOs (and media) providing support for the incumbents to stay in office. They operate to particularly minimise political rivalry risks to the incumbents. This concept is adaptable, representing the operation of the actors playing informal politics with the assurance of transactional relationships as incentives. These actors perform either encouraging or undermining activities for the

incumbents. The incumbents' capacity to manage these actors via mutual transactional relationships is central to discouraging counter-movements that may undermine the incumbents' influence amongst local people.

The last theme is tangibility or the ability to deliver tangible aspects of policy outputs and appearances, credited to the incumbents during office. Tangible and direct policy outputs are remembered and shape voters' preferences to vote for the incumbents in the *pilkada*, such as infrastructure at the neighbourhood level, city gardens, subsidised or free groceries and other donations praised to the incumbents. Not only in deciding to vote for the surviving incumbents, the case studies in Trenggalek Regency and Madiun Municipality pointed out that voters, including female voters, considered these policy outputs when deciding to vote for the non-surviving incumbents. To be specific, in Madiun Municipality, the cash disbursed by the winning challenger's camp also shaped voters' preferences not to vote for the incumbent.

Complementary to tangible policy outputs are noticeable appearances of the incumbent amongst local people. *Blusukan* and *takziah* are the two most

popular activities remembered and adored by voters. These activities contributed to the improvement of voters' likeability or affinity towards the incumbents. The existence of these three factors attached to the incumbents is crucial to explain the logic of their survival or failure. The comparison shows that the incumbent in Blitar and Probolinggo succeeded in performing populism and tangibility and in managing the low rivalry risks from informal and partisan formal actors prior to the *pilkada*. The incumbents in Trenggalek and Madiun actually succeeded in promoting populism and tangibility to the local people. Nonetheless, their failure to control informal politics and actors compelled the incumbents to leave their posts.

In the case studies, the low rivalry risks from informal politics can explain the logic of the incumbent's survival and failure in the *pilkada*. Good populism and tangibility fulfillment will support the incumbents in gaining credit from local people. Nevertheless, the politics of particularism via incentives, playing between the incumbents and five categories of local elites, were strong enough to minimise the risks of political rivalry that may undermine the incumbents' influence (populism and

tangibility) and to block money politics attacks on potential voters.

Thus, the rivalry risks from informal and partisan formal actors, which depend on the degree of informal political maneuvers played out between the incumbents and these actors, are likely to determine the incumbents' survivability, even though the incumbents have similar competitive advantages of populism and tangibility.

Making Democracy Valuable

For those studying local politics and democracy in Indonesia, the implementation of the *pilkada* in 2005 sparked critical concern about serious challenges for the emerging democracy, following democratic reforms begun just seven years earlier (1998). The dramatic end of the 32 years of an authoritarian regime, followed by rapid political change, still leaves questions about democratic consolidation thereafter. A logical question mainly addressed by political scholars pertains to the change in democracy in Indonesia, including at the local level. Does the *pilkada* encourage the progress of local democracy? What are the enabling or preventing factors for local democracy to move on? The previous collective works provide evidence that the *pilkada* is a step

that will help to deepen democracy (Erb and Sulistiyanto, 2009). Nonetheless, other works find difficulty in generalising local politics in post-Soeharto Indonesia, as there are various democracy outputs in diverse regions (Aspinall and Mietzner, 2010). Also, a local democracy study in four provinces (East Java, West Sumatera, South Sulawesi and Bali) asserts that local elites' interests, focusing only on gaining power, have undermined the positive contribution of the *pilkada* to democratic institutionalisation (Zuhro et al., 2011). Essentially, there is no single explanation of the progress of local democracy in post-Soeharto Indonesia. This research adds more detailed content on incumbents' political survival (regional heads) in an electoral democracy. Moreover, it seeks to assert that certain parties have a strong interest in "manipulating" local democracy.

By referring to Freedom House's measure of democratisation, based on the assessment of the quality of civil rights and civil liberties, Aspinall and Mietzner have put Indonesia's democracy into the consolidation perspective (2010). Other works in the same publication edited by these *Indonesianists* apply a similar perspective. The consolidation of Indonesia's democracy still has a struggle

to deal with the acceptance of democratic constitutional order amongst *sharia* state's supporters, worrying levels of behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional commitment to democracy from key elites, poor performance of corruption and the rule of law and the combination of presidentialism and a multi-party system that may lead to unstable democracy (Diamond, 2010). From the examination of voting behaviour data in a series (1999-2009) of legislative and presidential elections, Mujani and Liddle (2010) explain Indonesia's democracy consolidation and quality with both positive and negative aspects of voting behaviour. The similar perspective is also applied by Zuhro et al. (2011) to construct a model of local democracy in Indonesia.

Specific to reviewing the *pilkada* in the regions, other collective works¹⁵ concluded that the implementation of local elections in Indonesia is problematic in terms of democratic consolidation. The *pilkada* is coloured by weaknesses, namely a lack of impartiality and independence of local general election commissions, some violence, huge numbers of absentees and domination by

¹⁵ The majority of works assess the results and dynamics of the first round *pilkada* in 2005.

political parties (Erb and Sulistiyanto, 2009).

Nevertheless, consolidation as a perspective to 'measure' democratisation of a country or countries is not without criticism. As a cluster concept, consolidation is structurally understandable but without a core. The division of democratic types, liberal and electoral democracy, to classify either democratic survival or democratic progress in democratic consolidation does not have common ideas. As a result, the consolidation of democracy seems to act as a catch-all concept, lacking a core meaning to unite all modes of usage. Thus, "consolidology" is only a label for the study of new democracies. However, academic communities deploy the term democratic consolidation in whatever ways best fit for research, funding needs, and advertising strategies (Schendler, 1998). The consolidation perspective is also very formally oriented. It sets the criterion of formality based on "a close fit between formal rules and actual behaviour". In fact, some countries with long traditions of democracy, such as Italy, Japan and India are rampant with the practices of *particularism* which are informal in character (O'Donnell, 1996).

From the examination of political survival and failure at the regional levels, this study asserts that rivalry is a cross-cutting factor that may support the incumbents' survival or failure in the *pilkada*. In other words, a good incumbents' performance in delivering populist policy outputs and appearance with tangible and direct benefits is not adequate without obtaining backing and protection from informal and partisan formal actors.

This finding arrives at a crucial argument that the *pilkada* is captured predominantly by local elites. The degree of political rivalry on the incumbents, as an explanatory aspect of their survival and failure, is assumed to have a poor impact on the *pilkada* outcomes. The *pilkada* has not yet delivered its main mission as a competitive mechanism of democracy to encourage better local leadership, with positive effects on local development achievements. The domination of elites and less critical voters possibly became one of the factors that potentially caused local development losses. Informal and partisan formal actors transacted their influence and resources to gain individual and constituent-based benefits. They amused local people with short-term,

practical and popular development outputs.

Democracy is not solely about election concerns. Thus, electoral accountability or democratic accountability is the crucial idea of the democratic spirit.¹⁶ Election and succession are mechanisms to select better leaderships that are able to deliver equal advancement and benefits for all people. Schumpeter fundamentally contends that the classical doctrine of democracy is about the common good and the will of the people. "The democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions which realizes the common good by making the people itself decide issues through the election of individuals who are to assemble in order to carry out its will" (Schumpeter, 1950). Therefore, democracy is a competitive method to amass collective interest, aggregated in political decisions (policies) and mandated to the elected leaders. This doctrine clearly underlines the idea of the electoral accountability of the elected leader to carry out the common good and the will of the people.

¹⁶ This study uses the concept of electoral accountability and democratic accountability interchangeably. Both concepts have identical meanings.

Moreover, Dahl warns that democratic government under elected competitive leadership is accountable for translating these advantages into realities (1998). Based on these quantitative and grounded data from the field, relating to the *pilkada* and its impacts, this study proposes an alternative idea to review democratisation, not from the perspective of inquiring into the facts and reasons for what makes democracy work, in terms of the consolidation of democracy. In the emerging stages of democracy, especially at the local level, democratic progress should be viewed from the outcome perspective, to shape the will of the people. In the early stage of democracy in Indonesia, democracy as a constitutional choice needs to gain a quick win or impressive effect as a better alternative than any other form of non-democratic government. The confidence and trust of the people in local democratic government can only be obtained through the better performance and outcomes of democratic government under competitive elected leadership.

Here, it is assumed that electoral accountability is appropriate and complementary to other existing perspectives of democratisation, particularly the consolidation of

democracy. The logic of endorsing democratic accountability to measure democratic progress in the *pilkada*, complementary to democratisation, *firstly*, relies on the argument of institutional arrangement and accountable and democratic local government. The *pilkada* follows the logic of the presidential government system (*presidentialism*) in electing a leader. Under *presidentialism*, asking the government to be accountable to voters becomes possible. An incumbent leader is an easy target for voters to evaluate this leader's performance (Hellwig and Samuels, 2008).

Secondly, democratic accountability is important to consider as a complementary perspective to democratisation, since Indonesian democracy is not sufficiently understood through institutionalism only. In other words, institutional arrangements matter in shaping behaviour and policy, as in the first argument; nevertheless, non-institutional or informal factors have crucial roles in performing similar functions as formal institutions.

Thus, comprehending Indonesian political dynamics relies both on formal institutions (law, constitution, formal institutions, institutional arrangements) and informal factors (non-codified norms, value, actual praxis, beliefs). This study

demonstrates the importance of informal politics, which more significantly determined the political survival of regional heads in the *pilkada*. Democratic accountability as a complementary perspective is appropriate to comprehend democratic progress, as it may identify to whom an elected leader gives more response, whether to the large number of constituents or the small number of loyal and supportive elites.

CONCLUSION

Expanding the Logic

The study makes contributions to the literature on the theory of political survival (de Mesquita et al., 2003). The study, *first*, enriches the concept of tangibility to better understand the *selectorate's* voting behaviour. The research argues that not all voters can identify the incumbents' populism (policies and activities); some voters even intentionally ignore it. Thus, tangibility, that delivers the concrete aspects of policy outputs and popular appearance which are credited to incumbents, contributes to shaping voters' preferences to vote or not to vote for the incumbents in re-election bids. Also, the study introduces the concept of rivalry, to represent the operation of the actors who play informal politics that may encourage

or undermine the incumbents' survival in the *pilkada*. Informal politics is the play of the politics of particularism that can bond incumbents and informal and partisan formal actors and voters.

Secondly, the study revised the concept of provision of public goods that contribute to the leaders' survival. The case studies find specific goods were considered by voters in deciding to vote or not to vote for the incumbents in the *pilkada*, namely tangible goods, such as infrastructure, but not intangible wellbeing aspects, such as improvements in health, education and local economy. The concept of public goods also becomes blurred as a result of the politics of particularism played by the incumbents and informal and partisan formal actors.

Thirdly, the study criticizes the rational assumption of the *selectorate* theory about the possession of information on economic downturns, leaders' competence and the competitive advantage of the incumbents and challengers amongst voters. In fact, the majority of voters neglected these aspects. They strongly recalled and considered tangible aspects of policy outputs and the popular appearance of the incumbents. The study also enriches narrative explanations of voting behaviour

(preferences and reasons) in the *pilkada*, mainly pertaining to populism and tangibility.

Specific to the preceding literature on the *pilkada* in Indonesia, Sulistiyanto (2009) argues that factors leading to the incumbent's survival in the *pilkada* are different in each region. Arguably, this study finds that populism, rivalry and tangibility are similar factors that could contribute to the incumbent's survival or failure in many *pilkada*. This study also expands Erb and Sulistiyanto's (2009) arguments about local leaders' survival in the *pilkada*. It proposes the significance of informal politics and networks in the *pilkada* as instruments to minimise the risks of political rivalry to the incumbent, mainly from informal and partisan formal actors.

To the literature on voting behaviour, mainly for Javanese voters, this research reveals a genuine concept of *anut grubyuk* (fitting-in) in voting decisions in rural Java. This study finds *anut grubyuk* as a unique group-based voting preference amongst rural Javanese that cannot be separated from Javanese communal culture (philosophies and values).

Additionally, the preceding theory on Javanese voters states that norms and values shape partisan choices amongst

Javanese villagers. Rural Javanese voters express these norms and values mainly in two of three prominent *aliran* (mainstreams), namely *abangan* (who follow the Hinduistic element in Javanese tradition) and *santri* (who take as their main pattern a way of life orientation, a set of beliefs, values and expressive symbols based primarily on Islamic doctrine) (Gaffar, 1992). Nonetheless, *anut grubyuk* in the *pilkada* shows a distinctive explanation of rural Javanese voters. *Anut grubyuk* demonstrates, firstly, voters' rational behaviour in gaining benefit from collective voting decisions in the neighbourhood that could be bartered for particular incentives from the incumbents and overcomes the limitation of information to support voters' decisions to vote or not to vote for the incumbents. Secondly, it also shows that the level of democratic processes in Indonesia have not yet been able to provide equal freedom to vote independently for every voter.

To the literature on democracy, this study offers a complementary perspective to measure the progress of democracy by inserting electoral or democratic accountability. The concept further develops the inquiry into democracy in the emerging democratic countries that

emphasises democratic consolidation. Electoral accountability offers countries in the emerging stage of democracy an outcome perspective of democracy in shaping the will of the people (making democracy valuable). It argues that, in addition to sustained democratic progress, an emerging democratic country needs impressive effects of democracy as a better alternative government than any other forms of non-democratic government. Democratic accountability shows that a leader who is elected competitively chair a democratic government, to meet the common good and the will of the people.

Thus, based on the case study findings, the study recommends further practical work to examine the possibility of the inclusion of democratic or electoral accountability in composing the Indonesia Democracy Index (IDI). IDI is a provincially based measurement of democratic progress focused on three main aspects, namely civil liberties, political rights, and institutions of democracy (Rauf et al., 2011). IDI emphasises the application of a consolidation perspective to measure the irreversible progress of democracy. Thus, this study recommends that IDI needs to incorporate electoral accountability, as

complementary to this perspective, in order to broaden the assessment, to not only ensure making democracy work, but also making democracy valuable. IDI could probably add a new aspect of measurement, to assess people's perceptions of the performance of local elected leaders as well as legislators.

What, then, the prospect of Indonesian democracy? In the middle term, there will be some incremental improvements, mainly in the *pilkada*. However, informal politics will remain occur and capture the *pilkada* and democracy.

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