

# Choosing Democracy: The 1955 General Election in Medan, Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study analyzes the 1955 General Election in Medan, the inaugural democratic exercise in post-independence Indonesia. Aimed at understanding the era's political dynamics and voter behavior, the research focuses on the electoral process, party strategies, and the socio-economic context influencing the elections. The study uses historical analysis to draw on primary sources, including governmental decrees and local newspaper archives, alongside secondary literature on Indonesian political history. The method involves a chronological examination of events leading to the elections, political parties' roles, and socioeconomic factors that impact voter preferences. The results reveal that the 1955 General Election in Medan was a complex and multifaceted event shaped by the legacy of colonial and wartime experiences. Political parties like Masyumi, PKI, and PNI employed diverse strategies to engage with voters, ranging from religious politics to nationalist rhetoric. Despite land disputes and economic instability, the elections saw high voter turnout and active participation, culminating in Masyumi's victory. In conclusion, the 1955 General Election in Medan was pivotal in Indonesia's democratic journey, reflecting the interplay between historical legacies, political aspirations, and the people's collective will. It began a new era in Indonesian politics, characterized by active public engagement and the establishment of a representative democratic system.

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini menganalisis Pemilu 1955 di Medan, pelaksanaan demokrasi perdana di Indonesia pasca kemerdekaan. Bertujuan untuk memahami dinamika politik dan perilaku pemilih pada masa itu, penelitian ini berfokus pada proses pemilu, strategi partai, dan konteks sosio-ekonomi yang mempengaruhi pemilu. Dengan menggunakan analisis sejarah, penelitian ini memanfaatkan sumber-sumber primer, termasuk keputusan pemerintah dan arsip surat kabar lokal, serta literatur sekunder mengenai sejarah politik Indonesia. Metode ini melibatkan pemeriksaan kronologis peristiwa-peristiwa menjelang pemilu, peran partai politik, dan dampak faktor sosial-ekonomi terhadap preferensi pemilih. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa Pemilu 1955 di Medan merupakan peristiwa yang kompleks dan memiliki banyak aspek yang dibentuk oleh warisan pengalaman kolonial dan masa perang. Partai politik seperti Masyumi, PKI, dan PNI menerapkan beragam strategi untuk menjangkau pemilih, mulai dari politik agama hingga retorika nasionalis. Meskipun terdapat tantangan seperti sengketa tanah dan ketidakstabilan ekonomi, pemilu ini menunjukkan tingkat partisipasi pemilih dan partisipasi aktif yang tinggi, yang berpuncak pada kemenangan Masyumi. Kesimpulannya, Pemilu 1955 di Medan merupakan momen penting dalam perjalanan demokrasi Indonesia, yang mencerminkan keterkaitan antara warisan sejarah, aspirasi politik, dan kemauan kolektif masyarakat. Hal ini menandai dimulainya era baru dalam politik Indonesia, yang ditandai dengan keterlibatan publik yang aktif dan pembentukan sistem demokrasi perwakilan.

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## INTRODUCTION

The seeds of the General Election in Indonesia were sown with the inception of political ethics in 1901, which subsequently led to the emergence of various organizations such as Boedi Oetomo, Sarekat Islam, PNI, NU, and Muhammadiyah. This burgeoning political landscape eventually paved the way for establishing the People's Council (Volksraad) in 1916, marking a significant development in Indonesia's political history (Ricklefs, 2017, p. 263). More carry results politically and ethically. This then flap wing to outside Java Island, like to the island of Sumatra, is wrong; one targeted area is Medan because they have dynamic high politics. Another reason why Medan was made as a political base organization movement nationality is because this region is center administration plantations in East Sumatra so that all needs will feel faster compared to areas his neighbor. However, organizational politics are still brought to outside areas, such as the Karo and Simalungun regions (Blumberger, 1931, p. 206). Dr. Pirngadi, a prominent member of Boedi Oetomo, facilitated the initiation of a political organization in Medan. His involvement marked a significant entry of political activism into the region, setting the stage for future political developments in Medan (Suprayitno, 2012, p. 86).

More activity organization politics in Medan has been going smoothly for two decades. The number of members is increasing a lot. Japan landed at Tanjung Tiram and spread to Medan in 1942 (Oktorino, 2017, p. 88). Indonesia's political organizations underwent severe disruption, rendering them incapable of conducting activities as before. The Japanese occupation authorities strictly prohibited all forms of political engagement, with severe consequences, including death by firing squad, for any violations of this mandate. Japan's primary focus during this period was on the Second World War, specifically securing logistics to support their war efforts (Biro Sejarah Prima, 1976, p. 104). As part of their strategy, many residents were relocated to Medan to meet these logistic demands (Suprayitno, 2001, p. 167). However, by August 1945, Japan began to falter in the war, a decline that became apparent following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, leading to Japan's surrender to the Allied forces. In the wake of these events, the Indonesian leadership, spearheaded by Sukarno-Hatta, seized the moment to assert independence. On 17 August 1945, Indonesia's Independence was officially proclaimed in a solemn ceremony at Sukarno's residence, marking the nation's birth as a sovereign state (Kahin, 2012, p. 132).

The news of the proclamation of independence was not widely disseminated in Medan until October 1945, when Tengku Mohammad Hassan officially announced Indonesia's Independence to the Medan populace. The struggle for sovereignty continued; the same month, TED Kelly arrived at Belawan Harbor with armed forces. In November 1945, Mohammad Hatta, as vice president, promulgated Declaration X, urging all Indonesians to establish political parties, with plans for General Elections set in January 1946. This period marked the resurgence of dormant political organizations alongside the emergence of new groups such as the Youth Front and *Lasykar Rakyat*. These organizations prepared to participate in the 1946 General Election yet faced the immediate challenge of combating the Dutch and their allies to secure the nation's birthright. On 27 December 1949, Indonesia and the Netherlands reached an accord to terminate their conflict, thus affirming Indonesia's Independence and paving the way for the nation's future, including the organization of General Elections (Biro Sejarah Prima, 1976, p. 189).

After acknowledging Medan's sovereignty, the region faced a grave social crisis. The city grappled with a starvation epidemic, prompting the local government to organize rice distributions to mitigate the issue (Plomp, 2012, p. 372). Economic downturns led to widespread theft, with Belawan Harbor, a key logistics hub, becoming a frequent target for thieves (Lazuardy & Rochwulaningsih, 2020, p. 32). Land disputes were also prevalent, as the populace occupied and repurposed plantation lands for residential use, a problem persisting to day.

Political activities resumed during this turbulent time, notably by the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), which urged the local populace to continue fighting for their rights by occupying unused plantation lands. The PKI advocated for rapid nationalization of plantations, a sentiment echoed by the Indonesian National Party (PNI), which also promoted plantation nationalization and improved living standards. Tensions escalated between PNI and Masyumi after Masyumi members were ousted from governmental positions, leading to bureaucratic conflicts (Lazuardy & Rochwulaningsih, 2020, p. 33).

In response to the growing political unrest, President Sukarno enacted Presidential Decree Number 188 in 1953, establishing the Indonesian Election Committee (PPI) led by S. Hadikusumo. This initiative prompted the formation of Regional Election Committees across various administrative

levels, including Medan, facilitating voter education and election logistics (ANRI, 1953).

The spread of the Presidential Decree galvanized Medan's political parties into campaign mode. Masyumi criticized the PKI for using Islamic teachings, while PNI accused Masyumi of being unpatriotic. Despite these tensions, the General Elections proceeded in September and November 1955, with Masyumi winning locally in Medan, although nationally, it was defeated by PNI (Lazuardy & Rochwulaningsih, 2020, p. 32).

The significance of the 1955 General Election has been extensively analyzed, with notable contributions from Herbert Feith in "The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia" (1962) and Faisal Hilmy Maulida in "Sejarah Pemilu yang Dihilangkan" (2019). Feith praises the election for embodying democratic principles, while Maulida highlights its roots and enthusiastic public engagement. However, these studies primarily focus on the national perspective, leaving the 1955 Medan General Election less examined, indicating a gap in the historiography of localized electoral dynamics.

Based on the preceding analysis, this article provides a comprehensive overview of Medan's historical context during the Dutch colonial period, the Japanese occupation, and the era of Indonesian independence. Moreover, it delves into the social dynamics of Medan prior to the 1955 General Election, highlighting prevalent issues such as famine, theft, smuggling, and land disputes. Political parties played a pivotal role in stabilizing the social environment in the lead-up to the election. Each party devised and executed political strategies to garner maximum support from the populace of Medan. Holding key administrative roles, the Medan Government made concerted efforts to facilitate the electoral process for all stakeholders. Despite minimal social support, the General Election proceeded successfully in September and November, ultimately resulting in a victory for the Masyumi party.

## METHOD

This paper employs a historical method encompassing four key components: (1) heuristic, involving the collection of historical sources such as archives, colonial reports, contemporary newsletters, and scholarly literature, with notable collections from the National Archives of the Republic of Indonesia and direct acquisitions from the Medan Waspada office; (2) source criticism, which entails evaluating the authenticity (external) and credibility (internal) of the gathered data to ascertain historical facts; (3) interpretation, or the process of analyzing historical

facts to construct arguments and narratives; and (4) historiography, the synthesis and construction of history through writing. To conduct effective historical research, a theoretical and conceptual framework is essential. In this context, the theory of elections is perceived as a mechanism for power rotation, open recruitment, and public accountability, highlighting democracy's role in fostering extensive and constructive participation. This democratic system allows direct public involvement in political decision-making, enabling complete democratic governance through elections (Dahl, 1971, p. 2). In this framework, political parties act as significant intermediaries linking societal power and ideologies with formal government institutions (Budiardjo, 2016, p. 404). This study employs the interplay between election theory and the conceptual framework of political parties to analyze the 1955 Medan Election. The concluding section of this article will juxtapose the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of elections and political parties within the context of the 1955 Medan Election, following a detailed discussion of the historical facts.

## MEDAN FROM A COLONIAL TO INDEPENDENCE

Medan, a city on Sumatra's East Coast, is geographically positioned between 2°27' and 2°47' North Latitude and 98°35' and 98°44' East Longitude, with an elevation ranging from 2.5 to 37.5 meters above sea level. The introduction of plantations in 1863 by Jacobus Nienhuys marked the beginning of significant transformations in Medan, particularly in its urban development (*Staatsblad van Nederlandsch Indie*, 1881). The 1920s represented a golden era for Medan, during which the city expanded extensively, partly due to land grants from the Sultan of Deli to support the burgeoning plantation economy. This economic boom persisted until the 1930s, when a global economic downturn affected the East Coast of Sumatra, reflecting the city's dependency on export-oriented plantation economics (Said, 1992, p. 108).

The landscape was dramatically altered in early 1942 amid rumors of an impending Japanese invasion. The Dutch colonial administration initiated a scorched-earth policy, destroying key infrastructures to prevent their use by the Japanese forces (Oktorino, 2017, p. 102). Within weeks, Japan seized control of Medan, establishing organizations like Boempa, Talapeta, Gyugun, and Heiho to aid their war efforts and shifting agricultural production from cash crops to rice cultivation. The Japanese occupation, lasting approximately 3.5 years,

left an indelible mark on Indonesia's political landscape. It facilitated the rise of nationalist movements, fueling the Indonesian quest for independence. Post-occupation, the shift in plantation commodities created economic and social instability in Medan, leading to heightened conflicts as the city approached its first general election in 1955 (Sinar, 1992, p. 120).

On 17 August 1945, Indonesian nationalists officially proclaimed the nation's independence. However, the news of this proclamation only reached Medan in October 1945. Medan's residents met the declaration with enthusiasm. However, the initial period of independence was marred by reprehensible acts, including looting, particularly targeting the Chinese community, perceived as pro-Dutch (Ricklefs, 2017, p. 320). The situation escalated when NICA (Dutch forces) landed at Belawan Harbor in October, exacerbating the anger among the people of Medan (Reid, 2012, p. 180). Subsequently, Mohammad Hatta announced Declaration X, setting the stage for forming political parties and the planned General Election in January 1946. Despite the formation of parties and military groups, Dutch interference continually disrupted the election until 1949 (*Indisch Courant*, 1954).

Post-independence, Medan's trajectory was complicated by its history of Japanese occupation and the early days of Independence (Plomp, 2012, p. 372). On 21 September 1951, the city underwent a significant expansion, tripling in size, a move considered irrational given the unstable conditions. The expansion utilized former industrial plantation lands as outlined in the Decree of Mr. Date. 11-14-1951 No. 66/III/PSU. With a burgeoning population estimated at 500,000, Medan was divided into four sub-districts: Medan, Medan Barat, Medan Timur, and Medan Baru, further subdivided into various villages. Each village was led by a "penghulu" elected directly by its inhabitants, a system established by the North Sumatra Provincial Governor/Regional Head Regulation No. 30/UU/1953, dated 30 May 1953. These village leaders, assisted by Deputy Penghulus and blockheads, managed the daily administrative tasks (Tim Penuelis, 1959, p. 132).

### **SOCIAL SITUATION IN MEDAN BEFORE THE 1955 GENERAL ELECTION**

In the period leading up to the 1955 General Election in Medan, the legacy of Japanese occupation fostered land disputes. The Japanese had relocated people to Medan to support logistic needs around plantation areas, which led to land occupation con-

licts persisting post-independence, as these individuals felt entitled to the lands they had worked on during the occupation and in support of the Republic's establishment (Pelzer, 1985, p. 73). Instances of illegal land occupation, such as in the Sari Rejo and Sei Agul areas, where communities claimed plantation lands for agriculture, exemplify these conflicts. The Indonesian Farmers' Front (BTI) advocated for equitable land distribution to ensure a more prosperous life, highlighting cases like Tanah Kedai Durian, where farmers faced legal challenges over land ownership and resource use (*Waspada*, 1952).

Medan also experienced rampant theft during the 1950s, with significant incidents such as the massive theft of batik fabrics at Belawan port, revealing the city's economic hardships at the dawn of independence. Over 3,000 batik fabrics were confiscated by Belawan police, with the thieves concealing the goods on the Ophir ship, leading to operational delays and highlighting the broader issue of theft in the struggling economy (*Waspada*, 1951a). By 1955, over 1,300 individuals had been arrested for criminal activities in Medan, exacerbated by the UN's economic embargo on Indonesia, which increased the theft of valuable commodities like rubber (*Waspada*, 1955f).

Belawan port faced additional challenges with the planned distribution of 1,300 tons of rice to alleviate local starvation. The distribution was hindered by overcrowded government warehouses filled with public and private sector goods, causing significant delays in rice distribution. This logistical bottleneck forced the government to reorganize the storage facilities to facilitate rice distribution, underscoring the broader challenges of managing scarce resources during economic and social turmoil (*Waspada*, 1951b).

### **POLITICAL PARTIES IN ACTION**

The political landscape in Medan began evolving during the Dutch colonial era, marked by Dr. Pirngadi's criticism of the treatment of Javanese laborers on East Sumatra's plantations. This critique led to the establishment of the Boedi Oetomo network in Medan, aiming to improve the conditions of Javanese workers. The Indonesian National Party (PNI), introduced by Iwa Kusuma Sumantri and Sunaryo, expanded its regional influence (Blumberger, 1931, p. 206). Political activities, however, faced a hiatus during the Japanese occupation beginning in 1942, as Japan suppressed political movements and redirected plantation resources towards war efforts, establishing organizations like TALAPETA, Gyugun, and BOEMPA to mobilize

local support for their war objectives (Sinar, 1992, p. 120).

The end of World War II saw a resurgence in political activities with Mohammad Hatta's Proclamation X in November 1945, advocating for the formation of political parties and the scheduling of General Elections for January 1946. These moves reinvigorated political engagement in Medan, forming groups like Barisan Harimau Liar and Gagak Hitam. However, the Dutch resistance persisted, delaying the full realization of democratic processes in Indonesia until their final withdrawal in 1949. The situation in Medan stabilized somewhat after the State of East Sumatra dissolved in 1950 (Suprayitno, 2001; Biro Sejarah Prima, 1976, p. 189).

By the end of 1950, Indonesia unilaterally amended the agreements made at the Round Table Conference (KMB), thereby liberating political parties to resume their activities (van Der Kroef, 1957, p. 411). In 1953, President Sukarno enacted Presidential Decree Number 188, establishing the Indonesian Election Committee (PPI) under S. Hadikusumo's chairmanship. Hadikusumo then formed election committees across regions, including Medan, in preparation for the upcoming national General Elections. The decree, along with Law Number 7 of 1953, laid the groundwork for conducting these elections, prompting political parties in Medan to strategize for victory (ANRI, 1953).

Campaign regulations stipulated by Presidential Decree Number 188 of 1953 and Law Number 7 of 1953 were enforced, setting spatial limits for campaign activities and imposing a deadline for campaigning to conclude one day before the elections. These regulations aimed to maintain public order and fairness during the campaign (Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1955a).

The 1955 General Election period saw innovative campaign tactics due to the low literacy levels of the time. Parties had to creatively engage and educate the electorate to ensure their political messages were comprehensible. Consequently, various public events, beyond traditional party congresses or anniversary celebrations, became platforms for election campaigning. The issue of West Irian's incorporation into Indonesia became a prominent topic, resonating with nationalistic sentiments and influencing voter preferences (van Der Kroef, 1957, p. 417; Feith, 1962, p. 425).

In Medan, political parties built their campaigns around critical social issues, such as the use



Figure 1. Eid greetings from Underbouw PKI and Some of the Contents of the Claims (Harian Rakjat, 1955a)

of plantation lands, worker wages, and the representation of Muslims. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) focused on advocating for the rights of plantation workers and the underprivileged, particularly in impoverished areas like the Sei Mati slums. The PKI argued that the land, primarily worked by Indonesians, should not be controlled by foreign or feudal capitalist interests. They emphasized the ongoing struggle against foreign domination and exploitation despite Indonesia's formal independence (Lazuardy & Rochwulaningsih, 2020, p. 34).

Coinciding with Eid al-Fitri in 1955, which marked the PKI's 35th anniversary, the party promoted the festival as a symbol of peace and reconciliation among competing political factions. The PKI utilized this occasion to reflect on its history and reiterate its commitment to change and peace. The party also championed gender equality, advocating for equal status and opportunities for women and men in all public spheres, particularly politics. The PKI aimed to garner broad public support for its agenda, asserting that their victory would improve workers' conditions and realize social justice and gender equality, embodying the democratic principles they espoused (Harian Rakjat, 1955a).

During the 1955 General Election in Medan, various parties, including Nahdatul Ulama (NU), employed different strategies to garner votes. NU actively campaigned among religious teachers and female students in Islamic boarding schools while utilizing Friday sermons to advocate for electing Islamic leaders from their ranks (Waspada, 1955g). For NU, the election's stakes were high, viewing it as a critical juncture, especially with the potential rise of the PKI in Parliament. They urged the Muslim community to vote for NU, framing the election as a religious duty (*fardhu'ain*), where abstaining would be sinful, while participating would bring divine rewards (Waspada, 1954).

Masyumi, another major Islamic party in

Medan, positioned itself in stark opposition to the PKI, branding it as a political adversary. Masyumi employed religious teachings, referencing the Qur'an and Hadith, to argue that supporting the PKI equated to endorsing disbelief and immoral tactics for power acquisition. They appealed to the Muslim populace to avoid aligning with the "infidels" and to ensure Islamic victory in the elections (Al-Islam, 1955). Masyumi's campaign rhetoric emphasized the importance of voting for co-religionists to safeguard Muslim interests, warning against any support for non-Islamic groups, particularly communists, whom they described as corrupt and misleading (Abadi, 1955).

The PKI contested Masyumi's claim to represent the only valid form of Islam, arguing that Masyumi was monopolizing religious interpretation to its advantage: "Islam is not exclusive to the Masyumi brand. Religion should not be reduced to a mere matter of trust, as defined by Masyumi. According to them, Masyumi's rigid interpretation of Sharia law branded any deviation as heresy, fostering a theocratic state devoid of tolerance" (*Harian Rakjat*, 1955b).

In response to Masyumi's influence, the PNI strategically removed Masyumi-affiliated individuals from governmental positions to diminish Masyumi's prestige and electoral prospects. Accusations by PNI suggested that Masyumi supported Darul Islam's actions against the Republic, intensifying political rivalries (*Tegas* 1953). The influx of refugees from Aceh to Medan due to the Darul Islam movement was highlighted by PNI and PKI to criticize Masyumi's silence on the issue, urging Acehnese bravery against separatist movements (*Indisch Courant*, 1955).

PNI also mocked both Masyumi and NU for their theocratic aspirations, advocating for a separation of religion and politics and focusing on socioeconomic development instead. PNI's campaign emphasized national unity and the return of West Irian to Indonesia, accusing other parties of compromising national integrity for capitalist interests (*Koran Sumatera*, 1955a).

As the General Election neared, political tensions in Medan escalated, with parties using various incidents as ammunition for political attacks. For example, a significant rubber theft at AVROS, a major company, was blamed on BTI and PKI affiliates, adding fuel to the ongoing political conflict and enabling parties like NU and Masyumi to criticize pro-labor factions (*Koran Sumatera*, 1955b).

## ELECTION PREPARATION, IMPLEMENTATION, AND FINAL RESULTS

In anticipation of the first major exercise in party democracy, the General Elections Committee in Medan was established following directives from the central government to create local electoral management bodies for the 1955 General Election. The preparations in Medan for the election were commendably thorough. To ensure the smooth conduct of the General Election, the Medan government instituted the Voting Security Guard (PKPS). Each subdistrict in Medan organized PKPS units under the leadership of Vedana assistants, with the state police providing oversight at each location. The PKPS's mandate was to maintain security and order from 28 to 30 September 1955, covering 199 designated voting sites. A total of 597 PKPS members, grouped in teams of three, were appointed by the Mayor of Medan, who served as the Chair of the Election Committee for the region. These members were formally inducted and took oaths of office in a ceremony overseen by the Mayor and the Vedana assistants across all subdistricts (*Waspada*, 1955c).

The comprehensive election preparations involved civilians and military personnel to safeguard the electoral process, marking a significant moment in Indonesia's democratic history. Military forces were deployed across the city to every voting location to protect voters' rights. In addition, since 1953, Indonesian police forces have been sent abroad to countries like India, Pakistan, and Japan to gain expertise in election security, enhancing their readiness for the General Election (*Djawatan Kepolisian Negara*, 1953).

Police officers guarding the General Elections were compensated with Rp. 20 each, though the exact pay for TNI and PKPS personnel was not specified. However, it has been inferred that the wages for soldiers and police were comparable, with PKPS members potentially receiving higher compensation. The establishment of PKPS was a strategic move to bolster security, enhancing the overall safety and democratic integrity of the election process (*Djawatan Kepolisian Negara*, 1954). Deputy Prime Minister I Sogrono announced in late 1954 the introduction of symbolic images for each political party to aid voters, especially given the high illiteracy rates in Indonesia, including Medan. This initiative was aimed to facilitate voter understanding and participation in the electoral process (ANRI, 1954a).

The 1955 General Election had a substantial budget of IDR 479.891.729, allocated for various operational needs like committee honorariums,



Figure 2. Illustration Procedural 1955 General Election (Kedaulatan Rakjat, 1955)

public awareness campaigns, ballot production, voting booth construction, and nationwide ballot distribution (Tim Penulis, 2019, p. 89). Medan's specific election budget was around Rp. 5.000.000, accounting for over 266,500 voters across all polling stations. This budget aligned with the financial requirements of other major Indonesian cities. In financial shortfalls, election organizers were instructed to report promptly to the relevant authorities to ensure adequate funding for the election's smooth execution (Waspada, 1955d).

Election awareness in Medan was promoted through public discussions, educational seminars, and film screenings related to the electoral process. It was emphasized that only individuals aged 18 and above were eligible to vote, while younger citizens were encouraged to engage in positive activities. Additionally, it was mandated that businesses remain operational during the election to prevent any disruptions to the daily lives of Medan's populace, particularly given the ongoing food scarcity issues (Waspada, 1955a; Panitia Pemilihan Umum, 1955).

The procedural steps for the 1955 General Election in Medan were systematically outlined as follows: (1) Voter participants received an invitation letter from the local election committee. (2) Upon receiving this invitation, they could visit their designated polling station. (3) they presented the invitation letter to the officials at the station. (4) Voters were advised to absorb information provided by the polling station's (TPS) team before voting. (5) At 08:00, the election officially commenced with an announcement by the committee. (6) Officials displayed an empty ballot to demonstrate the election's transparency. (7) The committee then signed the ballot. (8) The TPS committee received the ballot. (9) Voters proceeded to the voting room to make their choices. (10) Inside, they found a wall displaying candidate names and symbols. (11) Vot-

ing tools and writing instruments were available. (12) Participants were instructed to vote clearly. (13) They marked their choices distinctly on the ballot. (14) After voting, they folded the ballot as initially presented. (15) The ballot was then placed in a designated ballot box. (16) Voters could then leave, with the option to return at vote counting time (Kedaulatan Rakjat, 1955).

Discussions about the ballot boxes began on 28 August 1954, with various companies from Jakarta, Solo, and Yogyakarta offering to produce them in different materials like wood and zinc. Ultimately, teak wood was selected for its durability despite its higher cost than other materials (Kementerian Penerangan Republik Indonesia, 1955b).

The Medan elections were meticulously prepared, with preliminary trials conducted in four sub-districts: Medan, Medan Barat, Medan Timur, and Medan Baru. These mock elections, held since August 1955, served as practical rehearsals for the upcoming national elections, aiming to familiarize Medan's citizens with the electoral process and reduce non-participation. Although these trials were limited in scope, they generated significant public interest. They were overseen by Medan's Election Committee, indicating the community's engagement and the broader significance of these elections in shaping the nation's future (Waspada, 1955b).

After the conclusion of the electoral preparations, the General Elections for the DPR in Medan City took place on 29 September 1955, aligning with the national schedule. However, security disturbances, particularly in Aceh and parts of Sumatra, caused by the Daud Beureueh gang led to disruptions. As a result, certain areas could not conduct the General Election, affecting approximately 18,587 citizens who could not cast their votes. Due to their election day duties, the military personnel assigned to maintain security and order during the elections voted on the subsequent Saturday, 01 October 1955 (De Tijd, 1954).

In conjunction with the General Elections, Medan's municipal authorities issued public notices across the city, clarifying that only Indonesian nationals could vote at the designated polling stations (TPS). Foreign nationals and business owners were excluded from the voting process but were encouraged to keep their businesses operational to meet public needs. It was emphasized that if an employee needed to vote, it should not necessitate closing the business for the day, ensuring minimal disruption to daily commerce. This arrangement highlighted the flexibility in voting, al-

lowing for an orderly process without significant time loss. Furthermore, the Minister of Information, Sjamsuddin, who visited Medan during this period, urged the community to ensure that no area was left without an electoral stage. He emphasized the importance of full participation in the electoral process, highlighting that failure to conduct elections in certain areas could negatively impact the nation's democratic continuity (ANRI, 1954b).

The electoral battle in Medan was intensely competitive, with initial forecasts suggesting a victory for the PNI over its main rival, Masyumi. Contrary to these expectations, Masyumi secured a significant lead in the vote count. In the Medan District, which housed 62 Masyumi polling stations, this party outperformed others, particularly at 38 stations within the same sub-district, tallying 16,211 votes against PNI's 2,647, Parkindo's 976, and PKI's 726. This surprising turn of events temporarily propelled Masyumi to a leading position, challenging earlier predictions and signaling a potential shift in the political landscape. Initially thought to be a strong contender, the PSI appeared to lag in voter support, struggling to secure a leading spot in the vote count (*Waspada*, 1955e).

In Medan Baru, when the vote counting concluded at 37 temporary polling stations, Masyumi again emerged as the frontrunner, garnering 5,279 votes, followed by PNI with 2,366 votes, Parkindo with 1,472 votes, and PKI with 785 votes. The voting pattern in Medan Baru mirrored that of the Medan district, with Masyumi maintaining a significant lead. This consistency across districts underscored Masyumi's strong performance, confirming its dominance in Medan's electoral landscape. The party particularly resonated in areas predominantly inhabited by agricultural workers, where it secured a substantial number of votes, further solidifying its position as the leading contender in the city (*Waspada*, 1955e).

In the Medan Timur report, vote counting at 22 polling stations showed Masyumi leading with 4,221 votes, PNI with 1,450 votes, PKI with 952 votes, and Parkindo with 840 votes. These results positioned Masyumi at the forefront in the East Medan District, consolidating its dominance across Medan City. Although the tallies were provisional, Masyumi's substantial lead suggested it would likely emerge as the victor. The margin between Masyumi and its closest competitor, PNI, was significant, indicating a clear preference for Masyumi among voters. Interestingly, in East Medan, the PKI overtook Parkindo, possibly due to strong support from BTI and SOBSI members in the area, reflecting a shift in

**Table 1.** Final Results of Party Votes Politics in the 1955 Election in Medan

No.	Political party	Vote Gain
1	Masyumi	41,208
2	PNI	17,321
3	PKI	7,074
4	Parkindo	6,824
5	NU	2,37
6	PSI	2,286
7	Baperki	2,28
8	PPPRI	1,851
	Total	81,214

Source: *Waspada* (1955h, p. 4)

voter allegiance compared to other subdistricts where Parkindo typically led. (*Java Bode*, 1955).

Masyumi maintained its leading position among the political parties in Medan Barat, confirming its victory in Medan's 1955 General Election. Masyumi's consistent aim has been to embed Islamic teachings and laws into the fabric of individual, communal, and public life. The party pursued this goal through three primary avenues: legislative action in parliament, governance at various administrative levels, and educational and social initiatives. Their success in the Medan General Election validated their strategy and confirmed their popularity among voters. However, despite their local triumph, Masyumi faced a tougher challenge on the national stage, where the PNI, their main competitor, posed a significant threat to their broader parliamentary ambitions (*Waspada*, 1955e).

Masyumi's dominance in Medan's local electoral landscape was significantly influenced by its ability to harness political identity and ethnicity. The Mandailing and Minangkabau ethnic groups, substantial contributors to Medan's economy in the 1950s, actively supported Masyumi. Their financial contributions and societal influence propelled Masyumi's campaign, resulting in a high vote count. Integrating ethnic identity with Islamic values was pivotal in Masyumi's success during the 1955 General Election.

While other Islamic parties like Nahdatul Ulama (NU) were also in the fray, NU did not emerge as the primary choice for many voters. It



was because NU was perceived as adhering to more traditional Islamic practices, which did not resonate with the urban electorate either. In contrast, Masyumi demonstrated a more adaptable approach to Islam, aligning it with the contemporary challenges and lifestyle of urban areas. This adaptability was crucial in a cosmopolitan and economically significant city like Medan, positioning Masyumi as a leading force in the 1955 General Election (Pelly, 2007).

In the final tally of the 1955 General Election in Medan, Masyumi emerged as the clear victor, securing 41,208 votes, which translated to 12 seats in the legislature. The PNI came in second with 17,321 votes and five seats, followed by the PKI with 7,074 votes and two seats. Parkindo also secured two seats with 6,824 votes. NU, PSI, Baperki, and PPPRI each gained one seat, with vote counts of 2,370, 2,286, 2,280, and 1,851, respectively. These results were formalized under the Minister of Home Affairs regulation number 4/1956, which outlined the seat allocation based on the electoral outcomes (*Waspada*, 1955h).

In the final count of the General Election for Medan City, 81,214 votes were cast, allocating 3,610 votes per seat for the 24 seats in the Medan City DPRD. The final distribution of seats was as follows: Masyumi secured 11 seats, PNI gained 5, PKI and Parkindo each received two seats, while NU, PSI, Baperki, PPPRI, and PSII each obtained one seat. This allocation was swiftly communicated by the Election Preparation Committee to the relevant parties, with a directive that the finalized list of candidates be submitted to the committee within ten days post-decision. Following the home affairs minister's directives, these candidates would then be forwarded to the Governor, who would officially appoint them as members of the people's representative council for the transitional region of the greater Medan area. Masyumi emerged as the local victor in Medan's General Election, reflecting their strong regional influence. However, on the national stage, they faced a tougher challenge, with the PNI taking a leading role in shaping national policies, underscoring the complex political dynamics at play during this period (Tim Penulis, 1959, p. 176)

## CONCLUSION

The initial plan for Indonesia's first general election was set for January 1946, based on Mohammad Hatta's Proclamation X issued in November 1945. However, the process was stalled due to the Dutch reoccupation, which lasted until 1949. It was not until 1955 that the general elections could be con-

ducted nationally, including in Medan. Despite the challenging social conditions in Medan, such as famine, smuggling, theft, and land disputes, there was significant local enthusiasm and preparation for the election, including securing funding, conducting outreach, and organizing necessary election infrastructure like ballot boxes and polling stations.

Political activities, dormant since the Japanese occupation, reinvigorated as the 1955 General Election approached, with each party launching vigorous campaigns. The PKI, for example, agitated for the redistribution of plantation lands to the public, while Masyumi campaigned against choosing PKI, branding them as infidels and misleaders. The PNI, in turn, positioned itself against Masyumi, accusing it of being subservient to foreign interests.

Masyumi emerged as the victor in the local Medan election, largely due to the support from the Mandailing and Minangkabau ethnic groups, which were significant contributors to their campaign funds. Despite this local success, Masyumi could not replicate this victory nationally, where the PNI prevailed, hindering Masyumi's aspirations to implement an Islamic-influenced government. The 1955 election in Medan illustrates the power rotation principle in democratic processes, with Masyumi succeeding the PNI in local governance. This election showcased political institutions' accountability, the people's sovereignty, and direct public participation, marking it as a seminal event in Indonesia's democratic history and highlighting the 1955 election as a peak moment of democratic practice in Indonesia.

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