

Helpdesk Research Report

Voting behaviour in Indonesia: Impact of information and performance

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Question

Does information provided to voters about the performance of subnational executives and/or parliaments in public service delivery impact on the electability of the incumbent? Do voters choose candidates for subnational executive and legislative positions on the basis of performance or anticipated performance in relation to public service delivery? What factors are significant?

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1. Overview

This report provides an overview of the literature on how information about performance in service delivery impacts on the electability of incumbents, looking first at a diverse range of country case studies, and then looking at this issue in the Indonesian context. It also looks at whether voters in Indonesia choose candidates for subnational executive and legislative positions on the basis of performance or anticipated performance in relation to public service delivery. Other factors that influence voting behaviour in Indonesia are also considered.

The literature is divided on the impact of information about performance in service delivery on voting behaviour. While some authors find that performance information has an impact on voter behaviour, others find that it has no impact on the reelection of incumbents. The literature on the impact of performance in service delivery on voting behaviour in Indonesia is also divergent.

2. Information on performance and electability

This section looks specifically at the impact of information about performance on incumbent electability and voting behaviour. The literature looks at a number of different types of information, including report cards, radio broadcasts, and public meetings.

Banerjee, Kumar, Pande, and Su (2011, p. 3) find that performance information only has an impact on voter behaviour when it is directly related to voters' well-being. Their fieldwork, conducted in slums in Delhi, involved distributing report cards on legislator performance to voters prior to state legislative elections. In addition to providing information about incumbent performance, the report cards also provided information about the wealth, education, and criminal record of the incumbent. The report cards provided the same information about the incumbent's two main challengers (2011, p. 2). Voters also received report cards for two neighbouring jurisdictions. Banerjee et al (2011, p. 3) found that voters opted for legislators who had a better attendance record at oversight committees (Ration Vigilance Committee, Police Vigilance Committee, and District Development Committee), and who spent the most money in the slums, rather than who spent the most overall. Incumbent attendance levels at the legislature had no impact on voter behaviour. Voters also benchmarked legislator performance against that of neighbouring jurisdictions, as well as benchmarking candidate qualifications. Banerjee et al (2011, pp. 2-3) find that voter behaviour changes quite significantly when they are provided with information about candidate performance. Average voter turnout increased, cash-based vote buying reduced, and while the average incumbent vote share did not reduce, the vote share of worse performing incumbents, and those who had more qualified challengers, reduced significantly.

Ferraz and Finan (2008) find that publicising the outcome of audits on how municipalities spent federally transferred funds in Brazil has a significant impact on incumbents' electability. Publishing financial audits reduced the electability of incumbents who had engaged in corrupt practices. Summaries of audit reports were posted on the internet and provided to main media sources (2008, p. 708). However, newspapers are not an important source of information in Brazil, as levels of education are low (2008, p. 709). Instead, local radio is the key source of information on local politics in smaller municipalities (Ibid). Ferraz and Finan (2008) find that electability of incumbents who engaged in corrupt practices was reduced more significantly in areas where local radio provided information about audit outcomes. The presence of a local radio station in a municipality also increased the chances of non-corrupt incumbents being reelected. Thus, they found that local radio can help to "screen out bad politicians and to promote good ones" (Ferraz and Finan, 2008, p. 744).

Fujiwara and Wantchekon (forthcoming) find that clientelism is reduced by open discussion of candidates' specific policy platforms. Their study looks at the impact of candidate-endorsed town hall meetings and public deliberation on voter behaviour in Benin. Moreover, they find that town hall meetings reduce the vote share of dominant candidates in a village. They suggest that this may be because dominant candidates in environments where limited information is available will be the most able to engage in clientelist practices such as vote buying and exploitation of ethnic identities. An increase in information and deliberation practices will therefore reduce the dominant candidates vote share because it reduces his/her ability to engage in these practices (Fujiwara and Wantchekon, forthcoming, p. 3). Fujiwara and Wantchekon (forthcoming, p. 18) also find that candidates who endorse town hall meetings in areas where they are not dominant, gain a much larger vote share. They argue that this implies that every candidate may find it optimal to engage in clientelism in his strongholds while pursuing a campaign based on policy platforms in his/her opponent's strongholds.

Chong, DeLao, Karlan, and Wantchekon (2013) look at Mexico, where mayors can only hold office for a single term. They find that providing information about mayors' corruption results in a loss of votes for the incumbent party, as a result of reduced voter turnout. This is because voters can become "disenchanted" with the political system on becoming aware of incumbent corruption. They also find that exposing incumbent mayors' corruption can reduce the challenger's vote share. This could be because perceiving information about corruption as a negative campaign by the challenger, may lead voters to believe that all politicians are "mudslingers." This could lead to voter abstention. Moreover, information about corruption could lead to abstention if voters do not like the challenger's policies or if they believe that the challenger would also be corrupt (Chong et al, 2013, p. 3).

Finally, Humphreys and Weinstein find that distributing a scorecard for MPs' performance had no impact on the reelection of incumbents in Uganda's 2011 elections (2012, p. 3). The authors developed a scorecard with information about the behaviour of Ugandan MPs. They then informed a randomly selected sample of MPs that the information would be disseminated in their constituencies, and informed voters about their MP's performance through a number of different dissemination channels (2012, p. 1). While voters were receptive to new information, reelection rates for incumbent MPs were not affected (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2012, p. 3). Moreover, MPs did not change their behaviour in anticipation of having to defend themselves to voters (p. 3).

Gordon, Humphreys and Weinstein (2013) argue that the divergent results discussed above can be attributed to a number of factors. They note that information can easily be manipulated, and that in situations where information is provided by a range of different actors with different agendas, voters can find it difficult to know who to believe. Moreover, information can be contested. Time lapses can also have an impact on the usefulness and impact of information about performance in service delivery.

Discussing Indonesia, one expert consulted for this report states that the degree to which information about public service delivery performance impacts on voting behaviour varies from region to region. She notes that voters are better informed in the more developed regions. She adds that people consider good leadership at the local level to be increasingly important, and as a result information about performance has an impact on the electability of incumbents (Expert comment).

3. Performance and voter behaviour in Indonesia

This section focuses specifically on the impact of past performance and anticipated performance on voting behaviour in Indonesia. Much of the data on voting behaviour in Indonesia looks at the population as a whole. However, Aspinall and Mietzner (2010, p. 15) note that it is difficult to make generalisations about local politics in Indonesia.¹

Discussing Indonesia, a USAID report (2009, p. 49) notes that "it is generally difficult for voters to disentangle the candidate's positions on specific service areas that might directly affect the interests of the voters." Related to this Jorge Valladares at International IDEA highlights the difficulty of establishing whether voters vote on the basis of the delivery of a single service (Expert comment – Jorge Valladares). Moreover, one expert consulted for this report notes that generally the Indonesian public finds it difficult to identify exactly what good service delivery would entail (Expert comment – Michael Buehler). He also

¹ For more information about the voting behaviour of specific groups in Indonesia see: Strachan, A.L. (2014). *Voting behaviour of marginalised groups in Indonesia* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1076). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

notes that Indonesians often elect incumbents who have been convicted of corruption while in office (Expert comment – Michael Buehler). He is therefore sceptical of claims that voters in Indonesia choose candidates on the basis of the quality of public services (Expert comment – Michael Buehler).

IFES' Indonesia Election Survey Report (2010, p. 5) finds that 11 per cent of people vote on the basis of past performance, and 11 per cent vote on the basis of a candidate's platform. 15 per cent vote on the level of experience of the government (Ibid). Moreover, several experts argue that most people vote for the candidate who has the best track record of performance in relation to service delivery (Expert comments). An Asia Foundation survey (2013, p. 8) finds that programme platform is one of the most important factors in determining which candidates the electorate votes for in elections at both the national and the subnational level. The IFES survey (2010, p. 5) finds that the way that candidates' deal with the community does not constitute a significant factor in determining voter behaviour, with only 4 per cent of people voting on this basis (Ibid).

One expert argues that the importance of performance has increased over time, especially with regard to performance in resolving everyday problems (Expert comment). She cites the example of a candidate being elected in Makassar in part because of his programme on rubbish disposal. Discussing the gubernatorial elections in Jakarta in 2012, Hamid (2012, p. 342) states that people did not vote on the basis of religious or ethnic considerations. She argues that Joko Widodo won the election on the basis of his performance as mayor of Solo (Ibid).

Sulistiyanto and Erb (2009, p. 20) state that voters generally voted on the basis of performance in recent local elections. They state that incumbents who had performed well during their first term were reelected, while incumbents who performed poorly in the first term lost the elections. Mietzner (2009, p. 276) notes that in Indonesia 40 per cent of incumbents have been voted out of office as a result of their poor performance in relation to public service delivery and corruption.

4. Other factors that impact voting behaviour in Indonesia

An Asia Foundation survey of voting behaviour in Indonesia (2013) shows that candidates' education was one of the most important factors in determining who people vote for in both subnational and national elections. The same survey shows that 38.6 per cent of candidates cited religion as being an important factor in their choice of governor, district head, and mayor. Moreover, an IFES survey (2010) finds that 41 per cent of Indonesians vote on the basis of candidate personality. The Asia Foundation also finds that ethnicity is more important in local elections than in national elections. 16.8 per cent of people stated that ethnicity is important in their choice of governor, district head, and mayor, while only 8.5 per cent considered it important in their choice of President. Papua province is arguably an exception, where ethnic loyalties are strong (Expert comment).² These numbers are all higher than the percentages who vote on past performance or government experience. However, Mietzner notes that winning candidates tend to appeal to cross-cultural constituencies rather than one ethnic, religious, or social group (2009, p. 277).

The Asia Foundation's survey (2013, p. 8) also finds that 44.4 per cent of respondents preferred male candidates while only 3 per cent preferred female candidates. The IFES survey (2010, p. 29) found that if

² This is discussed in more detail in: Strachan, A.L. (2014). *Voting behaviour of marginalised groups in Indonesia* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1076). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.

voters were given a choice between a male and a female candidate, then 54 per cent would prefer the male candidate and 14 per cent would prefer the female candidate.

According to the Asia Foundation survey (2013, p. 8) political party backing is considered relatively unimportant by the electorate for both national and subnational elections. However, the IFES survey (2010, p. 5) finds that 30 per cent of respondents always vote for the same party.

The Asia Foundation survey (2013, p. 11) finds that 18.1 per cent of voters would vote for someone who engaged in vote buying. A report by USAID (2009, p. 17) notes that votes can be bought for as little as US\$5.

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