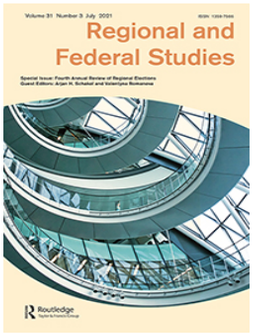

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ELECTION ARTICLES

Limitations to subnational authoritarianism: Indonesian local government head elections in comparative perspective

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, a sizeable literature on subnational authoritarian regimes in democracies has emerged. In some countries local authoritarian enclaves have persisted despite the democratization of politics at the national level. Even more intriguing, new subnational authoritarian regimes have emerged in the context of national level democratization. Finally, scholars have noted that there is considerable variance in subnational authoritarian regime durability between and within countries. This article will examine why subnational authoritarian regimes have *not* emerged in Indonesia. Arguably, the difficulties of subnational elites to concentrate control over local economies; the high economic autonomy of voters; and the rigid institutional framework of Indonesia's decentralized unitary state have inhibited the rise of durable subnational authoritarian regimes in the world's third largest democracy. One of the first studies on subnational authoritarian regimes in a decentralized unitary state, the article engages and informs the broader literature on subnational authoritarian regimes.

KEYWORDS Federal democracies; decentralized unitary states; Indonesia; local elections; subnational authoritarian regimes

Introduction[1]

Portugal's Revolução dos Cravos in 1974 was the beginning of a series of political openings in countries around the world that later became known as the Third Wave of Democratization (Huntington 1991). In addition to the introduction of free and fair elections, many countries decentralized power to the subnational level in the context of the Third Wave of Democratization.

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This development renewed political scientists' interest in local politics. Scholars were urged to 'scale down' (Snyder 2001) in both focus and method to understand these new developments.

The study of subnational authoritarian regimes has become a burgeoning subfield within this growing literature on local politics. Subnational authoritarian regimes have been defined in many ways. These definitions are often imprecise and contradictory, as several reviews of the literature have pointed out (Gervasoni 2018, 23; Matsuzato 2001, 506; Sidel 2014, 163). However, scholars working on countries as diverse as Argentina, Mexico, the Philippines, Russia, and the United States of America all agree that low levels or even the absence of political competition is the one characteristic that the empirical range of subnational authoritarian regime variants share (Gelman 2010, 8; 2014: 506; Gervasoni 2018, 30; Gibson 2012, 13; Giraudy 2015, 35; Matsuzato 2001, 61; Sidel 1999, 24; 2004, 56; 2014, 163; Trounstine 2008, 25). We will use this lowest common denominator as the starting point for our analysis.

In this context, scholars wondered why and how subnational authoritarian regimes *persisted* in many countries that had become democracies at the national level. Perhaps even more intriguing, why did subnational authoritarian regimes often *emerge* in the process of national level democratization? Finally, as time passed, scholars began to ask why subnational authoritarian regimes survived for decades in some localities, while in others they collapsed after only a few years or never emerged in the first place. How could this variance in subnational authoritarian regime durability *between* and *within* countries be explained?

Such questions have resulted in a broad and multi-faceted scholarly literature on subnational authoritarian regimes, which we will review in more detail below.

A country that has received scant attention in this literature on subnational authoritarian regimes is Indonesia. This is inasmuch surprising as a cursory glance at the contours of Indonesian politics suggests that this is a political system conducive to the presence of subnational authoritarian regimes. Not only is Indonesia the third largest democracy in the world, but also one of the most decentralized political systems around the globe. In addition, accountability and transparency are low while corruption is systemic and endemic at all levels of politics.

Yet, our original dataset of over 1600 local government head elections shows that Indonesian local politics are much more competitive than one would assume. Therefore, the research question animating this article is:

Why are subnational authoritarian regimes absent in Indonesian local politics?

Drawing on the broad literature on subnational authoritarian regimes, we argue that a combination of economic and institutional conditions has created considerable obstacles for the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes. Concretely, the economic autonomy of Indonesian voters is

relatively high; local economies rarely lend themselves to the concentration of control; and the rigid structures of Indonesia's decentralized unitary state circumscribe the possibilities for local incumbents to rig institutions in their favor.

The remainder of the article will not only show how a combination of existing theories can illuminate the dynamics in Indonesian local politics, but also how the Indonesian case can inform existing theories on the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes.

Literature review

The literature on the causes behind the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes can be broken down into two main approaches. They differ from one another with regard to their key explanatory variables. The first body of literature emphasizes the causal primacy of economic resources in the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes. Institutional resources are neither necessary nor sufficient to build subnational authoritarian regimes. The second body of literature argues that institutional resources are both necessary and sufficient to build and maintain subnational authoritarian regimes.

The economic causes of subnational authoritarian regimes

Scholars in this group place *economic conditions* at the centre of their explanations for the variegated patterns in the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes. In addition, they argue that subnational authoritarian regimes can have both *local or supra-local origins*. In fact, many subnational authoritarian regimes result from a combination of both.

Concretely, the economic autonomy of voters as well as the economic autonomy of would-be challengers to an incumbent circumscribe the possibilities for subnational authoritarian regimes to emerge and survive scholars working on Brazil (Montero 2011), India (Lankina and Getachew 2012), the Philippines (Anderson 1988; Sidel 1999, 2004; 2014), Russia (McMann 2006) and Thailand (Ockey 1998; McVey 2000) have argued.

For instance, Mann argued in *The Sources of Social Power* that enduring political authority first emerged in places where the local topography allowed leaders to encage their populations (Mann 1986, 80). Building on Mann's work, several subsequent studies argued that in places where the concentration of economic resources creates 'locked-in electorates' (Scott 1969, 1146 footnote 16) and 'pliable populations' (Hale 2003, 229), namely voters who depend economically on local elites, the latter have great leverage over local electorates (McMann 2006, 28–31). Such leverage then facilitates the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes.

However, equally consequential for the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes is the economic autonomy of potential rivals to the incumbent. Do challengers of the status quo have access to sufficient autonomous economic resources to successfully mount a bid for power? In jurisdictions where the local economic topography limits or precludes potential rivals from accessing resources needed to challenge the incumbent, subnational authoritarian regimes are more likely to emerge than in jurisdictions where the local economy provides would- be challengers with sufficient economic autonomy to launch attacks on the incumbent (McMann 2006, 31–34; Sidel 2014, 172). Importantly, local elites do not just *encounter* but may *actively create* economic resources that help them stay in power or challenge an incumbent. For example, incumbents may use their power over local policymaking to create rent-seeking opportunities or co-opt the collection and dispersion of fiscal resources. They then use these economic resources to fend off potential rivals.

In short, the economic autonomy of voters in combination with the propensity of the local economy to lend itself to the concentration of control in the hands of the incumbent determines whether or not subnational authoritarian regimes *emerge*.

Economic factors also determine the *durability* of subnational authoritarian regimes. If a subnational authoritarian regime depends predominantly on state patronage, it is vulnerable to attacks from both below and above. Subnational authoritarian regimes rooted in private ownership and therefore outside the immediate control of the state are more resilient to outside attacks. They are more durable as a result (Sidel 1999, 2014).

Political factors are an intervening variable in the relationship between economic causes and the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes. Alliances between local and supra-local powerholders often play an important role in the preservation of *encountered* and, arguably even more so, the protection of *constructed* economic resources that enable or undermine incumbency. National level politicians may grant (and subsequently protect) privileged access to export markets for local produce; confer licenses for local economic activity in a particularistic manner; or rig public tenders in favor of or against an incumbent. However, such political resources are neither necessary nor sufficient for subnational authoritarian regimes to emerge and endure, scholars in this group argue.

The institutional causes of subnational authoritarian regimes

Scholars in the second group argue that *institutional* resources explain the variance in the presence and durability of subnational authoritarian regimes within and between democracies. Subnational authoritarian regimes are also decisively *non-local in origin* as they always result from an

interplay between local and supra-local forces. Comparing subnational authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Mexico and the late-nineteenth 'Solid South' in the USA, Gibson (2012), for example, argues that local autocrats have to find ways to fend off attacks not only from local but also national opponents since subnational authoritarian regimes are embedded in national political arenas that constantly emanate democratic impulses.

How effectively local autocrats control the 'boundaries' to their jurisdiction explains the rise and collapse of subnational authoritarianism across space and time. The survival strategy of local autocrats consists of three interrelated components: One, they try to prevent local opposition forces from gaining access to allies and resources outside their jurisdiction. Two, local autocrats look for protection at the national level to influence decisions made at higher levels of the state apparatus about 'their' jurisdiction. Three, local autocrats seek to monopolize linkages between national and local politics.

Other scholars in this group have pointed out that national level politicians do not always push for democratization at the subnational level as Gibson assumes. If national level politicians have the capacity to wield power over local autocrats, they will try to co-opt local autocrats and turn them into vote-getters for national level politics. Scholars have called this subnational authoritarian regime reproduction from above in the case of Argentina and Mexico (Giraudy 2015, 28) or centralized subnational authoritarianism in the case of Russia (Gelman 2010, 9).

In contrast, if national politicians lack the institutional capacity to co-opt local autocrats, they have incentives to undermine subnational authoritarian regimes. To fend off such outside attacks, subnational autocrats may then resort to the kind of strategies outlined in Gibson's theory.

The effectiveness of these strategies depends on the institutional configurations local autocrats face: The degree of centralization *between* government layers; the distribution of power *within* government layers; and the institutional autonomy of government layers *below* a subnational authoritarian regime determine the fate of subnational authoritarian regimes (Gibson 2012, 20). The size of local fiscal deficits; levels of indebtedness; the fiscal autonomy of local autocrats as well as the degree of party institutionalization across government layers are additional factors shaping the vertical links between government layers (Gibson 2012, 149; Giraudy 2015, 31; Gervasoni 2018, 11–14).

In short, the interplay between local and supra-local politicians determines the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes. Different combinations of institutional factors shape this interplay and therefore explain variance in subnational authoritarian regime durability. Institutional resources are both sufficient and necessary conditions for subnational authoritarian regimes to emerge and survive.

The following paragraphs suggest that both approaches need to be taken into account when trying to explain why subnational authoritarian regimes have not emerged in Indonesia.[2] This is for the following reasons: The first group of scholars sees the causes for the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes as mainly *endogenous* to localities. Supra-local variables are important but ultimately do not determine whether or not subnational authoritarian regimes emerge. To explain why subnational authoritarian regimes have not emerged in Indonesia, one could therefore think it suffices to show that the economic autonomy of voters is high and that local economies do not lend themselves to a concentration of control.

However, scholars in the second group would interject that the conditions for the rise and fall of subnational authoritarian regimes are always *exogenous* to a locality. In other words, as subnational authoritarian regimes rest on institutional manipulation, they can be built entirely with their 'roots in the air' (Steffen 1904, 2), that is detached from local economic conditions. Control over institutional resources may therefore be a sufficient condition to establish and maintain subnational authoritarian regimes in Indonesia, these scholars may argue.

A comprehensive account of why subnational authoritarian regimes have remained absent in Indonesia despite the democratization and decentralization of politics in 1998 therefore needs to take both approaches into account.

The next section will provide a brief account of the rules and regulations governing local government head elections in Indonesia.

The regulatory framework for local government head elections in Indonesia after 1998

In 1998 the New Order dictatorship collapsed after 32 years in power. The successor government introduced free and fair elections. It also decentralized considerable political and fiscal authority to provinces but even more so to districts and municipalities, which are situated below the provinces. In an effort to deepen the democratization of Indonesian politics, the electoral process for local government heads was completely overhauled. Local government heads were no longer seen as representatives of the national government as was the case during the New Order. Instead, governors, district heads and mayors were now expected to represent citizens. To this end, a number of laws were adopted after 1998.

Most importantly, local government head posts became subjected to real elections. In the years immediately after the collapse of the New Order, local parliaments were tasked with electing local government heads. Law No. 22/1999 Concerning Regional Administrations allowed each parliamentary faction to nominate a candidate. The winner had to obtain 50 percent plus 1 vote from all local legislators present on Election Day. Each candidate

had to obtain at least one vote, otherwise the election was void. The law also limited the tenure of local government heads to two five-year terms anywhere in Indonesia.[3] In short, from early 2000–2005, the elections for governors, district heads and mayors were under the sole authority of local parliaments, with the exception of a few jurisdictions.[4] These elections were staggered to allow governors, district heads and mayors appointed during the New Order to finish their term.

Local legislators immediately began to abuse their power by demanding money and favors from incumbents and candidates competing in local government head elections in exchange for their vote. These practices became so endemic that there were calls for reform only months after these elections had been introduced (Buehler 2016, 74).

Consequently, Law No. 32/2004 Concerning Regional Administrations ruled that Indonesian voters should *directly* elect their local government heads. The new law also introduced posts for deputy governors, deputy district heads and deputy mayors and ruled that *pairs* of candidates had to compete against one another in future elections. Furthermore, candidates had to be nominated by a party or a coalition of parties that had earned at least 15 percent of the vote in the most recent legislative election or that controlled at least 15 percent of seats in the local parliament.

The new requirement simply shifted corruption and vote-buying from local parliaments to local party headquarters. To break parties' monopoly on nominations, the Constitutional Court ruled in 2007 that candidacy for local government heads should be open to all eligible citizens, not just those recommended by political parties. To accommodate the verdict, Law No. 12/2008 Concerning the Second Amendment of Law No. 32/2004 allowed *independent* candidates to contest these elections. However, the logistical and financial costs of running as an independent candidate are so high that the majority of candidates continued to run by seeking the nomination of a party or a coalition of parties (Lewis 2019, 6). Independents constituted only around one-sixth of all candidates by 2015 (Aspinall and Berenschott 2019, 77).

From 2005 to 2015, the pair earning more than 25 percent of legitimate votes was elected. If no pair reached 25 percent, the elections were repeated. The threshold was later increased to 30 percent of the votes. In 2015, Law No. 1/2015 Making into a Law Government Regulation No. 1, 2014, Concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors was adopted. It was amended a few months later by Law No. 8/2015 Concerning the Amendment of Law No. 1/2015 on Making into a Law Government Regulation No. 1/2014, Concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors. Among other changes, on which more below, these laws replaced the two-round system which had been in place since 2005 with a single round plurality system

also called a first-past-the-post system (Lay, Hasrul Hanif, and Rohman 2017, 431).

Aforementioned laws not only established the regulatory framework for the elections of local government heads but also defined their powers. Law No. 22/1999 shifted considerable political and fiscal authority to districts and municipalities. The national level retained key responsibilities such as security and defense, foreign policy, justice, monetary policy and religious affairs. As a result of these changes, Indonesia became one of the most decentralized countries in the world.

Law No. 22/1999 also greatly increased the power of local executive governments at the expense of local parliaments. It strengthened, for example, the authority of local government heads to control the financial management of their territories, to authorize spending and to set the priorities and the ceiling of the budget. Theoretically, the budget needs to be approved jointly with the local parliament, but anecdotal evidence suggests lawmakers' participation is limited and fraught with problems. Local parliaments report difficulties engaging in budget formulation because of their weak capacity and because the spending plan must be 'evaluated' by the central government for final approval. Furthermore, Law No. 22/1999 allowed local government heads together with local parliaments to issue local regulations to amend national laws. As in the case of budgeting, the experience of the past decade is that such regulations usually do not come from local parliaments but local government heads.

Several laws adopted in subsequent years tilted the power balance at the subnational level further in favor of local government heads. For example, Law No. 32/2004 gave subnational government heads the power to appoint civil services in the secretariat of local parliaments. This has allowed local government heads to interfere in the affairs of local parliaments. Law No. 12/2008 reduced checks-and-balances at the local level in favor of local government heads even further (Buehler,2010: 276).

In short, governors, district heads and mayors have become powerful figures in Indonesian politics and the country's policymaking process. Indonesian voters have elected them directly since 2005.

Local government head elections: Deepening democracy or facilitating the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes?

The introduction of direct elections for newly empowered local government heads in 2005 triggered a debate about its impact on the democratization process in Indonesia. Some scholars welcomed the introduction of these elections as a boon for Indonesia's democratization efforts (Antlöv and Wetterberg 2011, 3). Other scholars were more cautious, stressing the many challenges Indonesia had to overcome before reaping a democratic dividend

from these elections (Erb and Sulistiyanto 2009). Finally, some scholars worried that the introduction of popular elections for local government heads, whose fiscal and political authority had been increased while horizontal accountability mechanisms were being weakened, would facilitate the rise of 'little kings' (*raja kecil*). Such players would use local government head elections to entrench themselves in politics (Bakti 2007; Masaaki 2004; Savirani 2004).

Subsequent studies highlighted the narrow segment of Indonesian society that was participating in these elections (Hadiz 2010, 160) and the dynastic tendencies in local politics (Buehler 2013; Hasyim 2021). However, some also noted the ephemeral nature of many of these local power configurations (Aspinall and As'ad 2016).

All these contributions have in common that they are not based on any objective measure of the political dynamics on the ground. 'Democratic' or 'dynastic' politics remain ill defined. Most of these studies also only present anecdotal evidence derived from single-case studies.

In light of these gaps in the existing literature on the direct elections of local government heads in Indonesia, we wanted to use a *clearly defined* measure to examine the political dynamics in *all* the elections held since 2005. We therefore calculated the effective number of candidates in 1324 local government head elections as explained in an online supplement. This approach gave us a clear picture of the level of competition in these elections. Any elections that featured at least two candidates with a chance of winning, that is with an effective number of candidates ≥ 2, we considered to be competitive.

Of course, there is much that is potentially problematic with defining the absence of subnational authoritarian regimes in such a minimalist way. One may think of a locality where the electorate is 'locked-in' a powerplay between two or three equally strong politicians, all pursuing an undemocratic agenda based on voter intimidation and suppression. In other words, there would be competition in such a locality but the electorate would still not be free in its choices, as the literature on competitive authoritarianism has shown (Levitsky and Way 2002). Alternatively one may think of a locality where one politician is so popular that s/he wins elections uncontested but in an entirely democratic way. Our measurement would not capture any of these scenarios. Finally, one may also question the validity and reliability of our election data as local election commissions may sway elections in favor of one candidate *after* votes have been counted.

However, we find safety in numbers. The large majority of the 1324 elections between 2005 and 2019 we analysed was competitive. In addition, there were neither great changes across time nor differences across space. Furthermore, our figures show that incumbent turnover was considerable across all election cycles as shown below and in more detail in the online data

supplement. In light of these findings, we therefore feel confident to say that, *overall*, direct local government head elections that have been held in Indonesia since 2005 are competitive affairs.

Findings

We calculated the effective number of candidates competing in direct local government head elections in all the provinces, districts and municipalities that have held such elections since 2005. There were 1629 such elections and we managed to collect data from the National Election Commission (KPU) and its local branches for 1324 elections. Our data analysis shows that 75% (992/1324) of these elections were contested by at least two candidates with a chance of winning. These were, in other words, competitive elections.[5]

We then disaggregated our initial findings to examine the competitiveness of these races across *space*. A comparison based on the classification used by the Government of Indonesia (GoI) for East- and West-Indonesia shows no significant differences in competitiveness between the two areas. We also examined these races with regard to the more popular differentiation between Java and Outer Island Indonesia. Again, there are no significant differences regarding the competitiveness of local government head elections between Indonesia's main island and the rest of the archipelago. Overall, local government head elections are competitive across Indonesia.

We then compared the competitiveness of these elections across government layers within the same election cycle. We found the highest percentage of competitive local government head elections at the provincial level, followed by municipalities and, finally, districts.

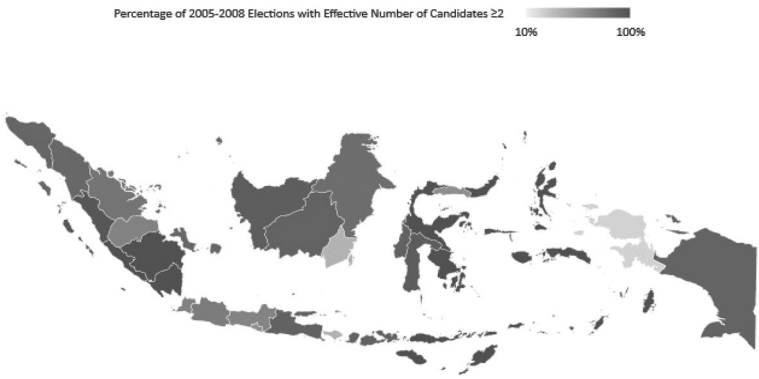
We also examined the competitiveness of these races across *time*. We found that the large majority of jurisdictions saw competitive races across multiple election cycles. While the last election cycle saw a decrease in the number of competitive races, 83% of all gubernatorial elections, 79% of all mayoral elections and 73% of all district head elections held since 2005 were competitive. In other words, the overwhelming majority of these elections was and remained competitive throughout the time period covered in our study.

The findings from our quantitative analysis can be found below in Table 1, disaggregated by province, district and municipality elections. The table shows the percentage of local government head elections that had at least two candidates with an actual chance of winning and that can therefore be considered competitive.

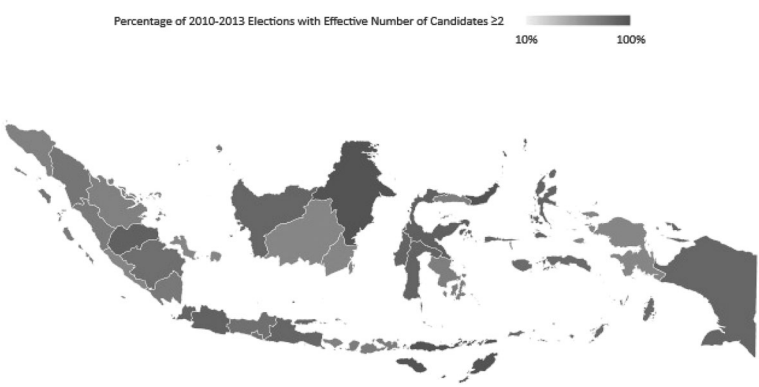
The consistently high levels of competition across the archipelago and multiple election cycles is visualized in the maps below:

Maps: Percentage of Elections with Effective Number of Candidates ≥2, by Election Cycle

2005–2008 Elections



2010–2013 Elections



2015–2018 Elections

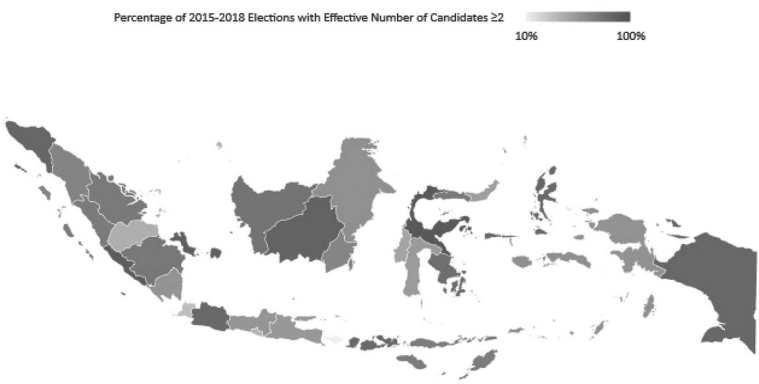


Table 1. Local government head elections with effective number of candidates ≥ 2, per year.

		Year*												
		2005	2006	2007	2008	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2017	2018	Total
Elections with effective number of candidates ≥ 2	Province	100% (2/2)	67% (2/3)	100% (3/3)	92% (12/13)	100% (6/6)	100% (3/3)	100% (3/3)	93% (14/15)	100% (1/1)	33% (3/9)	100% (6/6)	71% (12/17)	83% (67/81)
	District	86% (115/133)	85% (34/40)	93% (13/14)	69% (46/67)	78% (128/164)	76% (28/37)	64% (25/39)	84% (72/86)		63% (141/223)	64% (49/76)	67% (73/109)	73% (724/988)
	Municipality	78% (21/27)	83% (10/12)	89% (8/9)	81% (21/26)	83% (25/30)	100% (8/8)	76% (13/17)	91% (30/33)		61% (22/36)	67% (12/18)	79% (31/39)	79% (201/255)

*There were no elections for governors in 2009, 2016 and 2019 and no elections for district heads and mayors in 2009, 2014, 2016 and 2019.
Source: own calculations based on data obtained from the National Election Commission (KPU) and its local branches

Table 2. Incumbent turnover in local government head elections in Indonesia since 2005.

First-time candidates in newly created provinces, municipalities and districts	35	3%
No data	105	8%
Incumbents who ran for re-election and won	479	36%
Incumbents who were replaced because they reached their term limits	326	25%
Incumbents who were replaced for unknown reasons	62	5%
Incumbents who ran for re-election and lost	201	15%
Incumbents who dropped out before elections (ran for office in another jurisdiction; died in office; were arrested for corruption; decided not to run for personal reasons, etc)	116	9%
Total	**1324**	**100%**

To add another vantage point from which to examine whether Indonesian elites entrenched themselves through local government head elections, we looked at incumbent turnover figures for all these races. Only 36% (479/1324) of all direct local government head elections were won by incumbents. All other races were won by new candidates for a variety of reasons, as summarized in Table 2. The low number of races won by incumbents supports our argument that local government head elections in Indonesia are relatively dynamic affairs.

Why Indonesian local politics remain competitive

The following section will situate our findings in the broader literature on subnational authoritarian regimes to answer why local government head elections have not led to a rise in subnational authoritarian regimes in Indonesia.

Remember that economic theories of subnational authoritarian regimes argued that such political systems only emerge if the economic autonomy of voters is constrained and if the incumbent has concentrated control over the local economy.

Building on this literature, we argue that Indonesian local politics have remained comparatively competitive because the economic autonomy of Indonesian voters is relatively high. In addition, the country's economic topography does not lend itself to the creation of economic monopolies in the hands of *local* powerholders.

Economic constraints on the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes

The concentration of land in the hands of a small elite has often been considered *the* economic resource facilitating the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes (Anderson 1988, 8; Hagopian 1996, 48; Migdal 1988, 65).[6] In Indonesia, the concentration of land ownership is less pronounced than in

many other countries in the Global South. While there are large landholdings in some parts of Indonesia, especially in parts of the country where the plantation sector looms large in the local economy, this land is usually owned by *national* players with only a low stake in subnational elections. In areas where the concentration of land under *local ownership* is comparatively high, population density undermines the effectiveness of landownership as a tool of political influence (Buehler, 2018: 111). For example, West Java province, where the size of local landholdings is above the national average (Pincus 1996), also had a population of 50 million people as of 2021. Local landownership is simply not sizeable enough to serve as an effective tool to subjugate an electorate of this magnitude to the interests of local landholders. Furthermore, the diversification of the rural economy across Indonesia over past decades (Hart 1986, 192–212) has dramatically reduced the relevance of landholdings as a source of local political power. Rural voters no longer depend on one type of agricultural commodity for their livelihoods. Instead, they can choose from a variety of rural jobs. Many of them have also become 'urbanized villagers' (McCargo 2017) who supplement their income with city-based transient jobs. A total of 46% of the income of agricultural households in Indonesia came from non-farming economic activities as of 2016 (Neilson 2016, 256).

Furthermore, large-scale industrialization is absent in most parts of Indonesia. Heavy industries are concentrated in the extractive industries. While unsustainable natural resource exploitation is rampant across the archipelago and has created enormous profits for both local and national elites, much of the natural resource sector is under the control of the national government. Laws and regulations such as PP No. 34/ 2002 on Forest Administration and the Formulation of Plans for Forest Management, Forest Utilization, and the Use of the Forest Estate shifted power back to the national level after an initial decentralization of natural resource control through Law No. 22/ 1999 immediately after the collapse of the New Order (McCarthy 2007). *Local* mining operations are too small and fragmented to provide a platform for economic control over local electorates (Aspinall 2001).

Likewise, manufacturing employed only around 21% of Indonesia's official workforce as of 2016. While there are manufacturing clusters in Bandung, Jakarta, Medan and Surabaya, there are almost no single-company towns (Rothenberg et al. 2017) of the kind that facilitated the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes in places such as Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union (Hale 2003). The few conglomerates that exist are under the control of national-level elites, many of whom belong to a class of pariah-capitalists of Sino-Indonesians who cannot and do not play a direct role in politics for historical reasons (Chua 2008).[7]

In short, the economic autonomy of Indonesian voters is relatively high. They may be poor, but they are also relatively free compared to voters in

many other new democracies. In addition, the topography of local economies in Indonesia does not lend itself to the concentration of control in the lands of local incumbents.

In light of these challenges, why do local incumbents not just build subnational authoritarian regimes with their 'roots in the air', that is, through the manipulation of institutional resources exogenous to their locality?

The institutional constraints to pursuing such a strategy are the subject of the next section.

Institutional constraints on the rise of subnational authoritarian regimes

Remember that institutional theories of subnational authoritarian regimes argued that different configurations of intra-governmental relations explain differences in the emergence and durability of such regimes. The most important resources to establish and maintain subnational authoritarian regimes, according to this literature, are the manipulation of formal rules and regulations; gaining control over formal and informal sources of state patronage; and gaining control over vertical power relations through the monopolization of party structures between the national and subnational level.

Indonesia is a decentralized unitary state. This places serious restrictions on the monopolization of institutional resources needed to establish subnational authoritarian regimes. While governors, district heads and mayors became more powerful after the collapse of the New Order dictatorship in 1998 in ways described above, these powers mainly come in the form of *deconcentrated* rather than decentralized authority. In other words, the national level still determines most government tasks and how they are financed. Local government heads have simply more freedom to decide how exactly these tasks are executed compared to the New Order era.

Most importantly, the regulatory framework for subnational elections is under the control of the National Election Commission. This means that Indonesian provinces, districts and municipalities cannot write their own election rules or even constitutions unlike in many federal democracies. Likewise, the security apparatus is under the control of the national government (Kristiansen and Trijono 2005, 237) and subnational prosecutors' offices report to the national level (Tans 2012, 4). This has prevented the co-optation of local security forces and the judiciary by governors, district heads and mayors as they cannot bring these branches of the Indonesian government under their *formal* control. Of course, there is a lot of informal collusion and corruption between local government heads and members of the local security apparatus as well as the judiciary. However, since influence can only be *informal*, it does not lend itself easily to the creation of *durable* subnational authoritarian regimes.

The literature on the institutional roots of subnational authoritarian regimes also emphasized the role state patronage plays in the rise and collapse of such political systems (Giraudy 2015; Gervasoni 2018). Again, the institutional framework of Indonesia's decentralized unitary state creates various hurdles for local incumbents who want to manipulate local fiscal resources and/ or intergovernmental budget allocations. The fiscal autonomy of subnational government heads is weak. They can decide over only 11 types of taxes and levies according to Law No. 28/2009 on Local Taxes and Local Retributions. Provinces, districts and municipalities in Indonesia receive on average 90% of their revenues through national level block grants (DAU – *Dana Alokasi Umum*) and special allocation grants (DAK – *Dana Alokasi Khusus*). Both DAU and DAK are dispersed based on a fixed allocation formula, which is under the control of the national government. This dramatically reduces the possibilities for Indonesian local government heads to manipulate budget allocation (Gonschorek 2021) in order to establish subnational authoritarian regimes compared to their counterparts in federal democracies (Gervasoni 2018). This may explain why political budget cycles exist in Indonesian local politics (Wardhana 2020), but do not seem to increase the chances for incumbents to get re-elected.

In addition, the manipulation of the 10% intergovernmental budget transfers that are *not* part of aforementioned standardized allocation mechanism seems to be firmly under the control of the national parliament (Kiswanto 2021). This means that if local government heads approach the national parliament to manipulate intergovernmental budget allocations, which in any case won't exceed 10% of their local budget, they have to deal with a parliament reflecting the highly fragmented Indonesian party system. The fact that most local government heads are not party members and have only weak links to political parties (Buehler and Tan 2007), adds to the challenges local government heads face when trying to collude with national lawmakers in order to manipulate non-routine intergovernmental budget allocations.

In any case, access to local state patronage may generate limited mileage in local elections in Indonesia. Local government heads around the world have tried to co-opt the local bureaucracy to use it as a base from where to build subnational authoritarian regimes. Often, friends and family with leverage over the local electorate are hired into the local state apparatus not only to reward them for their support but also to channel state resources to the electorate through trusted allies. In fact, the group of people whose livelihood depends on the local state budget is so ubiquitous in certain countries that they often form a strong voting bloc in local elections. In Russia, for example, the *biudzhetniki*, the number of people on the local government payroll, is sizeable enough to form a distinct voter pool for local incumbents to tap into (Gelman 2010, 15). In Indonesia, however, due to the country's high population density, the size of the state apparatus vis-à-

vis the overall population is quite small compared to other countries in the Global South (Buehler 2011, 66). The percentage of the local population that is directly or indirectly dependent on the state apparatus is therefore too small to make the local bureaucracy an effective launching pad for establishing durable subnational authoritarian regimes.

Of course, institutional resources are not confined to local budget manipulation and influence peddling in intergovernmental budget transfers. The local state apparatus not only offers corruption and rent-seeking opportunities but also provides incumbents with structures to monitor patronage networks. Control over the local bureaucracy is therefore crucial to establish durable regimes (Saikkonen 2021). However, local government heads in Indonesia also struggle to monopolize such resources. This is not so much because institutional obstacles prevent local government heads from engaging in corruption and rent-seeking but because incumbents struggle to exclude competitors from such opportunities. A headline in an Indonesian newspaper read 'Elections come – Bureaucrats Disappear' (*Pilkada datang – Pejabat hilang*) (Kompas 2005). The article described how entire government buildings are empty prior to elections because different government units are coerced to campaign for their respective superiors who *compete against one another*. To examine this issue, we ran a correlation analysis to see whether the ratio of the number of local bureaucrats to the overall population in a given jurisdiction had any effect on the competitiveness of elections in a jurisdiction. We found that the higher the ratio of local bureaucrats to the overall population, the more competitive local government head elections are, as shown in the online data supplement.[8]

In short, incumbents are frequently challenged by competitors who emerge from within their own bureaucracies. The larger local bureaucracies are, the more likely such competitors seem to emerge.

Furthermore, the time to manipulate fiscal resources and intergovernmental budget transfers as well as engage in corruption and rent-seeking is finite. Term limits for subnational government heads, already mentioned above, are additional institutional hurdles for the creation of subnational authoritarian regimes. Local government heads can serve two five-year terms anywhere in Indonesia. While some local government heads managed to install relatives in their place at the end of their tenure,[9] term limits have levelled the playing field to the extent that new candidates are offered a potential 'in' every few years.

Finally, the literature on the institutional origins of subnational authoritarian regimes also considers the monopolization of vertical links between national and subnational politics a key element in the construction and maintenance of subnational authoritarian regimes. The literature has particularly emphasized the role political parties play in places such as Argentina and Mexico in providing vertical linkages between national and subnational

politics. Incumbents therefore seek to monopolize party structures to shore up authority at the national level and protect themselves from attacks from both above and below (Gibson 2012, 26; Giraudy 2015, 23).

Unfortunately, Indonesian parties have little to offer to local incumbents. Indonesian parties are 'top-heavy' as almost none of them grew out of political movements. Instead, most serve as political vehicles for national elites. In addition to concentrating power at the national level, Indonesian parties are poorly institutionalized. Subnational party branches therefore receive neither much attention nor resources in-between elections. Finally, most candidates participating in these races are bureaucrats or hail from the private sector (Lewis 2019, 5).[10] Consequently, candidate-party relations in local government head elections are frail and often collapse before Election Day (Buehler and Tan 2007). In other words, local government heads in Indonesia cannot use political party structures to monopolize national-subnational linkages unlike their counterparts in democracies where parties have a local political base, are more institutionalized and maintain an active presence across government layers in-between elections.

Furthermore, Indonesia's subnational party systems are highly fragmented (Tomsa 2014). This makes it equally difficult for incumbents to protect themselves from *horizontal* challenges. Recent research on local government head elections in Indonesia has shown that building (read: purchasing) large pre-election party coalitions increases the chances of challengers to unseat incumbents considerably (Lewis 2019). Indonesia's highly fragmented local party system provides ample opportunities for challengers to do just that. In other words, incumbents struggle to exclude and marginalize would-be challengers from putting together electoral vehicles to unseat them because the highly fragmented local party systems offer a multitude of 'entry points' to competitors. In short, incumbents' difficulties to monopolize party relations both vertically and horizontally is another reason why subnational government head elections in Indonesia have remained comparatively dynamic.

Conclusion

This paper showed that the large majority of elections for local government heads in the world's third largest democracy is competitive. Based on an original dataset covering all direct elections for governors, district heads and mayors since 2005, we showed that the majority of these races were contested by at least two candidates with a chance of winning.

We then argued that incumbents face considerable economic and institutional obstacles to entrench themselves in local politics across multiple election cycles. Concretely, the economic autonomy of Indonesian citizens is relatively strong. In many localities, local elites have little leverage over

voters, in other words, due to a combination of fragmented labour markets and high population density. In addition, the economic topography of Indonesian provinces, municipalities and districts does not lend itself to a concentration of control over the commanding heights in the hands of *local* elites. Furthermore, the rigid institutional framework set by Indonesia's decentralized unitary state creates considerable hurdles for local incumbents to entrench themselves in local politics.

Our findings point to several avenues for future research on subnational authoritarianism in Indonesia and beyond. While the overwhelming majority of local government head elections was competitive across both space and time, our data picked up some variance along these dimensions.

One, our results showed that a higher number of gubernatorial elections were competitive than mayoral and, finally, district head elections. Is this because the larger electorates in provincial elections are more difficult to co-opt than the smaller electorates in municipalities and districts? Are mayoral elections in cities more competitive than rural district elections because urban economies are more complex and therefore do not lend themselves to a concentration of control?[11] Similarly, does the diversity of urban economies strengthen the economic autonomy of voters compared to rural districts and therefore increase competitiveness? Are more gubernatorial races competitive than mayoral and district head elections because the weak authority of governors in Indonesia's institutional framework makes it particularly challenging to rig institutions at that level?

Such questions regarding the different degrees of competition both *across and within* government layers will need to be addressed in future research.

We not only picked up some variance in competitiveness between and within government layers but also across election cycles. Our data showed that there has been a moderate decline in the number of competitive elections at all government layers in recent election cycles. Future research needs to examine if this is a long term trend and, if so, what causes it. A recent study showed that the number of uncontested local government head elections is on the rise in Indonesia. The authors suggested that aforementioned Law No. 8/ 2015 opened up avenues for the manipulation of electoral institutions (Lay, Hasrul Hanif, and Rohman 2017, 428). This suggests that the decline in the number of competitive elections has institutional origins.

However, uncontested and uncompetitive elections are not the same. It is important to separate the two since the causes for uncontested elections may not be the same as the causes for uncompetitive elections. Furthermore, the decrease in the number of competitive elections began prior to 2015 our data shows. The changes introduced in Law No. 8/2015 are therefore unlikely to be the sole explanation for this decline in electoral competitiveness. Future research will therefore have to examine whether this development may also have economic origins.

Finally, our research findings also show avenues for future research on subnational authoritarian regimes beyond Indonesia. Scholars emphasizing the importance of institutional causes for the rise and fall of local political monopolies predominantly work on Latin America. This literature therefore almost exclusively focuses on *federal democracies*, the dominant political system in that part of the world. Federal democracies grant subnational government layers considerable autonomy to shape local institutions.

However, the majority of states around the world are *decentralized unitary states*. In such systems, the authority to change institutions and regulations is concentrated at the national level, with most government functions being merely *deconcentrated* to the subnational level. In other words, the possibilities (aspiring) local autocrats have to manipulate institutions in their favor are, if not entirely absent, much more limited in decentralized unitary states compared to federal democracies. There may therefore be a selection bias in the literature that emphasizes the importance of institutions exogenous to localities for the rise and fall of subnational authoritarianism. This is because most of this scholarship focuses on Latin America where the majority of states are built on regulatory frameworks that allow the comparatively easy manipulation of institutions. Future research will have to examine whether subnational authoritarian regimes built on the manipulation of institutions also emerge in decentralized unitary states. The Indonesian case suggests that institutional theories of the rise and fall of subnational authoritarianism do not travel well to decentralized unitary states.

Notes

1. We would like to thank Jan Pierskalla, Rizky Ridho Pratomo, John T. Sidel, Testriono, and two anonymous reviewers for their help with this article.
2. Bianchi (2013) put forward an explanation for subnational variance in democratization that emphasized a combination of local and supralocal economic and institutional resources.
3. Law No. 22/1999 Article 41 limited the tenure for local government heads to two five-year terms anywhere in Indonesia. Law No. 32/2004, Part 8, Article 58 was more specific and stated that nobody could serve for more than two five year terms either as a local government head or a deputy local government head. Ironically, the more specific formulation in Law No. 32/2004 opened up the opportunity for local government heads who served two five-year terms to subsequently run for deputy local government head.
4. See Buehler 2016, 74 Footnote 22 for a list of these jurisdictions.
5. A total of 1629 local government head elections were held between 2005 and 2019. Even if we assume that the 305 elections we could not find any data for were not competitive, 61% (992/1629) would still have been competitive.
6. For a critique, see Sidel 1999, 10.
7. Mining companies try to manipulate elections in their favor across Indonesia. However, they often fund different candidates running in the same election instead of putting all their eggs in one basket.

8. We thank Jan Pierskalla for sharing a dataset on the number of Indonesian local bureaucrats with us.
9. It is because of such cases that the Indonesian parliament wanted to ban family members of incumbents from running in subnational government head elections since 2014. They eventually did so through Law No. 8/ 2015, which prohibited relatives of incumbents from running in subnational government head elections. However, the Constitutional Court struck down the respective article in Law No. 8/ 2015 the very same year after the son of an incumbent district head argued that the law violated his constitutional rights to run as a candidate in Indonesian elections.
10. Arguably, party members rarely run in these elections precisely because party affiliations do not provide much in terms of political and economic capital.
11. See Freeman and Prieto (2021) for an argument about how accountability and transparency is higher in urban areas. Ironically, this has allowed incumbents to entrench themselves. The reduction in opportunities to engage in corruption and vote-buying in urban areas has lowered the electoral success rates of opposition candidates, the authors show.

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