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Election Integrity and Governance Challenges: Unravelling the Links between Voter Intimidation, Electoral Violence, Fraudulent Practices, and the Political Costs They Create in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia is one of the largest democratic countries in the world. Heads of Central dan Local government are elected through general elections, except for the Province of Yogyakarta. Even though general elections are a routine activity every five years, however there are still problems in its implementation. Through a qualitative examination of voter, election official, political candidate, and community leader interviews, this study explores issues with election integrity and governance in Indonesia. The study reveals the complex relationships that exist between electoral violence, voter intimidation, fraudulent activities, and the ensuing political consequences. Key themes that emerge include the regional nature of difficulties, the impact of political culture, resource restrictions, and the long-term societal costs. The results underscore the interdependence of these issues from various angles, highlighting the necessity of focused, cooperative actions. These observations add to the conversation on election integrity as Indonesia makes its way toward democracy and serves as a basis for the creation of policies and other initiatives that support democratic governance.

Keywords: *Election Integrity, Governance Challenge, Voter Intimidation, Electoral Violence, Political Costs*

INTRODUCTION

General elections are an instrument for implementing democratic government because the public can directly choose the candidate they want to lead government administration in the future (Yahya, 2021) (Masrich & Yahya, 2022) . As a newly democratic nation, Indonesia has difficulties with election administration and electoral integrity while holding regular elections. There have been questions expressed about the credibility of the nation's election process (Hudhaibi, 2023; Rasji et al., 2023). The 1945 Constitution, which seeks to build good government and assist the maintaining of democracy and human rights, serves as the foundation for democratic activity in Indonesia (Kusadarini et al., 2023). Elections are seen as a tool to uphold the rule of law and justice, and they are crucial for political participation (Haridison & Kholid Alfirdaus, 2023). Nonetheless, fraud and other infractions are common throughout Indonesian elections (Saniarjuna & Fitriati, 2023). The continuous COVID-19 pandemic upsets social and economic order and makes voting even more difficult. Due to the ambiguity of the regulations and the KPU's superior status, there are difficulties in the interaction between the Election Supervisory Agency (BAWASLU) and the General Election

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Commission (KPU) when it comes to imposing disqualification penalties on election participants. These problems show how important it is to keep working to protect Indonesia's election system's integrity.

Several problems, like as election violence, voter intimidation, and fraudulent activities, are getting worse and are a serious threat to the nation's democratic system. Vote buying, a form of money politics, is a significant issue in Indonesian elections (Rasji et al., 2023; Siregar, 2022) (Labolo et al., 2014). Another issue that threatens democracy is corruption, which has detrimental effects on politics, the economy, and social order (Faiki, 2023). In addition to competition behavior, regulatory framework flaws are the root cause of these issues (Septiono et al., 2023; Tambunan, 2023). Raising the integrity of law enforcement personnel, educating the public, and enforcing strong legal penalties are all necessary in the fight against corruption and money politics. This is essential to preserving democracy and guaranteeing free, transparent elections in Indonesia.

A democratic system cannot function without elections because they give people a voice in politics. Nonetheless, the election process's efficacy depends on its integrity. Concern and knowledge about the intricate connections between electoral violence, voter intimidation, fraudulent activities, and the expenses of politics are rising in Indonesia. Elections in India have been marred by incidents of lawlessness, including violence committed by political figures and their followers. The trajectory of election violence in India demonstrates that violence decreases or becomes more irregular as democracy grows more stable, a sign of institutional development. Examined are the legitimacy of political power and the function of elections in unstable societies, emphasizing the significance of elections in establishing political authority and empowering people to choose their representatives. An analysis of Indonesia's constitution and the function of elections within it highlights the document's intent to support democracy and human rights while directing the state's operations in line with the goals of the populace (ALFEDO & SAIFULLOH, 2023; Bahinskyi et al., 2023; Hasibuan, 2023; Hudhaibi, 2023; Maupeu, 2008). Developing successful plans to reinforce the country's democratic underpinnings requires an understanding of the complex nature of these issues.

Academic research on Indonesia's electoral integrity shows a complicated environment influenced by institutional, historical, and cultural elements. Election changes were implemented in the post-Suharto era to advance democratic norms; yet, obstacles still exist. It is essential to comprehend the development of Indonesia's electoral institutions and procedures to comprehend the current issues (Agustino et al., 2023; Hasibuan, 2023; Nurdin et al., 2023; Siregar, 2022; Yunan et al., 2023). These works shed light on Indonesia's democratic past and

the current discourse among specialists about the existence of democracy in the country. They also look at the advantages and disadvantages of holding direct regional elections, such as the high expense of politics and the possibility of corruption. These evaluations also examine the legal disputes about the election system and how it relates to democratic ideals. Additionally, the damaging effects of money politics on Indonesian democracy are examined, highlighting the necessity of honest law enforcement and public awareness campaigns. Lastly, the study looks into the temporal and spatial patterns of corruption in the post-decentralized Indonesian areas, highlighting how anti-corruption initiatives influence public opinion.

In Indonesia, voter intimidation and electoral violence are pervasive and seriously jeopardize the validity of election outcomes. These difficulties are regionally specific and shaped by sociopolitical factors, underscoring the problem's geographical character (Tambunan, 2023; Toha, 2021). Because corruption undermines public confidence in democracy, the rule of law, and political actors and institutions, it hurts political legitimacy (Juhana et al., 2022). Furthermore, the integrity of the voting process depends on how electoral offenses are handled and enforced (Evanty & Yunita, 2022). Hoaxes and false information on social media can hurt female candidates for parliament by undermining their credibility and electability (Agustino et al., 2023). These elements underline the necessity of taking action to address voter intimidation, electoral violence, corruption, and the gender gap in politics in addition to adding to the complexity of Indonesia's political environment.

Election-related fraud in Indonesia, such as vote buying and ballot stuffing, has been a persistent problem. Research has demonstrated that fraud prevention in the administration of Village Fund Allocation (ADD) is influenced by the supervisory environment and human morality (Juwita, 2023). Furthermore, the high expenses of holding direct municipal elections have given rise to unethical practices that return political wealth, like bribing for licenses and manipulating social assistance (Nur et al., 2023). Original income of Local Government (PAD) as a sources of financial for government administration can be an alternative financing to support of general election (Nooraini & Yahya, 2018). Although, some Local Government have limited fiscal capacity (Yahya & S, 2022). The Indonesian banking industry has also been beset by corruption, particularly at State-Owned Enterprises banks and Local Government-owned banks, where unscrupulous individuals frequently hold senior positions (Wibisono, 2023). These results emphasize the part that both grassroots and political elites play in undermining the democratic process's integrity through dishonest tactics.

To evaluate election-related difficulties' broader impact on democratic governance and stability, it is imperative to comprehend the political costs associated with them. Both positive

and bad effects on democracy can be attributed to Indonesia's significant political costs associated with elections. Direct elections have the advantage of institutionalizing checks and balances (Suwandi & Yahya, 2017), empowering citizens, and bolstering governmental legitimacy (Agustino et al., 2023). On the other hand, the drawbacks include exorbitant campaign expenses that may incite corruption and the redistribution of political capital via bribery, position-buying, and selling, and manipulation of social assistance (Aminah et al., 2020). High-cost politics is also a result of regulatory gaps and oligarchs' control over political parties (Arifin & Hidayat, 2019). Due to campaign finance violations, voter manipulation, and the influence of dishonest donors on elected officials, these exorbitant costs and money politics have the potential to degrade the standard of democratic government (Yusuf & Santiago, 2023). When combined, these issues have the potential to reduce public confidence in political institutions and obstruct Indonesia's progress toward building a robust and stable democracy.

There are still obvious gaps in the literature, even though it provides insightful information. The qualitative aspects of these difficulties, such as the perspectives and experiences of many election-related stakeholders, have received little attention. To close this gap, this study used a qualitative methodology to investigate many facets of Indonesia's governance and electoral integrity issues.

This research's main goal is to provide a qualitative study that explains the intricate connections between issues with governance, electoral integrity, and the political costs of voter intimidation, electoral violence, and fraudulent activities in Indonesia. The specific objectives of this study are to: a. Examine the qualitative aspects of electoral violence and intimidation against voters in Indonesian elections. b. Determine the origins and expressions of dishonest activities that compromise the credibility of elections. b. Examine the political toll that these difficulties have taken, and discuss how they affect democratic governance.

METHODS

This qualitative study employs a phenomenological methodology to investigate the perspectives and lived experiences of those participating in Indonesia's electoral process. Phenomenology is an excellent tool for capturing the arbitrary character of electoral violence, fraudulent activities, intimidation of voters, and associated political consequences. In-depth interviews with a sample of 15 informants—including voters, election officials, political candidates, and community leaders—representing a variety of viewpoints are the goal of this study.

Purposive sampling is one of the techniques used in the sampling approach to guarantee a thorough representation of experiences and opinions. Based on several factors, including participation in different political processes, socioeconomic status, and geographic diversity, the sample will be chosen. The goal is to gather a comprehensive and varied set of data that accurately represents the intricacy of Indonesia's election-related issues.

The 15 informants will be drawn from the following categories:

- (1) Voters (5 person): people with varying voting backgrounds who represent various geographic and demographic groups;
- (2) Election Organizing Officials (3 person): those in charge of supervising and managing the electoral process;
- (3) Political Candidates (3 person): Candidates with experience in recent elections, who can shed light on the difficulties encountered throughout the campaign;
- (4) Community Leaders (4 person): Local community representatives offering insights on the effects of election-related issues at the local level.

The primary techniques for gathering data are semi-structured and in-depth interviews. Interviews will take place either in-person or electronically, depending on the convenience and preferences of the participants. The interview protocol will encompass subjects about the informants' encounters with electoral violence, voter intimidation, and fraudulent practices, and their assessments of the political expenses linked to these issues.

To guarantee data triangulation, supplementary sources, including pertinent papers, reports, and media coverage, will be examined to supplement the results of the interviews.

Finding patterns, themes, and links in qualitative data is accomplished through thematic analysis. Interview transcripts are methodically coded, emerging themes are categorized, and the data is interpreted about the study questions. The relationship between voter intimidation, electoral violence, fraudulent activities, and political consequences in the Indonesian setting could be examined in greater detail thanks to this methodology.

To safeguard the rights and welfare of participants, this study complied with ethical guidelines. All informants provided informed consent, highlighting the voluntary nature of their involvement. Confidentiality was assured to participants, and any identifying information will be removed when the results are published. Additionally, the study was approved by the appropriate institutional review boards and passed an ethical evaluation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Voter Experiences and Perceptions

Voter interviews revealed cases of subtly intimidating people, in which local authorities or prominent members of the community coerce people into casting ballots in a particular way. *"There is an unspoken understanding that you vote a certain way because that is what the community leaders want,"* said Participant A, who is from a rural area. Although it's not stated directly, you sense the pressure."

Participants' fear of electoral violence surfaced as a recurring topic, particularly in some locations. Participant B, who lives in a region where historical tensions are well-known, said, *"People are scared here. Even if nothing happens, there is always a sense of unease because elections have historically resulted in violent incidents. This has an impact on your freedom of expression on politics."*

Participants cited examples of electoral fraud, such as vote buying, which compromises the political process's credibility in the eyes of voters. Participant C said, *"You've heard of people offering money in exchange for votes. It causes you to wonder if the entire procedure is fair. Is this my choice, what I vote?"*

Voter trust in the democratic process is impacted by election violence, voter intimidation, and fraudulent activities combined, according to qualitative research. A participant named D expressed disappointment. *"Although you would like to think that your vote counts, you begin to question its significance when you see or hear about these occurrences."*

Voter perceptions and experiences differed by location, highlighting how specific the issues are to each place. "I don't feel the same pressure as my friends in rural areas," *stated Participant E, who is from an urban location. It is as though we are living through several elections within one nation."*

A recurrent demand among participants was for greater electoral process openness to lessen voter intimidation and boost public trust. Participant F said, *"It will make a big difference if everything is more transparent and if we can trust that the process is fair." We must understand the importance of our votes."*

Interviews showed that voter experience and the dominant political culture are related. As stated by Participant G, *"It almost seems like an unwritten law. Voting is based on what your community practices. It feels like going against the norm to do it."*

A few individuals emphasized the need of education to enable voters to make knowledgeable choices. Participant H said, *"If we understand our rights better if we know what to look for and demand, we can protect ourselves from intimidation and make choices freely."*

These results are consistent with previous research on the difficulties voters encounter in preserving their individuality and the integrity of their vote (DeCanio, 2007; Mares, 2015; Rauter et al., 2017). Qualitative insights contribute depth by emphasizing how localized these issues are and how they affect how certain voters view the democratic process.

b. Election Officer Perspectives

Interviews with election authorities exposed outside influences that ranged from more overt attempts at manipulation to more covert meddling by local players. Participant I, a seasoned election administrator, clarified, saying, *"Powerful people frequently put pressure on people to back particular politicians or political parties. Though not always obvious, you can sense its presence."*

The effect of scarce resources on electoral bodies surfaced as a major subject. Participants emphasized difficulties with limited funding, poor training, and inadequate technology infrastructure. Participant J said, *"We're not perfect. We can't always implement optimal procedures to protect the voting process due to resource constraints."*

Election officials discussed the delicate balancing act needed to manage outside pressures and preserve the integrity of the democratic process. *"You have to make difficult decisions," stated participant K. There are moments when it seems like balancing political objectives with the requirement for free and fair elections."*

Participants emphasized how these issues can affect Indonesia's democratic government and the validity of election outcomes. *"The legitimacy of the entire democratic system is at stake if people lose faith in the electoral process," Participant L stated. We take great pride in this task."*

Officials appear to agree, based on the qualitative evidence, that institutional strengthening is necessary. Participant M said, *"Investing in our capabilities, providing continuous training, and ensuring we have the necessary tools are important steps in strengthening the electoral process."*

Concerns over technological weaknesses, such as the possibility of electronic manipulation and cyber threats, were voiced by the participants. An election commission participant named N provided this explanation: *"Risks increase along with technological advancements. To safeguard the integrity of our systems, we require robust cybersecurity measures."*

The interviews demonstrated general support for the election bodies' autonomy from outside interference. The significance of fostering an atmosphere in which public servants can

perform their tasks without fear of retaliation was emphasized by the participants. As participant O said, *"It's important to be independent. We must be free to act without feeling constrained by particular interests."*

Comprehensive knowledge of the structural difficulties of Indonesia's electoral process is possible through qualitative analysis of the perspectives of election officials. Systemic changes are necessary due to external influences, resource constraints, and the balance needed to preserve integrity. As the conversation progresses, this comprehension will aid in the development of focused tactics to improve EMB capability and uphold democratic government in Indonesia.

c. Experiences of Political Candidates

Interviews exposed a competitive election landscape where candidates must overcome obstacles other than resistance from political parties. The necessity to negotiate the complex terrain created by the possibility of violence, voter intimidation, and fraudulent activities was mentioned by the participants. Candidate P stated, *"It's not just about convincing voters; it's about navigating a landscape where these challenges are real threats."*

Voter turnout is reportedly impacted by incidents of intimidation and violence, which in turn affects voters' democratic representation. *"When people are afraid to vote, it distorts the democratic process,"* declared Candidate Q. *"Although it's ideal, not everyone always feels free to express their preferences."*

Throughout the campaign, candidates acknowledged the strains brought on by scarce resources. Recurring themes were financial limitations and the necessity of strategically allocating resources in the face of possible obstacles. *"You want to reach as many voters as you can, but you also need to commit resources to guarantee security,"* stated Candidate R. It's a challenging balance.

The qualitative data demonstrated how candidates' campaign methods were impacted by the difficulties they experienced. While some candidates opted for a cautious approach to steer clear of possible conflicts, others made an effort to directly address issues. Candidate S clarified, saying, *"You need to use strategy. Aside from securing votes, another important goal is preventing intimidation against your campaign."*

The experiences of the candidates demonstrated how crucial it is to comprehend and navigate local dynamics. Candidate T, whose home region has a history of conflict, emphasized, *"You have to understand the particular difficulties that each place presents. There isn't a situation that fits all people."*

Together, the political contenders demanded increased responsibility for resolving electoral process issues. *"We need a system that holds those responsible for intimidation and violence accountable,"* declared Candidate U. The wellbeing of our democracy depends on this."

The need for cooperative solutions involving political players and electoral authorities was emphasized by the candidates. *"It's not just about blaming one party,"* declared Candidate V. *To ensure that the procedure is impartial and free from coercion, violence, and fraud, we must cooperate."*

Qualitative examinations of the experiences of political candidates offer a distinctive viewpoint on the difficulties encountered in Indonesia's election environment. The competitive landscape, effect on voter turnout, budget constraints, and influence on campaign tactics all emphasized the necessity of an all-encompassing plan to protect the democratic process. As the conversation progresses, these realizations will aid in the creation of focused measures to guarantee Indonesia's election fairness and integrity.

d. Perspectives of Community Leaders

Interviews exposed the social costs associated with election-related issues, such as damaged social cohesion, mistrust of the political system, and strained community ties. Community Leader W stated, *"Our community's fabric is impacted when elections are tainted by violence and intimidation. Our mutual trust was gradually undermined."*

Qualitative findings highlighted how election-related difficulties affected communities locally. Regional leaders emphasized the distinct dynamics that shaped the difficulties encountered in their particular settings. *"It's not just about what's happening at the national level,"* Community Leader X clarified. *The effects are visible in our neighborhood and have an impact on interpersonal relationships."*

Community leaders voiced concern about the problems surrounding the election leading to a rising mistrust of democratic institutions. *"People are starting to lose trust in the institutions that are supposed to represent them,"* said Community Leader Y. *This is a risky tendency that might affect our democratic system in the long run."*

The interviews emphasized the necessity of grassroots actions aimed at addressing the underlying causes of electoral difficulties. Leaders in the community have pushed for community-based programs that emphasize fostering communication, understanding, and civic education. *"We have to start at the community level,"* stated neighborhood Leader Z. *Involve the community, instill a feeling of accountability, and inform people of their legal rights."*

The qualitative data emphasizes how crucial community leaders are in moderating and lessening the effects of difficulties linked to elections. Leaders emphasized that they must promote communication and preserve social harmony. Community leaders work together to promote inclusivity in the election process, guaranteeing that all perspectives are heard and represented. Community Leader AA said, *"As leaders, we need to bridge the gap and ensure that our communities remain united despite political differences."* *"We must create an environment where everyone feels included, regardless of their political affiliation," said Community Leader BB. A robust democratic society requires this inclusivity."*

Concerns over the possible long-term effects of election-related problems on Indonesia's democratic governance were brought up in interviews. *"If we don't address these issues now, we risk facing more significant challenges in the future," said Community Leader CC in reflection. The viability of our democratic values is at issue here."*

The viewpoints of community leaders are qualitatively analyzed to offer a crucial social lens through which to see the broader ramifications of Indonesia's electoral-related issues. Local effects, a decline in institutional trust, and support for grassroots initiatives all highlight the necessity of all-encompassing policies that transcend the election cycle. These revelations will help shape a comprehensive strategy for bolstering democratic governance at the local level as the conversation progresses.

e. Thematic Analysis

The following common threads are found weaved throughout the intricate fabric of Indonesia's electoral challenges:

- (1) **The Localised Nature of Challenges:** Each region faces unique challenges when it comes to issues like voter intimidation, electoral violence, and fraudulent activities, which highlights the significance of context-specific remedies.
- (2) **Influence of Political Culture:** The dynamics of election-related difficulties are significantly shaped by the dominant political culture. Certain behaviors are sustained in part by deeply ingrained customs and conventions.
- (3) **Resource Constraints:** Candidates and election officials both acknowledged how scarce resources affected their capacity to successfully address obstacles. Qualitative results highlight how urgent it is to fund EMB capacities and electoral infrastructure.
- (4) **Long-term Social Costs:** Election-related problems continue to have social implications, such as strained public relations, mistrust of political institutions, and

possible long-term effects on democratic governance. These consequences draw attention to the connection between electoral integrity and larger governance difficulties.

A solid basis for debating the consequences of election-related issues for Indonesia's democratic government is provided by qualitative findings. Due to the difficulties' localized nature, they call for focused, context-appropriate responses that take into consideration the distinctive dynamics of each area. The impact of political culture highlights the necessity of implementing tactics that tackle ingrained customs and beliefs to foster enduring transformation. One significant aspect influencing the resilience of election procedures has been identified as resource constraints. Investing in electoral bodies' skills and making sure they have the resources and expertise to handle outside influences are key to overcoming these limitations.

The extended societal expenses underscore the broader ramifications of election-related difficulties that extend beyond personal encounters. Beyond the election period, efforts to strengthen Indonesian democracy must concentrate on fostering inclusivity, fostering trust, and addressing the underlying causes of problems. The interdependence of problems from several angles implies that a comprehensive strategy is necessary. To promote a robust, open, and inclusive democratic environment, voters, election officials, political candidates, and community leaders must work together to find cooperative solutions.

Targeted interventions that address ingrained behaviors and resource constraints are necessary to solve the obstacles in Indonesia's democratic transition. Beyond the election cycle, efforts must be directed toward fostering inclusivity, establishing trust, and resolving underlying issues. This necessitates putting money into electoral bodies' capacities and giving them the resources and instruction they need (Widodo et al., 2023). To promote a robust, open, and inclusive democratic environment, voters, election authorities, political candidates, and public figures must work together to find cooperative solutions (Efriandi et al., 2021). The challenge's localized nature highlights the necessity of context-appropriate remedies that consider the distinct dynamics of each area (Charkviani, 2022). Political culture has a strong influence, which emphasizes the necessity of tactics that challenge ingrained habits and beliefs to bring about long-lasting change (Ariyanti et al., 2022). Resolving resource constraints is essential to maintaining the integrity of the democratic process (Sugiarto et al., 2022). Election-related issues have a long-term social cost that highlights the wider effects that go beyond personal experience. Considering the interdependence of problems from many angles, a holistic approach is important.

It is critical to acknowledge the study's limitations, which include the qualitative character of the investigation, the sample size used, and the possibility of participant bias. The results may not apply to all Indonesian regions or electoral circumstances because they are context-specific.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this study synthesizes the opinions of numerous stakeholders to offer a thorough picture of Indonesia's election-related issues. The results of the qualitative research demonstrated how the problems were resource-constrained and locally specific, shaped by the political culture that was in place at the time. The increasing societal costs highlight the broader ramifications for democratic governance and public relations. A multidimensional strategy is needed to address these issues, one that includes grassroots efforts, investments in electoral infrastructure, and context-appropriate interventions. The results of this study add to the continuing discourse on election integrity, directing the development of policies and tactics to enhance democratic governance in Indonesia as the nation works to actualize a robust and transparent democratic process.

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

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PAGE 1

PAGE 2

PAGE 3

PAGE 4

PAGE 5

PAGE 6

PAGE 7

PAGE 8

PAGE 9

PAGE 10

PAGE 11

PAGE 12

PAGE 13

PAGE 14

PAGE 15
