

The Rise of Uncontested Elections in Indonesia: Case Studies of Pati and Jayapura

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This article explains a new trend in Indonesian local politics: the rise of uncontested elections. We explore this trend by way of detailed examinations of two such elections in February 2017: the district head election in Pati, Central Java; and the mayoral election in

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Jayapura, Papua. In doing so, we consider explanations that have been advanced elsewhere, including those that focus on “scare-off effects” and incumbency advantages. Though such approaches are relevant, we show that there was a contrast between our two cases: in Pati, the strength of the incumbent and his wealthy running mate dissuaded rival candidates and parties from competing; in Jayapura, two other candidates wanted to run, and even secured backing from local party branches, but their candidacies were annulled after legal challenges. If the first pathway showed a process of broad-based elite bargaining producing a “win-win solution”, in Jayapura the pathway involved a zero-sum-game contest between rival elites. Despite these differences, in both cases there was competition between local elites, but it happened prior to the election. Overall, we argue the rise of uncontested elections points to growing elite entrenchment in local politics.

Keywords: local politics, uncontested elections, incumbency advantages, *pilkada*.

This article analyses a new trend in Indonesian local politics: uncontested elections, in which only one pair of candidates, usually the incumbent regional head and his or her deputy, stand for election. Uncontested elections are new in Indonesian politics, but are likely to become more common. In 2015, the first time such elections occurred, 269 regions held *pilkada* (*pemilihan langsung kepala daerah*, elections of regional heads), but only three were uncontested. In 2017, during the next wave of *pilkada* in 101 regions, nine races were uncontested. This represents a jump from 1.1 per cent to 9 per cent of *pilkada* in the years concerned. This new trend was enabled by a change in Indonesia’s electoral regime sparked by a Constitutional Court decision in 2015 allowing such elections for the first time. Though this court case was a key enabling condition for the rise of uncontested elections, it begs the question of why potential challengers in some regions are abstaining from electoral competition.

In this article we explain the rise of uncontested races by focusing on two such elections in February 2017: one in the rural district (*kabupaten*) of Pati in Central Java, and another in Jayapura city, the capital of Papua province. Despite having histories of significant political competition, in both places only one pair of candidates was on the ballot in 2017. In both cases, these pairs were led by the incumbent local government head. Viewed in terms of their past electoral histories, there was no reason to expect uncompetitive elections in either Pati or Jayapura. In Pati, four candidate pairs had

competed in the first *pilkada* held in the district in 2006, and six candidate pairs had competed in 2011. In Jayapura, two pairs had competed in 2005 and seven in 2011. The ferocity of competition in Pati in 2011 was also indicated by the fact that no candidate pair reached 30 per cent in that year, thus requiring a second round of balloting. Moreover, elections in both places were not only strongly contested, but they also led to bitter electoral disputes that were resolved only through Constitutional Court challenges.

In explaining the 2017 uncontested elections, we draw on literature that explains such races in other democratic countries. Most analyses suggest that elections are uncontested if an incumbent or, more rarely, some other candidate, has overwhelming political strength. This strength can have various sources, and is seen as exercising a deterrent effect on potential challengers: candidates or parties, as rational actors, decide not to waste resources joining races they are likely to lose. Elements of this explanation apply to Indonesia, and the rise of uncontested elections can be viewed as a reflection of the incumbency advantages that entrenched, financially well-resourced and successful regional government heads enjoy.

However, there was a considerable difference between the processes and mechanisms that produced the same outcome in the two locations: in Pati, rival candidates abandoned the competition as a result of a deterrence effect and after pre-electoral manoeuvring within the local political elite; in Jayapura, a set of harsher and even manipulative methods were used to prevent the registration of rival candidates. In both cases, there were potential rivals, but in Pati they were dissuaded from running; in Jayapura, they were prevented. We therefore argue that the rise of uncontested elections might not signify a decline in underlying political competitiveness, but rather a shift of that competition from the electoral arena to pre-electoral processes, whether through bargaining within the political elite or through the use of legal instruments to dispose of competition in advance.

Uncontested Elections and a New Electoral Regime

Uncontested elections are interesting in part because competition is usually assumed to be an essential feature of electoral democracy. The very idea of electoral competition assumes that more than one candidate will be presented to voters, allowing them to choose — and simultaneously to reject — candidates in keeping with their individual preferences. This act of choosing between alternative candidates,

in other words, is a basic function of democratic citizenship. In Joseph A. Schumpeter's terms, the essence of democracy is that "the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them".¹

Of course, uncontested elections are not peculiar to Indonesia. They occur in numerous countries, including established democracies such as the United States, Canada and India, as well as less consolidated or transitional democracies like the Philippines or Poland.² Most explanations of the phenomenon come back to a core factor: the deterrent effects that arise when a candidate, usually but not always an incumbent, is seen as having insurmountable electoral strength. For example, in a study focusing on the US House of Representatives, Peverill Squire argues that such uncontested races usually occur when the sitting member won by a very large margin in the preceding election.³ An incumbent who is very popular within the electorate can generate a "scare-off effect" whereby rival candidates and parties may decide not to expend resources on a competition they believe they are likely to lose. For such reasons, sole candidacy is often seen as being an expression of incumbency advantage.⁴

Of course, the ingredients contributing to an incumbent's electoral strength can vary. As well as past performance, the incumbent's likely electoral strength can be indicated by factors such as the results of opinion surveys, and the financial resources he or she is able to accumulate. Squire explains that, in the US context, a combination of major financial resources on the part of the incumbent, plus a large winning margin in the preceding election, is especially likely to give rise to a scare-off effect.⁵ Similarly, in his research on local politics in the Philippines, John Sidel has pointed to other factors such as entrenched local clans and "bossism", which can provide particular candidates with unrivalled electoral advantages and a strong grip on local sources of political and economic strength.⁶ In some cases, identity factors can play a role, as Michael Herron and Jasjeet Sekhon have explained with regard to ethnic preferences among African-American voters in the United States.⁷

Most existing literature, therefore, assumes that the critical driving factor behind uncontested elections is a deterrent effect produced by major electoral advantages on the part of the dominant party or candidate, generally an incumbent. When elections are predicted to be so uncompetitive that potential challengers have little or no chance of winning, those competitors themselves, whether parties

or individual candidates, may decide to abstain. While we find that this analysis applies to Indonesia, we also show that incumbents can play an active role in this process, scaring off potential rivals not only through the mere fact of their electoral strength, but also by actively manipulating the rules of the political game. Indeed, the mere fact that there is an uncontested election does not necessarily point to the absence of competition: that competition may instead occur prior to election day and result in the political field being cleared of rivals before voting even starts. Our two cases, in fact, demonstrate two striking variations in the pattern. In Pati, the deterrent effect of strong electoral and financial strength on the part of the incumbent was certainly a factor, as was a process of negotiation and consensus building among critical local interest blocs — not least of which were political parties. This was a “soft” pathway towards sole candidacy. In Jayapura, by contrast, the same outcome was produced by a much tougher process that involved active manipulation of electoral rules and institutions and, notably, the use of the courts to block potential rivals.

Before we proceed with analysing our case studies, it is useful, however, to briefly review the institutional context. As already alluded to, uncontested races are a new phenomenon in Indonesia. During the first decade of *pilkada* from 2005 onwards, if there was only one candidate pair, the elections were simply postponed and, in rare cases, an acting regional head was appointed by the central government. In many cases, the impasse was avoided simply by putting forward a “puppet candidate” (*calon boneka*) who allowed the competition to proceed but never stood a chance of winning and was standing as a favour for, or even after payment from, an incumbent.

In 2015, the relevant legal regulation (articles 51 and 52 of the Law No. 8 of 2015 on local elections) stated that at least two candidate pairs had to be registered for an election to take place, and that registration should be reopened if a lesser number registered. When registrations in the 269 regions holding *pilkada* closed in late July 2015, 12 regions had only one candidate and one had none. The General Elections Commission (KPU) reopened registration three times, amid much controversy, but in the end three districts — Blitar, Tasikmalaya and North Central Timor — still had only a single candidate pair registered.

As such, it was initially decided that these three elections would be postponed to 2017, but a case was brought to the Constitutional Court which determined that elections with a single candidate pair

were permissible after a second registration period, allowing these three regions to proceed with uncontested races. For the first time in the decade-long history of *pilkada*, uncontested elections were accommodated as an integral part of the electoral regime. For the 2017 round of *pilkada*, when the KPU opened candidate registrations on 21–23 September 2016, ten regions failed to come up with a second candidate pair, but unlike in 2015 this number barely budged after the second registration period passed, with only the district of Kulon Progo adding a second candidate pair.⁸

Pati: Fusing Political and Economic Power

The uncontested election in Pati was a direct result of the strength of the pair of candidates who ran: the incumbent, Haryanto, and his running mate, Saiful Arifin, a wealthy local businessman. Together these two represented a formidable combination of economic resources, political networks and social capital. Against each other they could have been fierce rivals, but their complementarity — with one providing political strength and the other finances — prompted them to join forces. Hardi, the head of the branch of the Gerinda party, explained what this meant:

If Arifin didn't support Pak Haryanto and stood himself it would change the whole political map in Pati, everything would be shaken up. But with Pak Arifin joining alongside Pak Haryanto automatically nobody would dare to challenge them, and [the election] will be quiet.⁹

It was not simply that these two candidates were endowed with political, financial and social resources, but their complementary nature allowed them to draw multiple layers of party, elite and community interests behind their candidacy, producing a formidable scare-off effect. Let us begin our analysis by considering the sources of these candidates' strengths.

Haryanto possessed very strong social capital. First elected as a *bupati* in 2011, like many of Indonesia's most successful regional heads, he had had a long career in the bureaucracy in the region he ended up leading. He had held many strategic bureaucratic positions, including several in charge of particular administrative regions, allowing him to build up strong networks among local notables and an excellent understanding of influential social and political networks in key parts of the district. Born in Pati, in 1964, he served as the head of the village of Growong Lor during the twilight of the New Order (1996–98), regional secretary of

Juwana subdistrict (1998–2000), and subdistrict head (*camat*) in Sukolilo (2000–1), Trangkil (2000–1) and Juwana (2002–6). He had also occupied several posts that helped him understand and build loyalty within the bureaucracy — still an important electoral asset in regional Indonesia. Some of these positions came early in his career, but especially important was his posting as the head of Badan Kepegawaian Daerah (BKD, Regional Civil Service Affairs Agency) between 2007 and 2009, a post that is critical in determining recruitment and postings within the bureaucracy. The peak of his bureaucratic career came when he served as the leading bureaucrat in Pati, Regional Secretary, in 2009–11. Such a bureaucratic career path is typical of successful regional heads in provincial Indonesia. As well as possessing strong bureaucratic networks, Haryanto had strong links in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the traditionalist Islamic organization, which has a strong mass base in Pati.

Part of the background for Haryanto's success was his record during his preceding five years in office. Certainly, party leaders tended to praise him for his success in fields such as infrastructure, health and education, noting for example that under his leadership Pati's accounts had been given a clean bill of health for the first time by the national audit agency.¹⁰ Many also expressed confidence that the combination of Haryanto's bureaucratic experience plus Arifin's business know-how would encourage investment and economic growth in the district (though in fact it is also likely that at least some of these local party leaders either had or hoped to develop personal business relationships with Arifin). To be sure, this was not a case of strikingly innovative local leadership — such as in Kulon Progo, which is also discussed in this special issue — but it is nevertheless true to say that Haryanto was helped by his record of governmental achievement.

Equally important, in keeping with many incumbent regional heads, especially ones with such deep knowledge and experience of civil administration, Haryanto was able to make use of the government apparatus as a powerful campaign machinery. For example, in January 2017, in the lead-up to the election, a major local sensation was caused by transfers of 671 local civil servants. Haryanto, even though he was not active at this time, was widely believed to have had a hand in these transfers, promoting allies and demoting potential enemies, in order to ensure the bureaucracy campaigned on his behalf. Critics pointed to all sorts of anomalies: people being demoted without justification; those who were close to former or potential candidates being sidelined; and even a new

cultural affairs director who could not speak Javanese.¹¹ In another typical sign of bureaucratic electoral mobilization, much controversy also surrounded the appointment of contract civil servants and their transfer into permanent (and much more lucrative) positions. Many sources informed us that contract government workers who had not supported Haryanto in the 2011 election were not being transferred, while those who demonstrated political loyalty were rewarded. We observed for ourselves on 11 February 2017 a delegation of hundreds of contract teachers who had been promoted to permanent positions participating in one of Haryanto's campaign events in Pati's town square, behind a banner declaring their support for the incumbent. Finally, there were many indications that Haryanto was also able to mobilize support in the very lowest reaches of the state apparatus, namely among village heads and other village officials. He had a reputation for always attending village events when invited, and village heads reciprocated by openly campaigning in his favour.

Haryanto was a strong candidate, so strong that one member of the district parliament said that "even if Haryanto ran with a *becak* [cycle rickshaw] driver he would win".¹² But he also chose his running mate strategically, breaking his links with his incumbent deputy and adding to his own political and bureaucratic strength the economic prowess of Arifin. Over the years, Arifin had accumulated great riches, becoming one of the wealthiest people in the district, and transforming his business from a small-scale informal enterprise into a large-scale business with diverse interests in sectors like hotels and property, and with assets stretching far beyond Pati. The wealth report he submitted when nominated as Haryanto's running mate listed assets amounting to 154 billion rupiah (about US\$11.6 million) while Haryanto reported 4 billion rupiah (US\$295,000).¹³ Such wealth is critical to political success in Pati; as one former PDI-P (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan, Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle) official put it: "For people in Pati, no matter how great a candidate is, if he doesn't have a lot of money there is no way he will make it."¹⁴

Arifin started from modest beginnings. Economic hardship led him to migrate to Jakarta in his youth, where in 1993 he ran a kiosk selling video compact discs in the Pasaraya shopping mall in the Blok M commercial centre. From 1998 he began selling cellular telephones, telephone accessories and credit, riding the wave of the telecommunications boom. His company, Arifindo Mandiri, became a major distributor of PT Telkomsel vouchers. He broadened his

business via Arifin Fimma Putra, another company, which bought property including several hotels in Jakarta, Bogor, Bali and Yogyakarta. In Pati, he owned the three-star Hotel Dafin, the best hotel in that part of northern Central Java. He also bought up a variety of fishing, shipping and livestock businesses in Pati, with all his companies organized as part of the Safin Group.¹⁵

As well as accumulating economic capital, Arifin also built up his social capital, not only in Pati, but also by building national networks through organizations such as Himpunan Pengusaha Muda Indonesia (HIPMI, the Young Indonesian Entrepreneurs' Association) and Kamar Dagang Indonesia (KADIN, the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce). He chaired the South Jakarta branch of HIPMI between 2014 and 2017 and headed the State-Owned Enterprise section of KADIN. He also cultivated close links with party-affiliated organizations, notably the Komunitas Banteng Muda (KBM, Young Bulls Community), a group that was ideologically close to the PDI-P, becoming the chair of its maritime affairs section. He was also active in various local organizations, such as the Ikatan Keluarga Kabupaten Pati (Pati District Family Association), an organization for migrants from Pati living in Jakarta which was led by Firman Subagyo, a Golkar (Golongan Karya, Functional Groups) party member of the national parliament. Finally, he managed two local football teams, PERSIPA Football Club and Safin Football Club.

Becoming Sole Candidates

There is nothing especially surprising in this story so far. It is widely recognized that having strong economic resources and socio-political networks are basic ingredients of success as candidates in *pilkada* throughout Indonesia. Most candidates with such advantages do not get to run for office without having to face opponents, however. Let us therefore turn our attention to the processes by which Haryanto and Arifin achieved this result.

In the first place, Arifin used his economic resources to gain and consolidate support from local party branches and other local elites, in part by funding party activities and incurring all expenses for campaigning purposes. For example, he allowed parties to use the Hotel Safin for meetings and campaign events, free of charge. He also paid for all expenses associated with the nomination and campaign process, lifting all financial burdens from supporting parties and their leaders. For example, whereas local PDI-P functionaries each had to contribute 25 million rupiah (about US\$1,900) during the

Central Java gubernatorial election some years earlier, they were not required to pay anything in 2017. There were also reports that parties prepared to nominate Haryanto and Arifin were rewarded with political “dowries” (*mahar politik*) of 150 million rupiah (US\$11,300) per seat in the district parliament (another common practice in Indonesian local elections), though it was difficult to confirm the sums from the individuals concerned.

At the same time, parties represented in Pati’s local parliament lacked leaders who had the capacity to compete effectively against Haryanto and Arifin, leading to a narrowing of their focus on the pair, especially when it became clear that they were polling very strongly. Though none of the party elites we interviewed shared with us hard copies of surveys conducted in the lead-up to the election, all of them referred to the high electability of Haryanto and Arifin when justifying their decision to back the pair. Jamari, the head of cadre training and organization in the Pati branch of the PDI-P, for example, stated that “all the parties conducted surveys, and all found there was no competition”.¹⁶ Even the district’s famous gambling bosses (*botoh*) came to the same conclusion, as the head of the PKB (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, National Awakening Party), Muhammadun, explained:

Botoh run their own surveys, they are not scientific but they are really accurate, yes, accurate, sometimes they amaze me. They have people checking [the public mood] over months...I don’t know the details but they really go out [into the community], they place their people in the villages. And pay them. They get it almost exactly right, in fact sometimes they are more accurate than surveys using proper methodology. It’s true. Their results are really similar.¹⁷

PDI-P, a key party holding eight seats in the local parliament, explained that their choice to back Haryanto and Arifin was because a survey conducted by the party showed the pair was unbeatable. This was more important than the fact that Haryanto was not a party cadre, having been issued party membership only in 2016. Throughout his political career, Haryanto had never been affiliated to the PDI-P. In 2011 and 2012, through bitterly contested elections, he had defeated the PDI-P candidates. In the 2013 Central Java gubernatorial election he had not supported the victorious PDI-P candidate, Ganjar Pranowo. In the 2014 presidential election he had strongly supported Prabowo, the rival of Jokowi, the PDI-P candidate.¹⁸ Yet the PDI-P greatly wanted to back a winner in 2017, having never won the district head position, despite often winning a

strong vote in legislative elections in Pati. For these reasons, when PDI-P decided to back Haryanto (despite the fact that several party cadres themselves were believed to harbour ambitions to run), other parties saw this as a signal, and rapidly swung behind Haryanto.

Other parties backed Haryanto for essentially the same reason: they thought he would win. Gerindra, which had the same number of seats in the district parliament, gave similar reasons. At first, both Gerindra and PKB had considered backing a different candidate pair. They communicated with Partai Nasional Demokrat (National Democratic Party or NasDem), which had four seats, but NasDem strongly wanted to support Budiyono, Haryanto's deputy *bupati*, who was also a local leader of the PKB. Gerindra backed down, because surveys indicated Budiyono did not stand a chance against Haryanto.¹⁹ PKB, which had six seats, likewise had wanted to support Sudewa, a national Partai Demokrat (Democratic Party) parliamentarian and contractor, along with Budiyono. But because Budiyono insisted on running as a *bupati* candidate, despite surveys showing he stood little chance, in the end PKB shifted to Haryanto and Arifin, prompting Budiyono's resignation from the party.²⁰ As Jamari explained, "Parties don't want to be fooled by their cadres. Decisions are made on the basis of surveys of the reality in the field. If PKB had nominated Budiyono, for instance, but surveys showed he wouldn't win, they would stand to lose. Better to let go of your cadre than to suffer a loss."²¹ In essence, parties in local elections in Indonesia are rational actors.

Though the factors discussed so far were important, they do not fully account for the uncontested nature of the election. An additional factor was even more decisive: debt. Our investigation showed that key potential contenders deserted the field because they remained in debt to Arifin from the 2011 race. Arifin was such a successful local business player that he became a major financier for candidates who contended in 2011. In the first round, Sunarwi, the PDI-P candidate, borrowed from Arifin; in the second round, after Sunarwi's candidacy was annulled by a court decision, Haryanto did so. Several informants explained that other candidates also went into debt to Arifin. In turn, this became a major weapon for Arifin in scaring off potential challengers.

In sum, what we see in Pati is a classic scare-off case. To be sure, there were candidates who wanted to run against Haryanto, but the parties decided against backing them when they looked at the electoral odds, and weighed up the advantages of joining the winning coalition. Those candidates still had the option of running

as independent candidates, without party support, but presumably they lacked the time, networks and resources for doing so. Though some residents of Pati were apparently unhappy with this outcome — evidenced by the fact that about a quarter voted for the “blank box” option when the vote was eventually held — some members of the local political elite expressed satisfaction, saying that an uncontested election reduced the risk of conflict and minimized expenditure on campaigning.²²

Uncontested by Force in Jayapura

If the uncontested election in Pati was primarily the result of a political process in which dissuasion of potential challengers was the main mechanism, the story in Jayapura involved a much more active role on the part of the incumbent. Unlike in Pati, challengers did not abandon the political field. They wanted to run, but were prevented from doing so when the incumbent’s camp used legal mechanisms to stymie them. This was a much harsher route to sole candidacy.

This route became possible because two parties ostensibly gave support to separate candidates. By the time registration of nominations closed on 23 September 2016, three candidate pairs had submitted their names to the electoral commission in Jayapura.²³ The first comprised the incumbent mayor, Benhur Tomi Mano, and his running mate, Rustan Saru. They were nominated by a super-coalition of eight parties that together held 33 of the 40 seats in the Jayapura city legislature (PDI-P with four seats, NasDem with three, PAN (Partai Amanat Nasional, National Mandate Party) with four, Golkar with seven, Gerindra with four, PKB with three, PKPI (Partai Keadilan dan Persatuan Indonesia, Indonesian Justice and Unity Party) with four and Hanura (Hati Nurani Bangsa, Conscience of the Nation) with four. This was despite the fact that in order to gain a nomination, a candidate pair needed only to be supported by parties with a total of eight seats. Next were Boy Markus Dawir, a Partai Demokrat politician and chair of Commission IV in the Papua People’s Representative Council (DPRP) who was running alongside the incumbent deputy mayor, Nuralam. They were ostensibly nominated by three parties which together held ten seats: Partai Demokrat with four; PPP (Partai Persatuan Pembangunan, Unity Development Party) with two; PKPI with four; and PKS (Partai Keadilan Sejahtera, Prosperous Justice Party) which did not hold a seat in the city legislature. The third pair was Abisai Rollo, a

businessman, *adat* (customary law) leader and Golkar functionary, and Dipo Wibowo, who were ostensibly nominated by Golkar with its seven seats and PBB (Partai Bulan Bintang, Star and Moon Party) with one seat.

The fact that Golkar gave its support to two candidate pairs, Benhur–Rustan and Abisa–Dipo, while PKPI supported both Benhur–Rustan and Boy–Nuralam, gave rise to an immediate and obvious problem given that electoral rules prohibited parties from supporting multiple pairs. Benhur’s camp quickly took advantage of this problem to frustrate the candidacy of their rivals.

Before we examine how this happened, it is worth to look briefly at the backgrounds of the candidate pairs. Their profiles were typical of candidates in regional elections in Indonesia, with each pair combining bureaucratic experience, party links, ethnic coalitions and experience in local businesses, notably the construction sector. Each pair also represented a cross-ethnic coalition, with each mayoral candidate being a member of the indigenous Numbay ethnic group and each running mate being a prominent member of a migrant community. Election candidate pairs in Jayapura usually try to win votes from the two big ethnic groups there: the indigenous Numbay population, and migrants from Sulawesi, Java, Madura, Sumatra and elsewhere.

Benhur was obviously the strongest candidate, given that he had been incumbent mayor since 2011. He began his bureaucratic career in 1990 in the *kabupaten* (rural district) of Jayapura, starting in the government service bureau, becoming a subdistrict secretary, and then serving as subdistrict head (*camat*) in Nomboran and Abepura between 2000 and 2005. He then moved to Jayapura city and served in various posts for a decade. Outside the bureaucracy, he was the chairperson of Persipura, a hugely popular football team, and of FKPPPI (Forum Komunikasi Putra-Putri Purnawirawan Indonesia), an organization of children of retired police and military officers. He had become close to the PDI-P, with his wife being appointed the provincial treasurer of the party in 2015. Benhur’s running mate, Rustan, was born in South Sulawesi and is one of the leading figures in the large community of migrants from that province in Papua where he led the major ethnic association, the Kerukunan Keluarga Susel (KKSS). He also chaired Papua’s branch of PAN, was a member of the provincial parliament and a construction contractor.

Boy was another prominent construction contractor, having held leadership positions in three major associations of contractors, namely, Asosiasi Tenaga Ahli Pemborong Indonesia (Atapi), Asosiasi

Konstruksi Pemborong Indonesia (Askopindo Papua) and Asosiasi Rekanan Pengadaan Barang dan Distributor (Ardindo). He was also a leading figure with the Papua Chamber of Commerce (Kadin). Before joining the Democrat Party in 2015 he had been a member of Golkar, and had served as first deputy chair and then chair of the Papua parliament's Commission D between 2009 and 2014. His running mate, Nuralam, was a Bugis from South Sulawesi and had been an economics lecturer at Cenderawasih University before becoming deputy mayor in 2010. Abisai, meanwhile, was the Deputy Chair of Golkar and chair of Commission A in the provincial parliament. He had stood for election as mayor twice previously, and was a wealthy real estate developer, owning the Rollo Green Diamond company. He chaired yet another association of construction contractors, Gabungan Pelaksana Konstruksi Nasional Indonesia (Gapensi) in Jayapura. His running mate, Dipo Wibowo, was the head of the Himpunan Kerukunan Jawa Madura Provinsi Papua (Papua Province Harmony Association of Javanese and Madurese), and another construction contractor and wholesaler. In sum, these candidates represented the usual mixture of bureaucratic authority and rent-seeking business interests we see dominating many local political contests throughout regional Indonesia. Benhur was the strongest candidate, given his incumbency, but his rivals were obviously not weak either.

Dispensing with the Opposition

In the weeks leading to the election, complex legal procedures were followed to deal with the conflicts with two of the parties over which candidate pair their party would support. During the verification phase of the nominations of the various candidates, the General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) in Jayapura sought clarification from the Central Leadership Board (Dewan Pimpinan Pusat, DPP) of the Golkar party about its support for two candidates (Article 8 of KPU Regulation no. 9 of 2016 requires nominations to be accompanied by an endorsement by the central leadership of a party). The board confirmed that it only supported the Benhur–Rustan pair, prompting the KPU to issue a decree stating that Abisai–Dipo had failed to pass the verification stage, effectively annulling their candidacy and ensuring that only Boy–Nuralam and Benhur–Rustan would compete in the election.

However, there were many oddities in the series of events that produced this outcome. At the start, Abisai–Dipo had been the only

candidate pair to gain Golkar's support. That support was confirmed in a 6 June 2016 formal recommendation letter issued in the name of the party's central board and signed by its general chairperson, Setya Novanto, and party secretary Idrus Marham, and witnessed by Nurdin Halid, the *ketua harian* (chair for daily affairs).²⁴ However, towards the end of the nomination period, the central board issued a recommendation letter favouring Benhur–Rustan, though without the endorsement of the *ketua harian*. The Jayapura Golkar branch rejected this decision and continued to support Abisai–Dipo. The central board refused to relent, however, pointing to an internal survey saying that Benhur had a greater chance of winning. It also claimed that Benhur was being prepared to head up the city branch.²⁵ Many observers questioned whether electability really was the crux of the issue; Abisai was widely admired for his ability to increase Golkar's share of seats in the city parliament to seven in 2014. Syamsuddin Usman, a former member of the city KPU and a supporter of Abisai, for example, explained that "Even if they say that the survey didn't support Abisai, the fact is that they had those seven seats in the council. Those seven seats comprised a party machine and were the most [of any party]. They could help."²⁶

It was also widely rumoured in elite circles, though we were unable to verify this, that "money politics" had played a role in the shift of support from Abisai to Benhur. Numerous reports circulated suggesting that Benhur had paid approximately 12 billion rupiah (US\$900,000) to attain the support of Golkar alone. Abisai, for his part, was asked to pay the same amount if he wanted to retain the recommendation. According to a source close to Abisai, "if Pak Abi wanted to get the recommendation back he would have had to pay a lot".²⁷

Abisai appealed the decision to the local election regulatory body, but was rejected, and to the administrative court in Makassar, but here the appeal failed because it was submitted too late.²⁸ It was too late because Abisai had been asked by Golkar leaders to send his case to the party's own internal dispute resolution body, again pointing towards manipulation within the party to disadvantage Abisai.²⁹ Abisai's failure led to tension, with rumours that there would be bloodshed between supporters of the rival camp, and with a Molotov cocktail at one point thrown at the home of the Jayapura Golkar party secretary.³⁰

With Abisai–Dipo out of the way, it was now the turn of the Boy–Nuralam pair. Once the local KPU decided on 25 November

2016 that only Benhur–Rustan and Boy–Nuralam were eligible to contest the election, the obvious problem was that both of these candidate pairs were supported by the same party, PKPI, which was then experiencing a severe internal conflict at the national level, which had produced rival boards.³¹ The statement of PKPI support for Benhur–Rustan was signed by the leaders of one of these boards, namely, Haris Sudarno, general chairperson and Samuel Samson, the general secretary. The statement supporting Boy–Nuralam was signed by rival general chairperson, Isran Noor, and Takudaeng Parawansa, his deputy secretary. Ramses, the chair of the PKPI's Papua branch, meanwhile, refused to back Benhur–Rustan because he wanted there to be a real contest in the election. He also suspected money politics lay behind the efforts to sabotage the candidacy of Boy, accusing Benhur of having paid PKPI 4 billion rupiah (US\$300,000) at a rate of 1 billion rupiah per seat in the city legislature.³² However, the PKPI was also split locally, with Ramses opposed by Junaedi Rahim, the chairperson of the Jayapura party branch, and the party's three other members of the city DPRD (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, Regional People's Representative Assembly) who supported the decision to back Benhur. This split provided a legal avenue the Benhur–Rustan camp could exploit.

However, according to the official database held by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights, the registered leaders of the PKPI were Isran Noor as chairperson and Samuel Samson as secretary-general.³³ Accordingly, when Benhur appealed against the KPU's decision to affirm the candidacy of the Boy–Nuralam pair to the local Election Supervisory Agency (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum, Bawaslu), this appeal was rejected on the grounds that Isran Noor was the legally recognized leader of the party.³⁴ But the Benhur–Rustan camp appealed this decision to the Administrative Court in Makassar, which inexplicably decided in their favour on 6 December 2016, ordering the KPU to invalidate Boy and Nuralam's candidacy, and giving rise to widespread suspicions among Benhur's opponents that bribery may have played a role in producing this decision. The Jayapura KPU lodged an appeal with the Supreme Court in Jakarta, but this was cancelled by the national KPU.

This series of events led to some serious repercussions for several members of local electoral bodies. The Honorary Council of Election Administrators (Dewan Kehormatan Penyelenggara Pemilu, DKPP) in Jakarta on 20 January 2017 decided to dismiss three members of the Jayapura KPU, while reprimanding two others. It also dismissed two members and the head of the Jayapura Election

Supervisory Committee (Panitia Pengawas Pemilihan, Panwaslih) and reprimanded two of its members. One critical failing identified by the DKPP was that the KPU should have immediately identified the problem with the PKPI, alerting Benhur–Rustam that their endorsement was from a PKPI board that was not recognized by the government or the central KPU.

In the end, the provincial branch of the KPU took over the implementation of the election. Despite fears of violent clashes between the rival camps, it proceeded peacefully and Benhur, standing uncontested, won 84.34 per cent of the votes cast. The fact that two parties had supported two different candidate pairs provided the entry point for a legal process which the Benhur camp exploited ruthlessly to clear the field of rivals. We do not know the extent to which this whole scenario was merely a fortuitous development which Benhur and his allies took advantage of, or whether it was planned from the start. Nor do we know the extent to which judicial bribery played a role in generating the ultimate outcome, even if Benhur's critics allege this to be the case. The case does, however, point towards the ways in which incumbents can actively undermine challenges by political opponents in regional Indonesia.

Conclusion

The two cases discussed in this article suggest different pathways to uncontested local elections in contemporary Indonesia. The story in Pati illustrates the sort of dynamic that the existing literature on such elections might lead us to expect: a combination of incumbency advantage, strong survey results, and financial strength prompting a rush of parties to support the strongest candidate pair. There was a “scare-off effect” for parties that might otherwise have nominated their own candidates. Most such parties did not leave the field altogether, however, which is what we would expect in more programmatic political systems; instead, they flocked to the strongest candidate pair, consistent with what we know about the pattern of party cartels in Indonesia.³⁵ In Jayapura, by contrast, the incumbent played a much more active role, and parties and competitors were not scared off, but actually tried to run. Despite his own strengths, and the oversized coalition that backed him, the incumbent used whatever legal mechanisms he could to successfully challenge the validity of the nomination of his rivals. It was widely understood in Jayapura that these efforts

included corrupt payments. Although we must stress that we could not find definitive evidence to substantiate such claims, it should be noted that such practices are very common in many parts of Indonesia, particularly in Papua.³⁶

However, in one critical respect these elections were similar: in neither case, despite the uncontested election, was there a complete absence of *contestation*. On the contrary, in both places various would-be candidates very much wanted to contest these elections. In both cases, such candidates took great efforts to secure the support of political parties and other networks. However, their efforts were confined to the period leading up to and, in the case of Jayapura, immediately following the nomination process. In short, in both cases, there was an element of competition, even if it only occurred inside the local political elite. We might therefore think of these cases not so much as uncontested elections, but as cases in which incumbents won a *pre-electoral elite competition*.

Again, however, we should emphasize that such pre-electoral competition was resolved by very different methods. In Pati, it was resolved through elite bargaining and compromise, and the eventual formation of an all-encompassing cartel. This was a “win-win solution”, at least for most of the elite actors involved. In Jayapura, by contrast, the pre-electoral competition was much tougher, and took the form of a zero-sum game. The first outcome points towards a strengthening of the trends of oligarchy and cartel politics that have been identified in studies of Indonesian national and local politics, whereas the second suggests a more serious undermining of democratic institutions and competition. At this stage, it seems that the former pattern is more common among uncontested elections: in the seven other cases in 2017 we found reports of disputes only in one (Sorong), but this was not as protracted or bitter as in Jayapura.

Whichever pattern is the more common, it seems clear that uncontested elections are likely to persist in Indonesia. In 2017, uncontested elections occurred in widely varied locations and political settings, and despite the fact that the KPU extended deadlines available to encourage other candidates to come forward. In every case where an uncontested candidate won, that person won handsomely (voters have the option of voting for a “blank box” option on the ballot paper in such cases), with totals ranging from 96.75 per cent in West Tulang Bawang to 55.68 per cent in Buton where the incumbent won despite having been charged by the Corruption Eradication Commission. Moreover, we cannot

explain all these victories by pointing to incumbency advantage. Of the uncontested races in 2017, only one candidate was not an incumbent: in Landak, West Kalimantan she was Karolin Margaret, the daughter of the province's governor, a national parliamentarian and a powerful politician in her own right. But she was the exception that proves the rule: Karolin Margaret was a leading member of a local political dynasty, and able to mobilize sufficient party, financial and bureaucratic strength to scare off potential rivals.

Scholars have for some time been pointing towards a "Philippinization" of Indonesian politics, highlighting such phenomena as the weakening of political parties, the rise of local dynasties, the personalization of political competition, and the dominance of "politico-capitalists who, often operating from provincial bases, have entered the political arena, bringing with them clientelistic patterns of internal party organization, systematic vote buying and political corruption".³⁷ The rise of uncontested elections in Indonesia seems to confirm that trend, adding one more dimension where Indonesian politics is increasingly resembling that of its neighbour: in the 2016 elections in the Philippines, 506 of a total 8,435 candidates running for local government executive posts did so in uncontested races — 14 as governors, 14 as deputy governors, 222 as mayors and 256 as deputy mayors. Uncontested races occurred in 73 out of 81 provinces.³⁸ Indonesia's record is still nothing like this, but the beginnings of a trend are visible.

Above all, the rise of uncontested elections points to a process of elite entrenchment in Indonesian local politics. Though they used different methods to clear the field of rivals, uncontested candidates in Pati, Jayapura, as elsewhere, were powerful local political bosses who were able to mobilize political and economic capital. They were also able to win the support of broad sections of the politico-business elite, and it is this factor which is likely to ensure the trend continues. Political parties, for example, provided they can join a local cartel backing a strong local candidate, have little incentive to buck the trend towards uncontested elections. Even local election committees are unlikely to object, given that uncontested elections are generally easier to organize. Even if, as we have argued, these uncontested elections often involve considerable pre-electoral competition and bargaining, these are processes from which ordinary citizens are excluded. The rise of uncontested elections should therefore be seen as a trend that involves a narrowing of space for political participation, and for local democracy itself.

NOTES

- ¹ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 284–85.
- ² See, for example, Katie England, “Most Utah County State Representatives Run Unopposed”, *Herald Extra*, 6 November 2016, available at <http://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/govt-and-politics/elections/most-utah-county-state-representatives-run-unopposed/article_61d18e14-d9e0-588f-a459-f8632450b564.html>; “Some British Columbia Mayoral Candidates Win by Acclamation”, *CBC News*, 15 November 2008, available at <<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/some-b-c-mayoral-candidates-win-by-acclamation-1.773914>>; Aadil Ikram Zaki Iqbal, “TMC: Shiv Sena’s Meenakshi Shinde Elected Thane Mayor Unopposed”, *India*, 6 March 2017, available at <<http://www.india.com/news/india/tmc-shiv-senas-meenakshi-shinde-elected-thane-mayor-unopposed-1896466/>>; Reynaldo Santos Jr., “2016 Local Races: Lone Candidates, Fewer Voter Choices”, *Rappler*, 4 May 2016, available at <<http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/131526-2016-philippine-elections-unopposed-lone-local-candidates>>; Adam Gendzwill, Tomasz Zoltaks, Jakub Rutkowski, “Uncontested Elections, Missing Candidates: Why Do Certain Electoral Committees Refuse to Nominate Candidates for Mayors?”, *Studia Regionalne I Lokalne* 64, no. 2 (December 2015): 64–79.
- ³ Peverill Squire, “Competition and Uncontested Seats in U.S. House Elections”, *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 2 (May 1989): 281–95. See also Jamie L. Carson, Erik J. Engstrom and Jason M. Roberts, “Candidate Quality, the Personal Vote, and the Incumbency Advantage in Congress”, *American Political Science Review* 101, no. 2 (May 2007): 290.
- ⁴ Adam Gendzwill, Tomasz Zoltaks and Jakub Rutkowski, “Uncontested Elections, Missing Candidates: Why Do Certain Electoral Committees Refuse to Nominate Candidates for Mayors?”, *Studia Regionalne I Lokalne* 64, no. 2 (December 2015): 64–79.
- ⁵ Squire, “Competition and Uncontested Seats”, op. cit., pp. 281–95.
- ⁶ John T. Sidel, “Philippine Politics in Town, District, and Province Bossism in Cavite and Cebu”, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56, no. 4 (November 1997): 947–86.
- ⁷ Michael C. Herron and Jasjeet S. Sekhon, “Black Candidates and Black Voters: Assessing the Impact of Candidate Race on Uncounted Vote Rates”, *The Journal of Politics* 67, no. 1 (February 2005): 154–77.
- ⁸ Another institutional change leading to more uncontested elections was a change in the law that required legislators (members of the national and local parliaments) to resign from their seats if they wanted to contest local government head positions: see article 7 of Law No. 10 of 2016.
- ⁹ Author interview with Hardi, 10 February 2017.
- ¹⁰ Author interview with Karmijan, legislator representing PKS, 17 January 2017.
- ¹¹ Author interview with Jumadi, a former PDI-P official who was critical of Haryanto, 10 February 2017.
- ¹² Author interview with Rusydi, DPRD member representing PPP, 18 January 2017.

- ¹³ Lismanto, “Kekayaan Cawabup Pati Saiful Arifin Capai 154 Miliar” [Wealth of Pati Bupati Candidate Saiful Arifin is 154 Billion], *Muria News*, 19 November 2016, available at <<http://www.murianews.com/2016/11/19/101160/kekayaan-cawabup-pati-saiful-arifin-capai-rp-154-miliar.html>>.
- ¹⁴ Author interview with Jamari, 9 February 2017.
- ¹⁵ Author interview with Saiful Arifin, 10 February 2017.
- ¹⁶ Author interview with Jamari, 9 February 2017.
- ¹⁷ Author interview with Muhammadun, 10 February 2017. On the role of *botoh* in elections in this part of Java, see Zusiana Elly Triantini, “Blora, Central Java: Local Brokers and Vote Buying”, in *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia: Money Politics, Patronage and Clientelism at the Grassroots*, edited by Edward Aspinall and Mada Sukmajati (Singapore: NUS Press, 2016), pp. 249–63.
- ¹⁸ Author interview with Jamari, 9 February 2017.
- ¹⁹ Author interview with Hardi, 10 February 2017.
- ²⁰ Author interview with Muhammadun, 10 February 2017.
- ²¹ Author interview with Jamari, 9 February 2017.
- ²² Author interview with Joni Kurnianto, head of Pati branch of the Demokrat Party, 21 January 2017.
- ²³ Author interview with Artaban Waskat Awinero, activist in the Port Numbay Crises Centre and Jhona Dostenes Weyai, activist in Lembaga Forum Anak Kampung, 12 January 2017.
- ²⁴ Author interview with Syamsuddin Usman, 13 January 2017.
- ²⁵ Author interview with Artaban and Dostenes, 12 January 2017, and confidential interview in Kota Raja, 13 January 2017.
- ²⁶ Author interview with Syamsuddin Usman, 13 January 2017.
- ²⁷ Confidential interview, 20 January 2017.
- ²⁸ Author interview with Yusuf Sraung, Komisioner (Commissioner), KPU Kota Jayapura, 20 January 2017.
- ²⁹ Author interview with Othniel Merauje, 9 January 2017.
- ³⁰ “Rumah Sekretaris DPD Golkar Papua Dilempar Bom Rakitan, Mobil Rusak” [Homemade Bomb Thrown at Home of Secretary of the Regional Leadership Council of Golkar, Car Damaged], *Detik*, 13 October 2016, available at <<http://news.detik.com/berita/d-3319914/rumah-sekretaris-dpd-golkar-papua-dilempar-bom-rakitan-mobil-rusak>>.
- ³¹ On this national split in the party, see Muhammad Taufiqqurahman, “Ini Akar Perpecahan PKPI yang Berbuntut Dualisme Kepemimpinan” [This is the Root of the Split in PKPI which has led to Leadership Dualism], *Detik*, 29 August 2016, available at <<http://news.detik.com/internasional/3285602/ini-akar-perpecahan-pkpi-yang-berbuntut-dualisme-kepemimpinan>>.
- ³² Author interview with Ramses Wally, 4 April 2017.
- ³³ Surat Kemenhukam kepada Direktorat Jenderal Administrasi Hukum [Letter of Ministry of Law and Human Rights to Directorate General for Legal Administration] No. MTTHH/19.HH11.01 Tahun 2015, 10 November; Surat Keputusan Kemenhukam, Direktorat Jenderal Administrasi Hukum [Decision of

Ministry of Law and Human Rights, specifically Directorate General for Legal Administration] No. AHU.4.AH.11.01/84, 20 September 2016.

- ³⁴ Fabio Mario Lopez Costa, “Gugatan Benhur-Rustan Ditolak, Tak Ada Calon Tunggal di Kota Jayapura” [Benhur–Rustan Case Rejected, No Sole Candidate in the City of Jayapura], *Kompas*, 11 November 2016, available at <<http://regional.kompas.com/read/2016/11/11/19193371/gugatan.benhur-rustan.ditolak.tak.ada.calon.tunggal.di.kota.jayapura>>.
- ³⁵ Dan Slater, “Indonesia’s Accountability Trap: Party Cartels and Presidential Power after Democratic Transition”, *Indonesia* 78 (October 2004): 61–92; Kuskridho Ambardi, *Mengungkap Politik Kartel: Studi tentang Sistem Kepartaian di Indonesia Era Reformasi* [Uncovering the Politics of Cartels: A Study of Indonesia’s Party System in the Reform Era] (Jakarta: Kepustakaan Populer Gramedia, 2009).
- ³⁶ Cillian Nolan, “Papua’s Central Highlands: The Noken System, Brokers and Fraud”, in *Electoral Dynamics in Indonesia*, op. cit., pp. 398–415.
- ³⁷ Edward Aspinall, “Elections and the Normalization of Politics in Indonesia”, *South East Asia Research* 13, no. 2 (July 2005): 121. See also Andreas Ufen, “Political Parties in Post-Suharto Indonesia: Between Politik Aliran and ‘Philippinisation’”, *GIGA Working Paper* 37 (December 2006).
- ³⁸ Reynaldo Santos Jr., “2016 Local Races: Lone Candidates, Fewer Voter Choices”, *Rappler*, 4 May 2016, available at <<http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/131526-2016-philippine-elections-unopposed-lone-local-candidates>>; Gerard Lim, “By the Numbers: Candidates in the 2016 Elections”, *Rappler*, 25 April 2016, available at <<http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/130157-statistics-2016-elections-candidates>>.