

Beyond Measuring the Voice of the People: The Evolving Role of Political Polling in Indonesia's Local Leader Elections

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Since 2005, political polling and the application of polls-based candidacy have been enormously influential and, in fact, have become vital for local leader elections (*Pilkada*), particularly in Indonesia's districts and municipalities. The Golkar Party's declaration that it was moving to polls-based candidacy created a domino effect, inducing other major political parties—such as the National Mandate Party (Partai Amanat Nasional, PAN), the Democratic Party (Partai Demokrat, PD), and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan, PDIP)—to follow Golkar's approach to contesting local constituencies. As polling becomes a new device for reforming the political recruitment process, political polling exercises have also unintendedly transformed into a means for waging a power struggle. Political actors have exploited polling as a tool for gaining a political vehicle, as a map for soliciting bribes, as a map for guiding the mobilization of votes, and as a means for inviting an indirect bandwagon effect. In short, political polling has moved beyond acting as a tracker of voters' preferences to become a popular political device.

Keywords: political polling, local leader elections, democratization, Indonesia

Introduction

Following the fall of Suharto in 1998, Indonesia embarked on an intensive project of local democratization. Under the banner of applying Law Number 32 of 2004 regarding "Regional Government," local leaders—such as governors, district leaders (*bupati*), and mayors—were to be directly elected by the people for the first time in Indonesian political history. In particular, from June 2005 onward, Indonesia began experiencing two enormous waves of direct local leader elections (*Pemilu Kepala Daerah, Pemilukada* or *Pilkada*; hereafter *Pilkada*). The first episode was from mid-2005 to the beginning of

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