

## Political Behaviour of the Indonesian Middle Class: Lower Turnouts in More Modernised Areas

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### Abstract

The modernisation theory assumes that the larger the middle class, the more likely democracy is supported; for example, there will be more participation in elections, as shown in Western countries. However, there is no clear evidence on whether this trend also appears in developing countries. This study emphasises the association between the proportion of the middle class and the support for democracy in terms of voter turnout. Irrespective of the nature of the elections, we suppose that the modernisation level, proxied by the middle-class share, determines voter turnouts. Using data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) and the General Election Commission (KPU), we differentiate the voter turnouts in Indonesia's general election in 2019 at the district or city levels by grouping them into modernised and less-modernized regions, i.e., urban versus rural, Java versus outside Java, and western versus eastern regions. This study documented a deviation from the modernisation theory, evidenced by an unclear association between the proportion of the middle class and the voter turnout in the modernised areas. Counterintuitively, there are positive associations in the less modernised areas. The findings also reveal the selective participation among voters, as they showed different participation levels in the types of elections conducted in one day. They were more active in presidential elections than in parliamentary elections. In developing countries like Indonesia, the expansion of the middle class, followed by the declining number of rural regions, may lead to a decline in voter turnouts, thus raising demand for good governance and better performance of parties and candidates.

### Keywords:

middle class; modernisation; voter turnout; Indonesia

### Introduction

#### Overview of the Political Role of Indonesian Middle Class

Indonesia's stable economic growth, followed by the rapid growth of the middle class and the success of democratic elections, has attracted scholars' interest in the past years. For example, in 2019, the general election saw a significant increase in voting participation. In the same year, Indonesia reached a new milestone and became an upper-middle-income country. The possible link between the turnout in the 2019 election and the expanding

middle class is a phenomenon that may be worth investigating.

In addition, this study is also motivated by the history of the global and regional political landscape. Samuel Huntington, quoting Alexis de Tocqueville, argued that the French Revolution was not sparked by poor peasants but rather by the middle class. Likewise, the history of the Southeast Asia region has also documented the middle-class movements. For example, the Philippines' middle class initiated the 1986 People Power Revolution, which overthrew the Marcos dictatorship

(Hsiao, 2018). Similar movements also emerged in Indonesia and Malaysia during the Asia financial crisis in 1998 (Ooi et al., 2018). In Thailand, in the 2010s, the middle class was in dispute with the upper and the military classes, challenging their abilities to instigate political activities (Fukuyama, 2018).

Regarding electoral participation, we may highlight what the French philosopher Sieyes said during the French Revolution. In his opinion, rather than a right, voting is a civic duty to be performed only by competent and responsible citizens who possess sufficient material wealth. These individuals are “active” citizens, while those with insufficient wealth are “passive” citizens and should be denied the right to vote. In other words, the citizens’ ability to understand the political mechanism and to responsibly participate in elections is determined by asset ownership (Nadeau et al., 2017). Hence, people with better incomes and educational backgrounds are more likely to vote in established democracies.

In Indonesia, during colonialization, well-educated intellectuals were involved in the anti-colonial movement and pursued independence. They originated from bureaucratic families, professionals, traders, and manufacturing owners who were considered the middle class (Zed, 2017). In the following decades, under the dictatorship of the New Order Era, movements were halted until the middle class gained the spirit to revitalize democratization in the fall of this regime in 1998 (Yusuf et al., 2022).

Since the middle class is considered a product of development, scholars employ the modernization theory to analyze its political behaviour. The theory assumes that the larger the proportion of the middle class, the more likely democracy will be supported, which will translate into, among other things, more electoral participation. In a democracy, voting participation is important since it determines who governs, measures democratic health, and symbolizes the existence of suffrage as formal

barriers to voter participation are eliminated (Nadeau et al., 2017).

However, the relationship between the proportion of the middle class and voter turnout has not been agreed upon (Schotte, 2021). The relationship is complex and influenced by a range of factors, which may affect an individual’s likelihood of participating in the political process, including race, gender, and age (Dermont & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2018). At the individual level, studies have also shown that those who exit poverty and move to the middle class tend to become more politically engaged and are more likely to vote in elections (Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). Meanwhile, another study discovered that individuals in the middle class were less likely to cast ballots (Mujani et al., 2018).

The middle-class expansion has key impacts on political regimes from political, social, and economic perspectives (Kotzè & García-Rivero, 2018). Therefore, this study examines the association between the share of the middle class in the population and voter turnout. The middle class is closely correlated with modernization. More modernized regions, as indicated by higher middle-class populations, are expected to show more electoral participation than those with lower middle-class populations. In Indonesia, we can categorize the urban, in Java, and western regions as the more modernized, while the rural, outside Java, and eastern regions are the less modernized ones. Using data from the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) by BPS and data from KPU, this study observed the political behavior of the Indonesian middle class. How are the varieties of voter turnouts in areas with different levels of modernization? And what is the association between the middle-class populations and voter turnouts?

This study aims to add to the literature by investigating the relationship between modernization and political participation. Literature generally observes the relationship

between the middle class and voter turnout using macro data at the country level or documenting individuals' responses. Hence, we fill the literature gap by proxying modernization and illustrating the macroeconomic conditions at the sub-national level using the proportion of the middle class in the population. The objective of this study is to observe the link between the variety in voter turnouts and the proportion of the middle class. The distinctive contribution of this study is that it provides empirical evidence of the association between the middle-class population and voter turnout. Therefore, the findings add to discussions about the relationship between the middle-class population and the quality of democracy, as measured by voter turnout. This should help us better understand the political dynamics in Indonesia as affected by the attitudes and actions of the middle class.

We present descriptive analysis and use the Ordinary Least Square as an empirical method for observing the association between the share of the middle class and the resulting voter turnout. In general, the findings show that the middle-class population is not associated with voter turnout. Counterintuitively, there is a positive association between the middle-class populations and voter turnouts in the parliamentary elections in less modernized regions. The findings also show that people participated more in presidential elections, which indicates the existence of selective participation by Indonesian voters.

We develop the argument for these claims through the following sections: Section 2 summarizes the research design and estimation strategy. Section 3 presents the study results and discusses them in Section 4. The last section is Section 5, which presents concluding remarks.

### **The Growth of the Middle Class in Indonesia**

Regardless of different data sources, thresholds, and classifications, The World Bank

(2019) and Dartanto et al. (2020) documented the increasing middle-class population in Indonesia. According to the World Bank, in general, there are five economic classes based on average daily expenditure: a) the underprivileged, who live below the poverty line (<US\$ 2.20); b) the vulnerable, whose income ranges from 1.0 to 1.5 times the poverty line (US\$ 2.20 – 3.30); c) the Aspiring Middle Class (AMC) whose income ranges from 1.5 and 3.5 times the poverty line (US\$ 3.30 – 7.75); d) the Middle Class (MC), who make between 3.5 and 17 times the poverty line or (US\$ 7.75 – 38); and e) Upper Class (UC), who make more than 17 times the poverty line (>US\$ 38). Specific to Indonesia, using data from the Susenas, the World Bank estimated the Indonesian middle class's expansion by threefold, from seven per cent in 2002 to 23 per cent in 2018 (The World Bank, 2019). According to Dartanto et al. (2020), there are five income-based groups: a) extremely poor (< US\$ 1.9), b) poor (US\$ 1.90 - 3.20), c) emerging (US\$ 3.2 - 5.5), d) middle class (US\$ 5.5 - 15.5), and e) upper class (>US\$ 15.3). Applying these thresholds to Indonesian Family Life Survey (IFLS) data, the middle class made up 4.2% of the population in Indonesia in 1993, 7% in 1999, 8.3% in 2000, 18.3% in 2007, and 36.2% in 2014.

Unfortunately, due to disparities between rural and urban, Java and outside Java, as well as between western and eastern Indonesia, the middle and upper classes are unevenly distributed (Wilsonyudho et al., 2017). The middle and upper classes are mainly concentrated in urban, Java, and western regions. On the other hand, people living in rural areas do not have easy access to large sums of money. Their jobs are often blue-collar, and they have less education and make less money (Mujani et al., 2018). The percentage of the middle class in Indonesian districts in 2018 (prior to the 2019 elections) is shown in Figure 1.

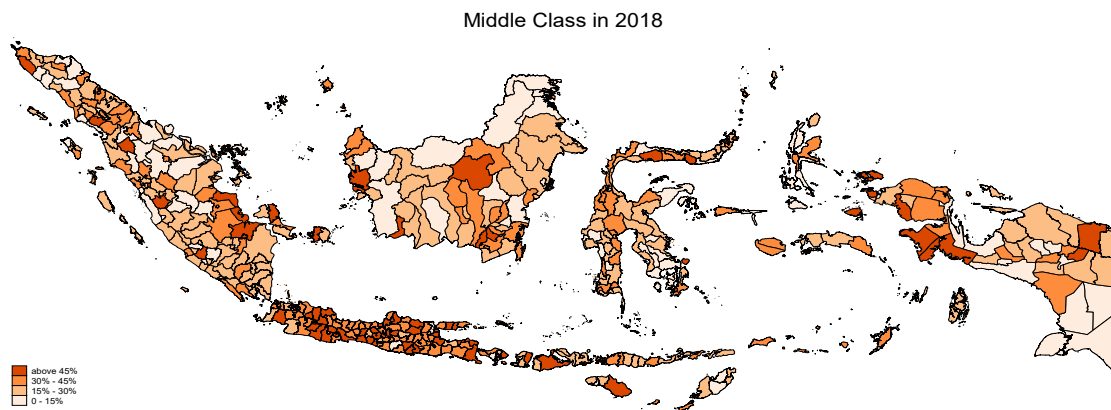


Figure 1. The share of the middle-class population with a threshold of \$5.5–15.3 PPP per day prior to the 2019 elections

Source: Susenas

### Elections and Voter Turnouts in Indonesia

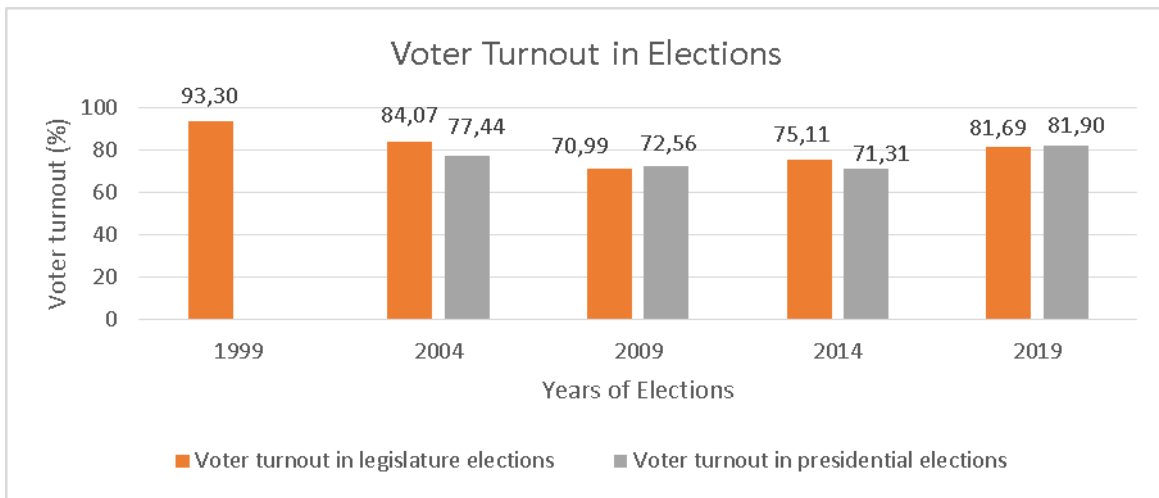
The history of Indonesian democracy and the electoral system are marked with fundamental shifts. From 1945 to 1959, under the first president, Indonesia adopted liberal representative democracy under Parliamentary Democracy. This was followed by the Guided Democracy, which lasted from 1959 to 1967 and was more like a suppressed democracy that bordered on authoritarian dictatorship. From 1968 to 1998, dictatorship dominated the Indonesian political system under the New Order era led by the second president (Virananda et al., 2021).

In the electoral system, the first democratic parliamentary elections were in 1955. Following this, six parliamentary elections were held between 1971 and 1997 in a way that was hardly democratic: the 1971, 1977, 1982, 1987, 1992, and 1997 elections. Later, in the reformation era, Indonesia conducted five democratic elections every five years from 1999 to 2019. Indonesia has held presidential elections since 2004, in addition to parliamentary elections. Another fundamental adjustment was moving from a closed-list system and separation between presidential and parliamentary elections in 2014 to an open-list system and simultaneous elections on the same day in 2019. Most

Indonesian voters have five vote rights: four votes each for the House of Representatives at the national level (DPR), the Provincial DPR, District/City DPR, and the House of Regional Representatives or the Senate of Indonesia (DPD), and for the president.

Regarding voter turnouts, Indonesia has a considerably higher turnout globally (Mujani et al., 2018). The historical average turnout is more than 85%, similar to Albania, New Zealand, and Portugal. The elections are continually improved, but this improvement is not always accompanied by higher voter turnouts (Figure 2). Since the legislative election in 2019, which revealed that 87% of all eligible voters cast ballots, most Indonesian residents have been interested. Later, voter turnout rose to 93% in 1999, fell to 84.07% in 2004, and reached 70.99% in 2009 before rising to 75.11% in 2014. In the first and second rounds of the 2004 presidential election, respectively, 79.76% and 76.46% of eligible voters cast ballots. In the one-round presidential elections in 2009 and 2014, voter turnout reached 72.56% and 71.31%, respectively. Surprisingly, it increased to 81.9% in 2019. For the legislative election, it increased from 75.11% to 81.69% in 2019.

Many surveys concluded that some voters abstain mostly for administrative reasons, such



**Figure 2. Voter Turnouts in Indonesia's Elections since 1999**

Source: General Election Commission (KPU)

as being sick, not being registered, relocating to a new address, having other urgent business on election day, etc. Others choose not to vote because they believe elections are worthless and no candidate or party adequately reflects their goals. The idea that elections are insignificant has also been a dominant reason. During the New Order era, abstain voters were called the "white group" (*golongan putih* or *golput*) because they punched out the white or empty area of the ballot to symbolize their opposition to the authoritarian government. They believe that the elections serve neither the nation's nor their interests (Mujani et al., 2018).

The government of Indonesia has made some efforts to increase voter turnouts. Voting is not compulsory, but the government makes election day a holiday, which Indonesians sometimes call a "festival of democracy." This national holiday enables formal workers to come to the polling stations to cast their votes in presidential and legislative elections. To accommodate illiterate citizens, ballot papers are marked by the names and the party logos, as well as the names and photographs of the candidates. Rather than using a pen or pencil, voters punch a hole in the ballot paper with a nail. Votes are counted if a punch appears in

one of these areas: the party's logo, the party's name, the photograph of the candidates, and the candidates' names.

State officials traditionally view a high voter turnout as an indicator of their performance. Village heads, regents/*bupati/walikota*, or governors must be able to achieve as high voter turnout as possible to indicate their control over their areas. Hence, the government, the police, and the military agencies conduct a systematic campaign to encourage citizens to vote (Mietzner, 2019).

**Reasons to Vote**

Voting motivations can be divided into two main themes: individual characteristics and contextual variables. Contextual variables may introduce heterogeneity among the same individual characteristics. This study elaborates on the theory related to an individual's socioeconomic status and employs contextual theories.

The modernization theory has been widely used to explain political behavior among economic classes. It assumes that economic growth leads to societal developments, such as increased incomes, industrialization, better education, and urbanization. New masses

arise when the economy grows, especially among those who move from poverty to the middle or higher classes (Barozet & Espinoza, 2016). The middle class may either support democratization in nondemocratic societies or improve democracy in institutions that are already democratic (Rosenfeld, 2015). A sufficient income and education will produce self-empowered people, which will enable them to organize themselves, openly express their political views, create democratic institutions, and hold elected officials accountable for their pledges (Ong, 2020). In summary, there is a positive association between income and democracy.

However, the interpretation of this theory engenders a debate among political scientists, sociologists, and economists. In this regard, we refer to a wider perspective, starting by observing that democracy is a package of institutions (Aidt & Jensen, 2017). As a community modernizes, the demand for a higher quality of democracy will increase, with electoral institutions being one of the components. This perspective may help us understand the gradual democratic reforms in village-head elections in Indonesia. During the colonialization, villages were still ruled by leaders from established families with a quasi-hereditary grip on power with undemocratic elections (Berenschot et al., 2021). However, Law No.6/2014 has allowed for more competitive village-head elections.

Another relevant theory, i.e., the rational choice theory, assumes that voters should be economically consistent and instrumentally rational in their decision-making. Each person aims to maximize the expected value of their payoff (utility), considering their preferences and the information at hand (Kasara & Suryanarayan, 2015). In an economic sense, the middle-class decision to vote is influenced by policies and motivated by the expectation of material gain. Voter turnout may rise mainly in favor of the opposition parties to go against

the incumbent. However, people tend to concentrate more on their work and attention on addressing economic problems, so they pay less attention to elections. In addition to economic motives, socioeconomic statuses, such as educational background, may also determine political participation (Lindgren et al., 2019).

The success of mobilization in campaigns and voting is also a determinant of voter turnout. Clientelism is a common mobilization method from the economic status differences and the advantage of power asymmetries, which may be reflected in the provision of personal favors, such as jobs, contracts, welfare support, money, and so forth, in exchange for electoral support (Berenschot, 2018). This is also related to patronage, highlighting the transaction between the elites and the lower class. If the elites are the bureaucrats, state dependency will emerge among the ruling elites. Further, the dependency on state budgets concentrates control because the power is in the hands of ruling elites.

### **Different Voting Attitudes in Different Elections**

Given the indifference tendency, the different attitudes among voters in different elections warrant further investigation. Hence, there are three types of citizens: selective voters, participating citizens, and citizens who consistently abstain. Voters are more likely to cast ballots if they are interested, believe that parties or candidates can be held accountable, and believe they would bring significant benefits. Parties or candidates with the closeness of ideology to citizens are considered to have the minimum cost of voting and are most likely to be chosen (Degan & Merlo, 2017). Voters also tend to participate more if the election is competitively (Kennedy et al., 2018).

Lastly, information and participation are positively correlated. Voters who lack

information incur higher costs and are more likely to cast inaccurate votes or abstain from voting altogether. Voters tend to have more knowledge of presidential candidates than legislative candidates. The cost of voting in presidential elections is, therefore, lower than in parliamentary elections (Degan & Merlo, 2017). In addition, the overwhelming options in legislative elections may also cause absences. People tend to delay or decide not to choose at all when faced with too many possibilities. Decision-making was difficult since many options required increasing focus and memory (Söderlund, 2017).

**Methods**

**Data**

*Data and Variables*

The main data sources are KPU, which provides data on registered and eligible citizens and the results of general elections in 2019, and BPS, which provides data on socioeconomic

conditions. For deeper analysis at the individual level, we also cited the findings from the Lembaga Survey Indonesia (LSI) and Saiful Mujani Research Consultant (SMRC) surveys summarized by Mujani et al. (2018).

The outcome variables are the voter turnouts, which represent the percentage of registered voters who give valid votes in different types of elections. In this context, the number of observation units (i.e., districts or cities) varies depending on the availability of the data. The voter turnout data for the Presidential and DPD is available in all districts/cities, with several districts in Papua lacking data on voter turnout for the DPR, provincial DPR, and DPR at the district level. Overall, data on voter turnout for DPR at the district level is the least since one district and five cities in DKI Jakarta province only have provincial DPR without DPR at the district level.

The main independent variable is the middle-class population, which is predicted

**Table 1.**  
**Descriptive Statistics of Variables**

Variable	Description of variables	Number of Observation	Mean	Standard of Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
$VTPres_i$	Voter turnout in presidential election	514	0.819	0.236	0.630	0.990
$VTDPD_i$	Voter turnout in senator election	514	0.710	0.104	0.509	0.941
$VTDPR_i$	Voter turnout in national legislative election	510	0.769	0.257	0.520	0.951
$VTDPRProv_i$	Voter turnout in provincial legislative election	509	0.736	0.239	0.526	0.946
$VTDPRKab_i$	Voter turnout in district legislative election	503	0.780	0.238	0.518	0.945
$SMc_i$	Share of the middle class or the ratio of individuals having expenditure between USD 5.5 PPP–15.3 PPP to the total population	514	0.379	0.122	0.007	0.722
$SEd_i$	Share of education or proportion of people who are presently enrolled in or have graduated from university to the overall population expenditures	514	0.170	0.072	0.006	0.561
$Gi_i$	gini coefficient based on the distribution of per capita expenditure in previous year	514	0.383	0.064	0.269	0.425
$Gr_i$	average regional GDP per capita growth for the last five years	514	0.290	0.129	-0.070	0.521
$SUb_i$	the ratio of individuals who live in urban areas to the total population	514	0.404	0.313	0	1
$SNet_i$	the ratio of individuals who have internet access to the total population	514	0.302	0.129	0	0.686
$SAgr_i$	the ratio of people employed in primary sectors (agriculture and mining) to the total population	514	0.190	0.118	0.001	0.653

Source: Authors

by calculating the ratio of individuals having expenditures between 5.5 PPP and 15.3 PPP to the total population. Other socioeconomic conditions related to education, inequality, economic growth, urbanization, internet access, and field of work are used as control variables. The descriptive statistics of variables are summarized in Table 1.

### *Threshold of The Middle Class*

Applying an objective classification, we use a prior IFLS survey, the middle class is made up of individuals who spend between \$5.5 and \$15.3 PPP per person per day (Dartanto et al., 2020). Wealthy individuals earn or spend more than \$15.3 PPP per day, whereas the underprivileged earn or spend less than \$5.5 PPP per day. Furthermore, provincial thresholds were updated to take into account the international poverty line, currency, national poverty line, and regional variation of poverty lines at the provincial level, as provided by the BPS. The adjustment based on the consumer price index PPP at \$5.5 per capita per day in this study yields IDR 607,530 per capita per month in 2008, IDR 626,247 in 2013, and IDR 842,323 in 2018. Accordingly, the upper levels of \$15,3 PPP are IDR 1,690,038 in 2008, IDR 1,742,106 in 2013, and IDR 2,343,190 in 2018, respectively. The provincial-characteristic adjustment criteria are applied at the district level as thresholds. The adjusted thresholds of the middle class and the proportion of the middle-class population in every district/city are shown in Appendix 1.

### **Methods**

We divided districts or cities into different categories, i.e., modernized and less modernized, in analyzing the association between the middle-class population and voting participation. We employ two broad methods for examining voter participation in the 2019 election. First, for descriptive analysis, we define the average voter turnout of each

election in all districts/cities in Indonesia and among regions with certain geographical characteristics, such as urban, rural, Java, outside Java, western, and eastern. Second, we analyze empirically using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) to uncover the association between the middle class population and the voter turnout at the district/city level. The econometrical model can be written mathematically as follows:

$$Y_i = \alpha_i + \beta_1 SMC_i + \beta_2 SED_i + \beta_3 SMC_i \cdot SED_i + \beta_4 GI_i + \beta_5 Gr_i + \beta_6 Sub_i + \beta_7 SNet_i + \beta_8 SAgri_i + \epsilon_i$$

where  $Y_i$  is the outcome or dependent variable that represents voter turnout, while the rest represent independent variables (share of the middle class and other control variables). The parameters are:  $\beta_i$  as the coefficient of the independent variables;  $\alpha_i$  as intercept for unit  $i$ ; and  $\epsilon_i$  as a disturbance term for unit  $i$ , which is expected to be zero ( $E(\epsilon_{ij}) = 0$ ). We also analyze the interaction between the middle class and education, considering that the middle class share and voter turnout may have different associations due to the varying shares of well-educated people.

### **Results**

This study covers a descriptive analysis of voting turnout and an empirical estimation of the association between the middle-class population and voter turnout. The descriptive analysis uncovers the disparities between areas or regions. As a complement, empirical analysis regresses voter turnout and the middle-class population. The description of regional-based voter turnouts and the empirical result are presented in the subsections below.

#### **Descriptive Analysis**

The increased voter turnout from the previous general election in 2014 is one notable accomplishment of Indonesia's general election in 2019. For parliamentary elections, voter turnout increased from 0.751 in 2014 to 0.817 in



2019, and for presidential elections, it increased from 71.31% to 81.9%. Indeed, these values vary between districts/cities, as shown in Appendix 2. Not only have we documented the average turnout at the national level, but Figures 3, 4, and 5 show the comparison of average turnout at regional levels, i.e., between the modernized regions (urban, Java, and western) and less modernized regions (rural, outside Java, and eastern). As illustrated in those figures, in general, the average voter turnouts in the modernized regions are higher than those in the less modernized regions. Holding the assumption that the share of the middle class is higher in more modernized regions than in less modernized regions, these figures can capture the differences in voter turnouts between two different population shares of the middle class.

**Empirical Estimation**

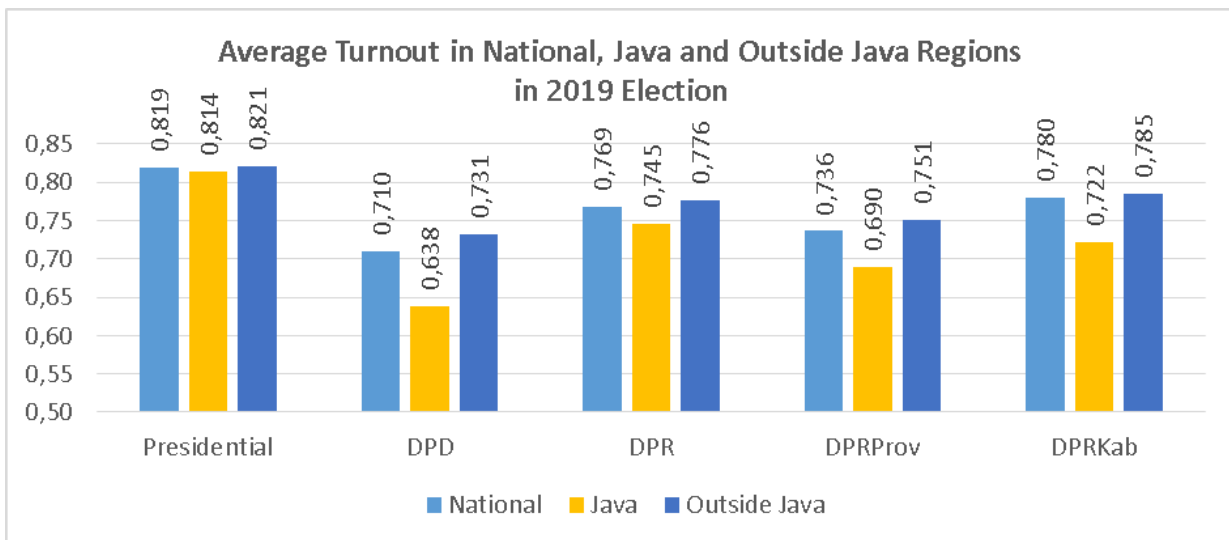
According to the modernization theory, the political behaviour of the middle class is probably associated with the political outcome in a region. The theory expects that a larger

middle class correlates with higher voter turnout. Thus, voter turnout in more urbanized regions should be higher. The estimation results of the association between middle-class population and each type of election in each region are summarized in Table 2, while the results of other independent variables are depicted in Appendix 3.

The association between the middle-class population and voting participation is inconclusive nationally. This phenomenon also occurs in urban, Java, and western regions. It is assumed that a larger share of the middle class does not always correlate with voting participation. However, significant associations exist in less modernized regions, such as rural, outside Java, and eastern regions in a positive direction.

**Discussion**

Behind the seemingly successful 2019 election, which is considered the most complex election in Indonesian history, there were fraud cases, such as money politics and identity politics.



**Figure 3. The Comparison of Average Turnout between National, Urban, and Rural in the 2019 General Elections**

Source: General Election Commission (KPU)

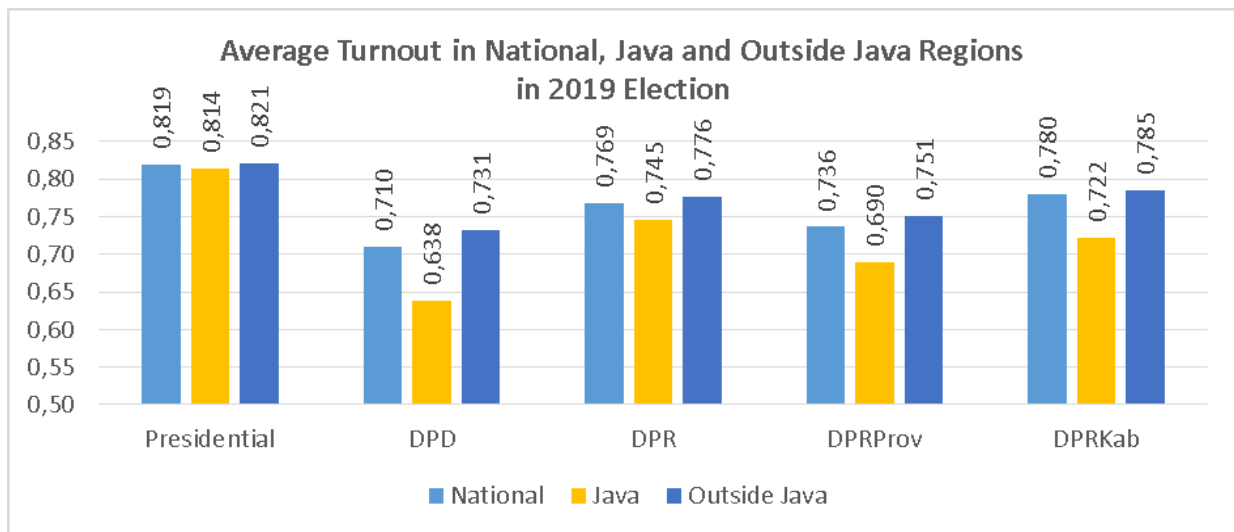


Figure 4. The Comparison of Average Turnout between National, Java, and Outside Java in the 2019 General Elections

Source: General Election Commission (KPU)

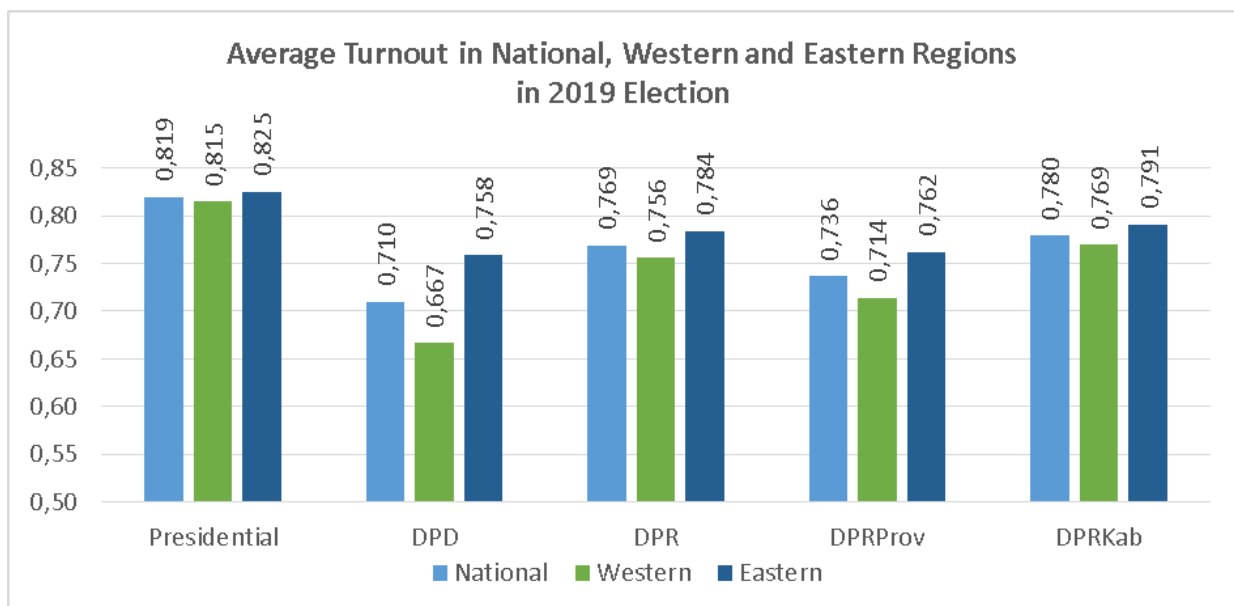


Figure 5. The Comparison of Average Turnout between National, Western, and Eastern Regions in the 2019 General Elections

Source: General Election Commission (KPU)

The General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) reported 345 court criminal decisions, with 213 cases found in eastern Indonesia. Regarding identity politics, surveys and exit polls conducted by SMRC and LSI reported the rise in identity politics, mainly based on ethnicity and religion, especially in presidential elections, which were more competitive than the multipolar

legislative elections. However, compared to money politics, the impact of Islamic political identity is limited by, among other things, the public evaluation of the incumbent, making it a less decisive factor in an election (Hanan, 2020). In terms of religious polarization in general, the electoral pillar of Indonesian democracy in 2019 remained relatively strong, but the democratic

**Table 2.**  
**Estimation Result of Coefficient of Middle Class using OLS in Regions**

Elections	The coefficient of the middle-class variable						
	All regions	Urban (city)	Rural (regency)	Java	Outside Java	Western	Eastern
Presidential	0.064 (0.050)	-0.193 (0.221)	0.056 (0.058)	0.292 (0.102)	0.089** (0.060)	0.013 (0.067)	0.060 (0.080)
DPD	-0.235 (0.007)	-0.314 (0.100)	0.259 (0.093)	-0.356 (0.177)	0.104 (0.076)	-0.145 (0.102)	0.279* (0.100)
DPR	-0.012 (0.058)	-0.039 (0.248)	0.054* (0.067)	-0.329 (0.138)	0.018** (0.068)	0.006 (0.084)	0.032* (0.090)
DPRD for provincial level	-0.059 (0.062)	-0.415 (0.239)	-0.074 (0.072)	0.265 (0.146)	0.038 (0.069)	-0.113 (0.093)	-0.033 (0.088)
DPRD for district-level	0.093 (0.062)	-0.301 (0.322)	0.078* (0.070)	0.444 (0.129)	0.131** (0.073)	0.026 (0.083)	0.106* (0.099)

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses. Coefficient statistically significant at \*\*\*1%, \*\*5% and \*10%.  
Source: Authors

quality, i.e., democratic rights and norms, gradually declined.

The descriptive analysis and empirical estimation reveal disparities in voter turnout in inter-regions and inter-elections. In general, voter turnouts in less modernized areas were higher than those in more modernized areas. Accordingly, the positive association between the middle-class population and voter turnout is more salient in less modernized regions.

Based on the rational choice theory, which holds utility maximization, the cost needed to come to the pooling station for all elections in one consecutive day is assumed to be equal. Therefore, the varying turnouts based on the types of elections may be due to selective participation, as detailed in the following subsection.

**Descriptive Analysis of Voter Turnout at the National Level**

Generally, the average voter turnouts at the national level were higher than those in less modernized regions but lower than those in more modernized regions. The lowest turnout was for the DPD election, and the highest was for the presidential election. Disregarding geographical variability, the order is as follows: 1) presidential, 2) district DPRD, 3) DPR, 4) provincial DPRD, and 5)

DPD. There are two drivers of voter turnout in presidential elections. First, voters might think that the presidential election's outcome matters more than the parliamentary election because the president's role is the most important in deciding policies. Second, the availability and accessibility of information also play a role in public engagement. Sufficient access to presidential candidates' information enables voters to evaluate credentials, records, ideology, and other characteristics because these were covered in the news. Accordingly, voters were able to distinguish their preferred candidates, which motivated them to cast their ballots.

Another probable explanation for why citizens vote less for legislative candidates is their unfamiliarity with the candidates due to the distant connection. The shift from party-centeredness in the New Order Era and the 1999 election to candidate-centeredness in the elections from 2009 to 2019 was meant to encourage voters to cast ballots. Candidate-centeredness is considered more personalized. However, this has resulted in a substantial number of candidates, which may discourage voters from obtaining sufficient information about them. Voters may lack the motivation to vote because they cannot adequately describe candidates' backgrounds, philosophies, and other characteristics. The candidates themselves

must compete with their rivals both from outside and within the party. Another plausible explanation is related to political apathy and a lack of awareness. Voters thought their votes had no meaning since the previous elections resulted in low performance of parliaments.

The question is as to why DPD is the least favored type of election compared to the other types. The answer may lie in the public activities and program continuity of the senators in DPD and representatives in DPR. Activities carried out by legislators are more frequent and sustained than those by the DPD. As a result, DPR is more well-known than DPD. Voters may not be motivated to participate in DPD elections because they recognize these disparities and may perceive that DPD is not as relevant.

### **Descriptive Analysis of Disparities between Modernized and Less Modernized Regions**

The descriptive analysis revealed a deviation from the modernization theory, which predicted that voter turnouts in modernized regions are higher than those in less modernized regions. However, the results pointed in the opposite direction. For the same election, voters in less modernized regions voted more than their counterparts in more modernized regions. Elections are meant to be a channel for citizens to voice their aspirations and policy preferences peacefully, without conflicts or violence. The low turnouts may indicate that the citizens did not believe the elections delivered or actualized their aspirations. In the long term, this may cause them to view democracy as an illegitimate means of expressing their voice and policy preferences (Resnick, 2015).

People in more modernized regions tend to be more independent in channeling their aspirations and more knowledgeable about candidates. With more developed infrastructure supporting their individualist lifestyles, urban citizens cannot be quickly

mobilized. In addition, the population in metropolitan or modern regions tends to have higher educational backgrounds and stable incomes, indicating that they are more politically aware or even critical. In case of dissatisfaction, their likelihood of voting may decline.

Voters in less modernized areas were more motivated to vote and easier to mobilize due to several reasons. First, they have greater social capital, especially the close relationships with their surroundings. This tight connection can be a channel for relatives, neighbors, traditional leaders, village elders, or officials higher up in the government to assert influence and persuasion. They have hierarchical respect for elders and leaders and established cultural practices or *adat*, which entail loyalty to family beliefs and practices, including voting behavior.

Second, they typically have less access to information and education, which makes them more easily influenced by any available and accessible information. Hence, information from their relatives, neighbors, traditional leaders, village elders, and other members of their social organization easily influences their interest in voting. Moreover, since voter turnout is seen as one of the bureaucrats' performance indicators, the local government may have put maximum effort into persuading citizens to vote.

Third, people in less modernized areas have more time to participate in many political activities, such as parties' election campaigns, and are more likely to respond to gratification from candidates. It may appear as a form of patron-clientelism politics through vote-buying. Because of their lower incomes, they are more likely to respond to and receive money or other clientelistic instruments. In return, they cast their votes for candidates or parties as the patron requests. However, the patron may not be able to do this easily in more modernised regions since voters have a higher income. Mobilising and swaying their votes may

require more money. These phenomena in the 2014 elections were documented by Berenschot (2018), concluding that clientelistic exchange was less intense in Java, particularly in the cities, and was significantly more pervasive in eastern regions, including the provincial capitals. In the 2019 elections, the Bawaslu documented 67 of 262 cases of money politics for which a court sentence was imposed, with 197 cases being public reports.

Fourth, people in less modernised areas are more satisfied with their current conditions and tend to support the current political outcome. Living in rural areas is more dependent on nature, with less work pressure. They are more likely to feel that their needs are already fulfilled, mainly related to material goods. They thank the ruling government for this condition, which is reflected in their support of the government's programs, resulting in election participation.

The different impact of mobility has also been demonstrated by two prior studies in the West Sumbawa District of Nusa Tenggara Barat (NTB) province and in Bogor City in West Java. In NTB, the candidates' persuasion was the primary motivation for voting, significantly outweighing the notion that elections were beneficial (Chandra, 2016). In Bogor, voting was done to elect better leaders and exercise one's civic duty. As a result, most voted decided based on their expectation for parties or candidates (KPU-Bogor, 2015).

### **Empirical Estimation**

In general, the empirical estimation is in line with the results of the descriptive analysis. There is a deviation from the modernisation theory, i.e., the positive association between the middle-class population and voter turnout. In other words, it is expected that regions with a higher share of the middle class will have higher voter turnouts. However, this study reveals that the association between the middle-class population and voter turnout is more

pronounced in the less modernised regions, suggesting indifference in the modernised regions. The lower turnout in urban areas can be associated with lower participation among the middle class. Based on surveys conducted by LSI and SMRC between 2004 and 2014, the lower class participated more than the middle and upper classes. These surveys can capture mobilisation and voting decisions through surveys and exit polls in more specific regions. Analysing these surveys' results, Mujani et al.(2018) posit that free riders may cause a lower turnout among middle and upper-class citizens.

We also propose possible reasons drawn from previous relevant studies, i.e., the lower participation of the middle class could be attributed to income and education (Mujani et al., 2018). The middle class may think that their economic circumstances are not strongly influenced by political activities. They also dislike political pragmatism, such as vote-buying, unqualified candidates, and any other flawed elections, since they generally demand greater institutional quality. They are less inclined to cast a ballot when they believe the election is not competitive. Their displeasure with elections is also apparent.

We argue that mobilisation is also more challenging among middle-class voters. Since their income is more secure, the middle class has more time and better access to information, including the government's policies. With critical democratic attitudes, public issues may induce political apathy and prompt them to become free riders. They believe other activities are more important than casting a ballot. This causality is in line with surveys on elections in 2004 and 2014 by LSI and SMRC. They regarded voting as "less important or unimportant".

In addition, due to their individualistic lifestyle and the larger share of individuals with similar middle-class status, middle-class individuals' influence on their surroundings in cities is less significant than their counterparts

in rural regions. In terms of the patronage-clientelism framework. As urban middle-class individuals' income is higher than that in rural areas, mobilisation through the patron-client transaction is more expensive. The higher price is needed to match their higher income. In addition, the middle class' demand for better institutions may cause them to reject this transaction. By contrast, the patronage indicators are more salient outside Java (Berenschot, 2018). Having a relatively sufficient and stable income combined with a higher education background, the relatively small number of middle-class individuals in rural or outside Java, as well as eastern regions, often become the ruling elites. Their attitudes set an example, and they become more influential.

The estimation results of other independent variables are depicted in Appendix 3. In summary, mainly in Java regions, educational background shows positive associations with voter turnouts, but when it interacts with the share of the middle-class population, it shows negative associations. Among the macroeconomic variables such as the Gini coefficient, economic growth, and urbanisation, only the Gini coefficient has a positively significant association, mostly at the national level. In general, Internet access has a positive association with voter turnout, mostly in Java, and a similar association also exists between the share of farmers and voter turnout, mainly at the national level.

## **Conclusion**

The electoral behaviour of Indonesian voters exhibits a deviation from the modernisation theory. The larger size of the middle class does not always correlate with higher voter turnouts. In general, the voter turnouts in more modernised regions are lower than their counterparts in less modernised regions such as rural, outside Java, and eastern regions. Income and higher educational

background may have enabled middle-class individuals into a political literacy class and create critical democrats with apathetic attitudes toward elections, which could result in abstention. In terms of mobilisation, the middle class in more modernised areas is not easy to mobilise and tends to be apathetic in elections.

We also found different levels of participation in the types of elections. Disregarding geographical variability, the order is as follows: 1) presidential, 2) district DPRD, 3) DPR, 4) provincial DPRD, and 5) DPD. The lower participation in parliamentary elections could be related to limited information and distant connections between voters and parliamentary candidates. Citizens had more access to information on presidential candidates' qualifications, records, ideologies, and other traits and could differentiate each candidate's platform. This was not the case in parliamentary elections. Citizens may have found the information too complex in the multiple elections, which may end in a decision not to vote.

In general, the empirical estimation documented unclear associations between the share of the middle-class population and voter turnout in national and modernised regions but positive associations in less modernised regions. The middle class in modernised regions can figure out parties and candidates more comprehensively than their counterparts in rural or outside Java or eastern regions. They are less inclined to vote if they believe the election is less competitive and their expectation of democracy's performance is unfulfilled.

We realise that data would be ideally drawn from interviews with members of the individual middle class after many elections. However, given the resource constraints, we construct indicators by utilizing secondary data from KPU and BPS. This study has the following limitations: predicting individual

behavior based on aggregate estimation at the district or city level and missing data on electorate participation. Hence, observations that utilize individual data are needed for more accurate findings.

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