



Indonesian young voters: Political knowledge and electing women into parliament[☆]

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ABSTRACT

While there are numerous studies available on general elections and young voters in Indonesia, far less research has systematically studied the particular connection between young voters and electing female representative. This contribution deals with Indonesian young voters (17–24 years old) by investigating (a) their shared political knowledge on electoral systems and (b) their preferences in electing female legislators. Using data from 234 respondents with various backgrounds, it argues that the vast majority of Indonesian youth are relatively less-informed with regards to the country's political and electoral systems. This paper demonstrates the gender gap exists in both political knowledge and preferences. It also suggests that young electorates offer a massive support to male over female candidates as nearly 75% of respondents are more inclined to elect a male parliamentarian. The study finds that there is no significant difference in terms of voting behaviour between young and non-young Indonesian voters during legislative elections, as both groups are influenced by gender stereotypes about the ability of male and female politicians to represent the constituents.

Introduction

Indonesian young adults, people ranging from 17 to 25 years old, comprised almost 30% of the total voters in the List of Final Voters compiled by Indonesia's General Election Commission/KPU (Rahmawati, 2014). Having been exposed to a more politically open electoral system following the fall of Suharto's regime, the group, also known as Generation Y, tends to be change-seeking, better informed, mobile, savvy and connected (Chen & Syailendra, 2014). However, a study by Kompas (2014) suggests young adults in Indonesia are also politically apathetic and less nationalistic where more than 53% considered not casting their vote in the 2014 elections.

While there are various studies available on general elections in Indonesia (Aspinall, 2014; Aspinall & Sukmajati, 2015; Mujani & Liddle, 2010; Simandjuntak, 2012), Indonesian young voters (Chen & Syailendra, 2014; Rahmawati, 2014), and the success of women's political nominations to elective office (Bessell, 2010; Hillman, 2017; Noor, 2014; Prihatini, 2018a; Puskapol FISIP UI, 2014; Shair-Rosenfield, 2012), far less research has systematically studied the particular relationship between young voters and electing female representatives. By using an online questionnaire and in-depth interviews, this paper seeks to examine and elucidate Indonesian young

adults' political knowledge and their support for female legislative candidates. The present article makes a significant contribution to the conversation around Indonesian young voters concerning their political knowledge and political preferences in improving women's representation in parliamentary politics. Substantively, this will be the first of its kind to bridge the two literatures on young voters' political knowledge and women's representation.

This study argues that Indonesian young voters' capacity to participate in democracy and to shape the society in future may be limited as respondents display a relatively low accuracy in political knowledge, here measured by seven key questions related to political and electoral systems. It also finds a gender gap in political knowledge among male and female participants, although the difference is not too significant. Regarding political preferences in electing a legislative candidate, the vast majority of respondents in this study offer support to male aspirants. They judge men as being more suitable to work as lawmakers by citing some religious justification and based on the assumption that men can work outside the house with a higher degree of freedom compared to women. Most respondents were applying gender stereotypes rather than actual political knowledge in comparing male and female politicians' capabilities in representing constituents. Conversely, participants who prefer female candidates assert more women need to

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be in parliament to produce better policies and to ensure women's and children's interests are well served.

This article is divided into four sections. The first part reviews the literature on political knowledge, gender stereotypes and women's representation. It also stresses the significance of the current contribution. The second section explores the data and the mixed-methods adopted for this research; online questionnaire and in-depth interview. The following part explains the results of this investigation and situates them within the current literature. Finally, the concluding section summaries the main findings, highlights the limitations of the study, and offers avenues for further research.

Theoretical background

Young voters' political knowledge

Political information is often associated as a synonym for political knowledge, yet knowledge is something beyond information (Grönlund & Milner, 2006). For information to become knowledge, a person needs to process it, to distinguish correct from incorrect information (Sartori, 1987). In their seminal book, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) argue political knowledge is “a critical and distinct facilitator” of good citizenship where a well-informed citizen will be more likely to be attentive to politics and to feel efficacious (p. 6). Various studies conducted in Western societies have shown a strong link between insufficient political knowledge and less interest in voting among young adults (Goerres, 2007; McAllister, 2016; Stockemer & Rocher, 2017). A similar condition exists in Indonesia, where nearly 30% of eligible voters did not cast their vote in the 2009 elections and some argue that the more critical youth were among this figure (Yasih, 2014).

A growing body of literature suggests that the distribution of political knowledge is unequally distributed, where female young adults are less politically interested and informed than males (Banwart, 2007; Dow, 2009; Gibson & McAllister, 2014; Pereira, Fraile, & Rubal, 2014; Verba, Burns, & Schlozman, 1997; Wolak & McDevitt, 2011). The uneven distribution of knowledge raises many normative concerns as women, with lower levels of knowledge and interest than men, may be less well represented in the democratic system (Atkeson, 2003; Fraile, 2014; Fraile & Gomez, 2017). Burns (2007) highlights four major explanations for the knowledge gap: (1) resource disparities between women and men, especially in regard to income, education and the control of money at home; (2) marriage, motherhood and homemaking responsibilities (Verba et al., 1997), (3) childhood socialisation; and (4) perspectives on gender roles where women's political interests might be suppressed by ideologies of motherhood stating that women are simply not suitable for the political arena.

A study by Sanbonmatsu (2003b) on political knowledge and gender stereotypes suggests that political knowledge leads to voter stereotypes about politicians' issue positions, while beliefs about women's emotional suitability for politics plays a crucial role in voters supporting candidates based on their gender. Political gender stereotyping, “the gender-based ascription of different traits, behaviours, or political beliefs to male and female politicians” (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993a, p. 120), can often be a shortcut and cue for less knowledgeable voters with more traditional societal views in choosing how to cast their vote (Lau & Redlawsk, 2001; McDermott, 1998). To sum up, support for male or female candidates “can be explained by voters' gender and by gender stereotypes about traits, beliefs, and issue competency” (Sanbonmatsu, 2002, p. 31).

Women's representation

Globally, women only comprised 23.5% of national single or lower houses (The Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2017) with the best performers located in Nordic countries (42%) and the worst in the Pacific region (15.4%). Despite a series of gender mainstreaming policy interventions

Table 1

Women's share in Indonesia's House of Representatives (DPR). (Source: KPU (2014).)

	1987	1992	1999	2004	2009	2014
Women's share in DPR-RI (%)	11.6	12.6	11.4	11.5	18.04	17.32

aiming at improving women's political nominations (Davies, 2005; Prihatini, 2016; Siregar, 2006), women's share in the Indonesian national parliament continues to be under-represented (see Table 1). Regulations set by the government to promote gender equality in legislative bodies was first introduced in 1984 by ratifying CEDAW, and under Abdurrahman Wahid's administration Presidential Instruction No. 9/2000 on Gender Mainstreaming was launched as a strategy to absorb both men's and women's experiences, aspirations and needs, to create more inclusive development plans.

Scholars are puzzled by the slow growth of women's legislative representation with some arguing political parties—as gatekeepers (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995)—are not genuine enough in nominating women into parliament (Budiatr, 2012; Soetjipto & Adelina, 2012). This is evident from the fact that few parties put female candidates as candidate number one and two on the list, where 79.1% of such candidates are elected (Formappi, 2014). Thus a study on seven parties participated in the last three general elections shows that there is no party has ever nominated more than 30% of women as leader in the list of candidates (Prihatini, 2018b). In the 2014 elections, PPP nominated women as candidate number one in 28.57% of electoral districts. This is the highest percentage ever achieved among all parties observed and the result shows that 90% of elected female lawmakers from PPP were those placed on top of the list.

However, it is also crucial to note Indonesian voters tend to support male over female candidates. A survey published by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems/IFES suggests 54% of respondents say if they had a choice between a female candidate and a male candidate they would support the male candidate and only 14% would offer support for the female candidate (Sharma, Serpe, & Suryandari, 2011). The gap is even wider across genders, where 62% of men say they would support a male candidate and merely 6% would elect a female candidate. From the female respondents group, 47% would support a male politician and 21% would elect a female candidate. From the whole sample, those who support a female candidate most said intelligence is the main quality influencing their preference to vote for women (35%), followed by a perception that women are less corrupt than men (26%) and then women's experience in politics (20%).

Data and methods

Due to insufficient availability of official research by government or non-government bodies on Indonesian young voters related to general political knowledge and political gender stereotyping, this article offers an experimental study by investigating a sample of Indonesian young adults. Here, two methods were applied; (1) online questionnaire and (2) in-depth interview.

The first method enables the researcher to gain hundreds of responses in less time than offline questionnaires and to reach participants outside the researcher's area (Wright, 2005). The second approach facilitates the researcher in further investigating respondents' answers by posing open questions which require them to explain their preferences in electing legislative candidates. The two methods are complementary and useful in quantifying participants' responses to research questions.

Online questionnaire

Using Google Forms, an online questionnaire in Bahasa Indonesia

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