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Incumbency advantage and candidate characteristics in open-list proportional representation systems: Evidence from Indonesia

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Abstract

We use evidence from Indonesia's April 2014 legislative elections to study the relationship between incumbency, list position, candidate characteristics, and electoral success in open-list PR systems. Contrary to a recent literature identifying an incumbency disadvantage in other large developing democracies, we identify a consistent personal incumbency advantage in Indonesia. However, we argue that this advantage is mediated by party choices over how incumbents and newcomers are ranked on party lists, a key heuristic for voters in low-information electoral environments such as Indonesia.

Keywords

Candidate characteristics, Incumbency advantage, Indonesia, Open list proportional representation

1. Introduction

Incumbent legislators and their parties face difficult choices in open-list PR systems. Candidates have a strong incentive to cultivate a personal vote (Carey and Shugart, 1995), and incumbency provides critical advantages in doing so. Yet in open-list PR systems, the sheer length of party lists presents a daunting challenge for both incumbents and challengers seeking to stand out. Parties therefore can play a key role in candidates' electoral fortunes in assembling the electoral list, since list position is a common heuristic for voters in low-information environments (Miller and Krosnick, 1998). Recent studies of incumbency advantage in new democracies and under PR systems have provided more nuance to the incumbency advantage literature, concluding that it is conditional on small district size or that incumbency actually places candidates at a *disadvantage* (Golden and Picci, 2015; Moral et al., 2015, Klačnja and Titunik, 2017). However, it remains difficult to disentangle personal incumbency effects from other candidate characteristics and parties' strategic behavior in determining candidates' list positions, which may both reflect anticipated incumbent electability and independently determine their electoral fortunes.

In this article we do so by examining the relationships between incumbency, list position, candidate characteristics, and electoral success in democratic Indonesia. We introduce a unique dataset that includes detailed work histories and educational backgrounds of all 6606 candidates contesting in the 2014 elections for the Indonesian lower house, the People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, or DPR). April 2014 marked the fourth time that Indonesians voted in national legislative elections since the country's transition to democracy that began in 1998, and Indonesia's elections are one of the largest single day elections in the world (The Wall Street Journal, 2014).

We use these data to establish several facts about incumbency and electoral success in Indonesia. We find evidence of a significant electoral incumbency advantage in Indonesia's open-list PR system. This incumbency advantage influences both candidate ranking on their party's list and their subsequent electoral fortunes. We find that incumbency predicts list position: incumbents tend to rank lower on party lists than do challengers. (Throughout this article, we adopt the convention that "low" party list positions are the highly sought after positions at the top of the list, which correspond to the lowest number in the rank order of the candidates on the list.) We also find that list position magnifies the effects of incumbency. Lower ranked incumbents perform significantly better than do low ranked challengers. However, in higher list positions, incumbents and challengers fare equally. We also find that independent of incumbency, other candidate characteristics matter for list position: men, younger candidates, and highly educated candidates tend to earn lower list positions. Nevertheless, incumbency is also positively associated with vote share independently of list position. While female candidates experience a penalty in general, being an incumbent can mitigate those losses: we estimate that female candidates experience a gender penalty of 0.5 percentage points in vote share, but incumbents gain 2.66 percentage points in vote share.

Our explanation for incumbency advantage in Indonesia's open-list PR system relies on both an institutional and an informational mechanism. Incumbents are able to secure a better position in their party's slate of candidates, allowing them to benefit from the key voting heuristic of list position. But incumbents also have a personal advantage among a crowded field of candidates – possibly generated through name recognition, and ability to marshal resources of office for both aboveground and illicit methods of cultivating their constituencies. While open-list PR has been identified as weakening the role of partisanship – since candidates are incentivized to cultivate a personal, not party reputation – parties nevertheless play an important gatekeeping role in placing candidates in coveted list positions.

These findings make two contributions to the growing literature on incumbency under proportional representation. Extending work by Shair-Rosenfield (2012), this manuscript documents and quantifies incumbency effects in Indonesia, the world's third most populous democracy. In contrast to recent work on non-Western democracies (Linden, 2004, Uppal, 2009, Macdonald, 2014, Moral et al., 2015, Klačnja and Titunik, 2017), we find that much like elections in advanced industrial democracies, there is a personal incumbency advantage in Indonesian elections as well. The second contribution is empirical. Data on the personal characteristics of both challengers and incumbents are rare, particularly outside Western cases. Our data allow us to evaluate how electoral arrangements – in this case, the open-list system and party control over

list position – interact with personal incumbency and other personal characteristics. We find that incumbency matters for list position as well as for electoral outcomes.

2. Institutions and incumbency

The large literature on incumbency has its roots in the study of the US Congress, but recent literature has applied its insights to developing democracies (e.g. Linden, 2004, Uppal, 2009 on India; Klačnja and Titunik, 2017 on Brazil; and Macdonald, 2014 on Zambia). Notably, much of this work has identified an incumbency *disadvantage* in single member district (SMD) plurality settings. But what are the channels and mechanisms through which an incumbent (dis)advantage might accrue under a multimember proportional representation system like that of Indonesia?

A recent literature has begun to address this question (Shair-Rosenfield, 2012, Ariga, 2015, Golden and Picci, 2015, Moral et al., 2015). Theoretically, open-list PR systems should incentivize candidates to cultivate a personal reputation (Carey and Shugart, 1995, 418). Shugart et al. (2005), building on Carey and Shugart (1995), argue that the choice of open or closed-list systems and district magnitude change the incentives of politicians to invest in their personal reputation as a way to attract votes. Under an open-list system, as district magnitude rises, candidates are increasingly incentivized to build a personal vote to differentiate themselves from competing candidates from the same party (439–440). Under such situations, politicians have incentives to use patronage or pork to distribute to the small voter base needed to win seats (Ames, 1995). Incumbents, then, use their office to build up advantages in future elections.

The literature has generally distinguished among three ways incumbency advantage could work (Cox and Katz, 1996). First, incumbents have access to legislative resources to build a personal reputation through constituency service or other means (King, 1991). Second, higher quality challengers may be deterred from contesting elections against incumbents (Levitt and Wolfram, 1997, Ashworth and Mesquita, 2008). And third, incumbents may simply be higher quality candidates in the first place, an issue which is subject to intense debate (see Green and Krasno, 1988, Jacobson, 1990). While some scholarship incorporates other candidate characteristics (such as their public prominence or campaign spending; Green and Krasno, 1988, Abramowitz, 1988), the most common method measuring quality has been through determining whether a candidate had previously held elective office (e.g. Cox and Katz, 1996, Jacobson, 1990).¹

But even as the incentives to cultivate a personal vote increase, politicians face greater difficulties in building a personal reputation in PR systems. Credit claiming is difficult in electoral systems with multiple incumbents. Golden and Picci (2015, 511), for example, find that Italian legislative candidates receive no personal benefit to incumbency, even when individual candidates channeled more public spending and patronage to their electoral district.² The same is presumably true for negative reputations, such as when candidates are known to engage in corruption or are blamed for poor district outcomes. Yet this is the mechanism – voter discontent with incumbent politician performance in office – that drives at least some of the incumbency penalty found in the incumbency disadvantage literature (e.g. Klačnja and Titunik, 2017, Macdonald, 2014, Uppal, 2009). It therefore remains an open question about the extent to which voters in PR systems are able to overcome information challenges to link political outcomes to particular politicians.

In such contexts, we expect that voters rely on information shortcuts when making electoral choices. Shugart et al. (2005) examine two heuristics under proportional representation: candidate birthplace and previous experience in district electoral office. The former signals the legislator’s “insider knowledge” about the

¹ Education is another common proxy for candidate skill, though recent work by Carnes and Lupu (2016) casts doubt on the validity of education as an indicator of candidate quality. They examine the connection between politicians’ level of education and a wide variety of political outcomes, including reelection. Among U.S. members of Congress and Brazilian mayors, they find that there is little electoral advantage for having a college degree; Brazilian mayors with college degrees are 5% more likely to be reelected (pp. 43e44; fn. 15)

² There may also be a party effect, where the incumbent party builds an organizational structure that benefits candidates regardless of whether they are incumbents (Erikson and Titunik, 2015, 104), or perhaps builds a local party reputation that benefits all the party’s candidates. Moral et al (2015) argue that party incumbency is a better measure than personal incumbency in PR systems, but their case (Turkey) is a closed-list system.

district; and the latter signals capacity and credibility to be responsive to the district's needs (441). Another common information shortcut is where candidates stand on their party list. This heuristic may work in two different ways: voters simply choose the first-listed candidate because they have little to no information on the candidates (Miller and Krosnick, 1998), or because voters see the party's ordering of candidates as a form of guidance about who is the party's favored choice (Golden and Picci, 2015, 510). Knowing this, parties can enhance or mitigate the effects of incumbency (dis)advantage by where they place incumbents on party lists. Shair-Rosenfield (2012) has found that in Indonesia, incumbency benefits female candidates by causing them to be ranked lower on the party list than they would otherwise be.

3. Research design and data

3.1. Case background

To investigate the relationship among candidate characteristics, list position, incumbency, and electoral success, we use data from the 2014 legislative elections in Indonesia. In April 2014, almost 187 million Indonesians voted for national, regional and local representatives (Kotarumalos, 2014). We focus our analysis on the electoral contests in Indonesia's lower house, the House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, or DPR). The 560 seats for the DPR are divided into 77 multi-member constituencies spanning the archipelago. Since 2009, Indonesia has used a fully open-list proportional representation system. Each district has 3–10 seats, according to district population (IFES, 2014, 1).

The 2014 elections in Indonesia were the second time that voters participated in open-list elections. The move from closed-list to open-list PR has been cited as a key reason that patronage and vote buying practices by candidates have become increasingly important as candidates are incentivized to cultivate a personal vote (Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016, 12). Another notable change occurred between the 2009 and 2014 legislative elections: In 2014, only twelve national parties (and three Aceh province-specific parties) met new threshold requirements for contesting the elections, down from thirty-eight national parties (and six Aceh province-specific parties) in 2009.

Several aspects of Indonesia's institutional arrangements are of particular importance to evaluating incumbency effects in multimember systems. On election day in 2014, Indonesian voters simultaneously voted for four levels of office: the national bodies of the House of Representatives and the Regional Representative Council, along with provincial and district/city legislatures. The ballot for the House of Representative listed all the candidates fielded by the twelve eligible parties³ allowed to contest the election, ranked under each party by list position. Voters could choose to mark either an individual candidate, the party, or both, although if the candidate and party did not match then the ballot was considered invalid. Voters awarding their votes to *individual candidates* thus raised the likelihood both that their candidate would win, and that the party would win enough votes to receive a seat under the seat allocation process (described below). Voters who vote only for the *party*, however, only raise the likelihood that the party will win a seat, but their votes do not count to determine who actually wins the seat from the party list.

Voting in Indonesia takes place in what might be characterized as a low-information environment. While survey data about voter knowledge of legislative candidates are unavailable, other evidence suggests that voters face significant challenges in gathering information about candidates. Television is by far the most common medium for political information, with 68% of respondents in a 2014 poll watching television every day (The Asia Foundation, 2014). Television news is also highly skewed towards national issues and campaigns. A sizeable proportion of the survey's respondents read newspapers and listen to the radio (39% and 27% respectively), where they may gather more information about legislative candidates. However, this is likely to have limited effects on the aggregate information environment because, as argued by local organizations in Indonesia, voters find it difficult to gather information about candidate track records (Kristanto and Hari, 2014).

³ 3 Voters in the province of Aceh could vote for three additional political parties only allowed to contest in that province.

Information on candidates in the 2014 election was filed with Indonesia's electoral commission and made accessible via the Indonesia Open Election Project (PemiluAPI). The data provided by PemiluAPI contain information on each official candidate's name, gender, age, religion, birthplace, work and education history, party affiliation, electoral district, and list position. Working with the unstructured raw data on educational background and work history, two research assistants hand-coded a series of variables that measure the educational attainment and professional experience of all 6606 candidates in the 2014 election. Unusually for research on personal incumbency, the data include career and educational backgrounds on both incumbents and challengers from all parties contesting the election. It is rare that data on losing candidates is available (Shugart et al., 2005, 441 fn. 7), and many studies focus on a narrower subset of parties or elections (e.g. Golden and Picci, 2015). Using information on the 2009 election, we also determined the incumbency status of all registered candidates (more on variable definitions below).

3.2. Candidate nomination and list position

The elections law guiding the 2014 elections (Law 8/2012) stipulates that candidate lists should be assigned by party officials at the national level (Article 53, paragraph 2). Parties can include on their lists candidates with a maximum as the total number of seats in the electoral district (*daerah pemilihan, or dapil*) (Article 54). Parties are required to have 30% female candidates on the party list, and at least one woman among the top three candidates on the list (Articles 55–56). In 2004 and 2009, parties in practice failed to meet this requirement without serious repercussions (IDEA, 2015, 170). Open-list systems, as the name suggests, allow any candidate on the list to be elected. In reality, as elsewhere, in Indonesia list position still appears to play an important in voter decisions. For instance, Wardani et al (2013, in IDEA, 2015). find that female candidates in a lower list position are more likely to be elected.

3.3. Seat allocation

The institutional arrangements guiding the allocation of seats to parties complicate the connection between vote share and victory, because it is not always the case that the winners of the highest vote share in the district will be awarded a seat. Indonesia uses a multi-stage Hare quota system: The General Election Commission (KPU) creates a quota for each *dapil*, which is the total number of valid votes cast divided by the total number of seats in the district. The quota dictates how parties are awarded seats; if for example the quota is 1500 votes and the party receives 5000 votes, the party is then awarded three seats. The seats are then awarded to the highest vote getters on each party list.⁴ Any seats remaining are awarded to political parties with the largest vote remainders (Ibid). If vote remainder is the same across parties, parties with a wider geographical distribution of votes are awarded the seat(s).

Furthermore, parties which receive under 3.5% of the national vote for the DPR will not gain seats. In 2014, two parties, PBB and PKPI, did not meet this threshold, meaning that votes for their candidates or parties were invalidated.

3.4. Measuring incumbency and candidate characteristics

We define incumbents as candidates who held office at the time of the 2014 election. We focus on three candidate characteristics in particular—work experience, education, demographics—in addition to list position.

3.4.1. Work experience, education, and demographics

Our data allow us to examine a wider variety of candidate background beyond previously holding office. Indonesia's democratic transition has spurred scholars to investigate the extent to which democracy and decentralization produced a new breed of reformist, outsider politicians, or simply entrenched authoritarian holdovers in local and national politics (e.g. Robison and Hadiz, 2004, Hadiz, 2010, Buehler, 2012). By

⁴ This example is reproduced exactly from IFES 2014, p. 4.

bringing in evidence on candidate work experience, we also connect to this debate about change and continuity among the country's political elite (Poczter and Pepinsky, 2016).

Importantly, our measures of candidate quality are in line with how at least some Indonesian voters view candidates. A 2014 survey of voters before the legislative elections in Indonesia asked respondents to rank ten characteristics of candidates; respondents placed educational background and work experience as the two most important characteristics of candidates, followed by the candidate's platform (The Asia Foundation, 2014). However, we know that voters also respond to issues like age, gender, and religion, much like voters around the world.

3.4.2. List position

List position is particularly important in Indonesia because party organizations in Indonesia tend not to have significant machinery or resources to assist candidates (Aspinall, 2014). List position is thus a finite resource with great value for candidates that parties are able to dole out. Indonesia's poorly resourced parties have a history of selling nominations, and most importantly, list position. Mietzner (2007, 251) documented that in 2004, under a closed-list system, the going rate for nominations was determined according to position, with the lowest rankings the most expensive.⁵ It is unclear the extent to which this still occurs after Indonesia moved to an open-list system in 2009. Nevertheless, we expect—given the patterns identified by Mietzner (2007) and our theoretical discussion previously—that incumbents will be more likely to be rewarded with lower list positions, and that voters will be more likely to choose candidates with low list positions regardless of whether or not they are incumbents.

3.5. Limitations

Before turning to our empirical analysis, we note here some of the limitations of our data. Like most work on incumbency effects, we are unable to measure “direct” effects of personal incumbency: that is, the role of constituency service, pork, or patronage. Given the lack of systematic data about legislative practice in Indonesia, we cannot ascertain the extent to which this affects voter choices and thus contributes to personal incumbency effects. Relatedly, we cannot measure the prevalence of vote buying. Vote buying is a common practice in Indonesia's elections; a 2014 survey by The Asia Foundation found that 36% of respondents had experienced vote buying during a legislative election (The Asia Foundation, 2014). The same survey found 16% of respondents would vote for the candidate who provided money or gifts, while 17% would explicitly not choose the party or candidate offering these inducements. It is also unclear *ex ante* how vote buying is related to incumbency in the Indonesian case. It is possible that incumbents have more resources and are thus more able to engage in vote buying, but the comparative evidence on the effectiveness of such strategies is mixed. Reviewing evidence from field experiments in West Africa, Vicente and Wantchekon (2009) find that vote buying is a more effective strategy for challengers rather than incumbents. In contrast, Collier and Vicente (2014) argue that, in Nigeria, vote buying (along with ballot fraud) will benefit incumbents as they have both the money available and they are more credible in promising clientelism (349, fn. 26). Aspinall et al. (2015) find that vote buying is common yet largely ineffective in Indonesian elections, in part because the costs of monitoring voters are prohibitively high.

While list position has been demonstrated to be an important heuristic for voters in low-information environments, there are other heuristics that likely play a part in voting behavior that we are not able to systematically assess. For instance, Indonesian names frequently offer clues about the ethnic regional, and/or religious background of candidates. Finally, campaigners in Indonesian elections often employ campaign material that cues ethnic, religious, or other sentiments for voters (Fox and Menchik, 2011).

Another concern in Indonesian elections is the manipulation of vote results. Concerns in the 2014 election were raised about the illegal transferring of votes from one candidate to another, with the assistance of corrupt election officials (Rumah Pemilu, 2014: 5). Electoral disputes were submitted to the Constitutional Court, which ordered 22 recounts. However, in only one case did the results overturn the previous winner (Della-

⁵ Mietzner's analysis was written prior to the creation of the “fully” open-list PR system in Indonesia in 2009.

Giacoma and Junadi, 2014). It is unlikely that electoral fraud is systematic enough that it has significantly altered the vote share totals or likelihood of winning in a way that would bias our estimates of incumbency effects.

Finally, our data provide a snapshot of incumbency advantage over a single election in Indonesia. While measuring incumbency effects and its changes over time would be ideal, the repeated and sometimes drastic changes in electoral rules and guidelines over the elections Indonesia has held since 1998 make it difficult to study incumbency effects over time.

4. Analysis

4.1. Candidate backgrounds

The 6606 candidates running in Indonesia’s elections have diverse backgrounds: as activists, celebrities, government officials, employees in the private sector, and others. Following the career coding scheme used in Pocster and Pepinsky (2016), we coded nineteen different types of career backgrounds (see Table 1). Specifically, we looked at every career position listed for every candidate through *PemiluAPI*, and assigned it to a career category. We then aggregated these to the candidate level to code candidates as having experience in one or more career categories. As a result, candidates’ career histories are not mutually exclusive; for instance, candidates with experience in both local government and in the private sector receive a “1” for the dummy variables *local government* and *private sector*.

Table 1. Career backgrounds of 2014 legislative candidates.

Career Type	Number	Percent	Description
Ambassador	10	0.15%	Held ambassadorial position (not including regular employee in embassy)
Bureaucrat	1055	15.97%	Any position in any ministry except for minister or deputy minister
Celebrity/Sports	95	1.44%	Presidential spouses, television personalities, etc.
Civil society	676	10.23%	Working for civil society organizations, nonprofits
Cooperative	86	1.3%	Position in a cooperative
Education	1421	21.51%	Teacher or professor
Executive	16	0.24%	The president or president’s personal staff
International	114	1.73%	Work experience abroad
Law	488	7.39%	Employed in the legal profession
Local government	657	9.95%	Any position in local government (not local arms of the bureaucracy)
Media	369	5.59%	TV anchors, newspaper editor, columnist, etc.
Medical	158	2.39%	Employed in the medical profession
Military	158	2.39%	Member of the military or police
Minister	16	0.24%	Held ministerial or deputy ministerial position
Parliament	951	14.40%	A sitting parliamentarian
Party	119	1.80%	An official position with a political party
Private sector	3725	56.39%	Any private business position, including consulting, accountancy, but not law
Public sector	144	2.18%	Any position in a publicly held business
Religious	155	2.35%	Any religious position, or position in a religious organization

Table 2. Other candidate characteristics.

Characteristic	Number	Percent
Highest education level		
Elementary	9	0.14%
Junior High School	62	0.98%
Senior High School	833	13.21%
Higher education (including Bachelor’s Degrees, Postgraduate)	5404	85.67%
Less than elementary/Not recorded	298	4.51%
Religion		
Muslim	5561	84.18%
Christian	840	12.72%
Hindu	69	1.04%
Buddhist	19	0.29%
Confucian	1	0.02%
Not available	116	1.76%
Median Age	47	
Gender		
Male	4139	62.66%
Female	2467	37.34%

These data are useful for characterizing the social backgrounds of Indonesian legislative candidates, and can be used to illustrate change over time. Mietzner (2007: 257) found that in 2004, 39.8% of all national parliamentary members had business backgrounds; we find that among winning candidates in 2014, 56% had a background as a businessperson. This shows the relative rise of the private sector as a route to a political career.

Table 2 covers a series of additional candidate characteristics of interest that we obtained from *PemiluAPI*.

A large majority (86%) of candidates had some form of higher education. The religious background of parliamentary candidates roughly reflects the distribution of religious affiliations in the general population, with Muslim candidates constituting the vast majority (84%). Importantly, despite efforts to increase the number of women in parliament using quotas, only about 37% of candidates are female.

4.2. Incumbency

Seven percent of all candidates running in the 2014 elections were incumbents. All of the 77 electoral districts had more than one incumbent contesting in the district, often from the same party, with an average of 6.3 incumbents running in each *dapil*. The number of incumbents seeking reelection between the last two legislative elections has increased. In the 2009 election, 34% of incumbents from 2004 chose not to run (or were excluded by the party from) the ballot list (Buehler and Vermonte, 2012, 6–7). In 2014, only 13% of incumbents did not appear again on a party list.⁶ Importantly for our analysis below, incumbents were generally given low list positions: 56% of incumbents were ranked first in the party list; 24% in second place; 6% in third, and 7% in fourth.

4.3. Election results

The data show how difficult it is to win a commanding share of the vote in Indonesia's fragmented system. Only 53 of the 6606 candidates received more than 10% of the vote, and the average *winning* candidate won only 5.45% of the vote. Not surprisingly, candidates at low list positions tended to win the most votes. This was true among candidates from within the same party; the correlation between list position and where candidates stood in terms of their ranking in total votes earned was 0.73. It was also true across parties; Fig. 1 displays histograms of candidates' vote shares by list position.⁷ The x-axis shows the distribution of vote shares and the y-axis the proportion of candidates in each vote share bin. Panel 1 – showing the distribution of vote shares for candidates with list position 1– indicates that top-ranked candidates' vote shares are fairly evenly distributed between zero and ten percent. As candidates move down in list position, the distribution of vote shares becomes much more concentrated around a zero percent vote share, as shown in panels 2–10. In fact, candidates ranked in the third – tenth position in their party lists were unlikely to be elected.

Another way to think about the benefit of incumbency is to consider whether incumbents are more likely to be the candidates who win the most votes within their party in any particular *dapil*. If incumbency is defined broadly (including both those who held the seat at some point in the previous term or held the seat at the time of the election, $n = 488$), 48% of incumbents received the most votes of any candidate in their party; 27% received the second highest vote share of any candidate in their party.

Fig. 2 provides further evidence on the role incumbency played for candidates' electoral success. The figure displays kernel density estimates for candidates' vote shares for incumbents (solid line) and non-incumbents (dashed line). The distribution of vote shares for incumbents strongly differs from non-incumbents, indicating,

⁶ The incumbents themselves are also self-selected; it is possible that incumbents who perceived their chances as poor, possibly because of corruption scandals, poor performance, or inability to use the resources of office to their advantage, decided not to run again.

⁷ To improve the visualization, we excluded the top 1% of vote shares (i.e., above 10%)

across the board, higher final vote shares. On average, incumbent candidates receive 4.16% of the vote, whereas the average non-incumbent only received 0.93% of the vote.

Fig. 1. Vote shares by list position.

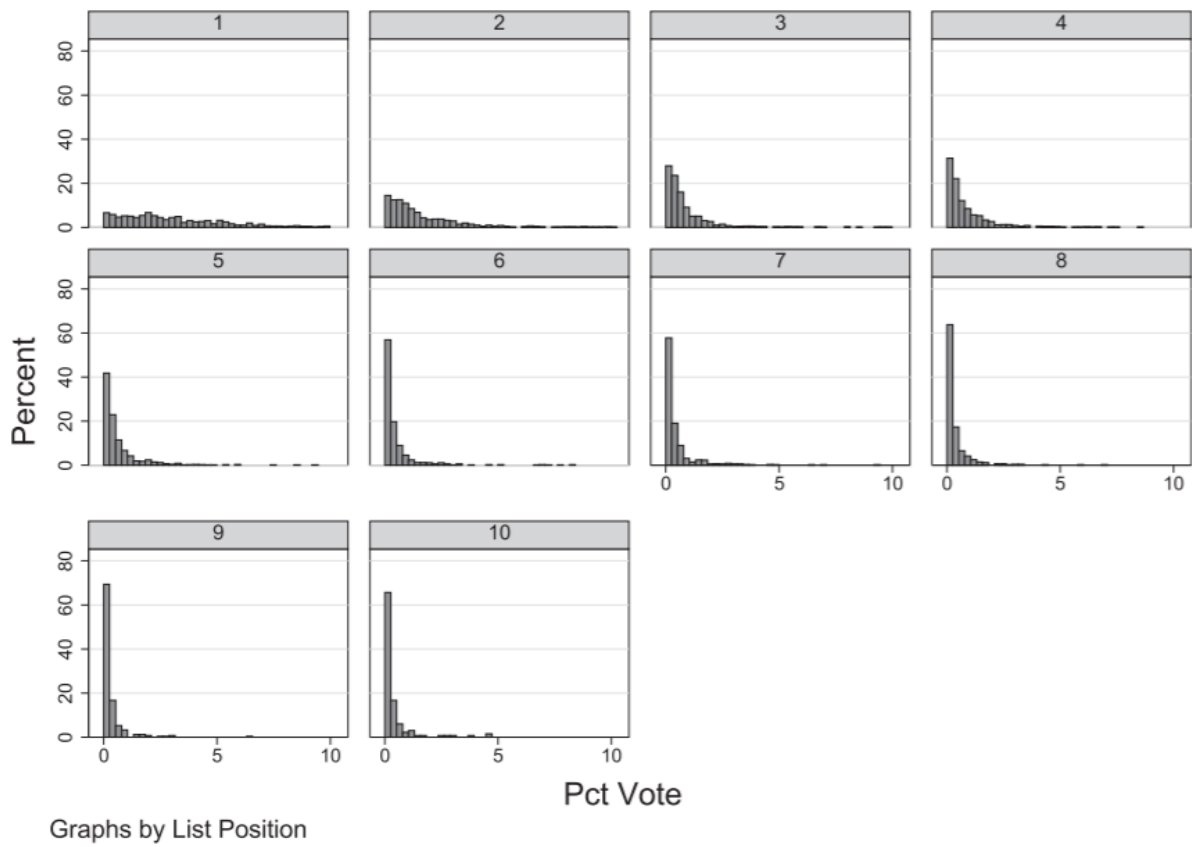
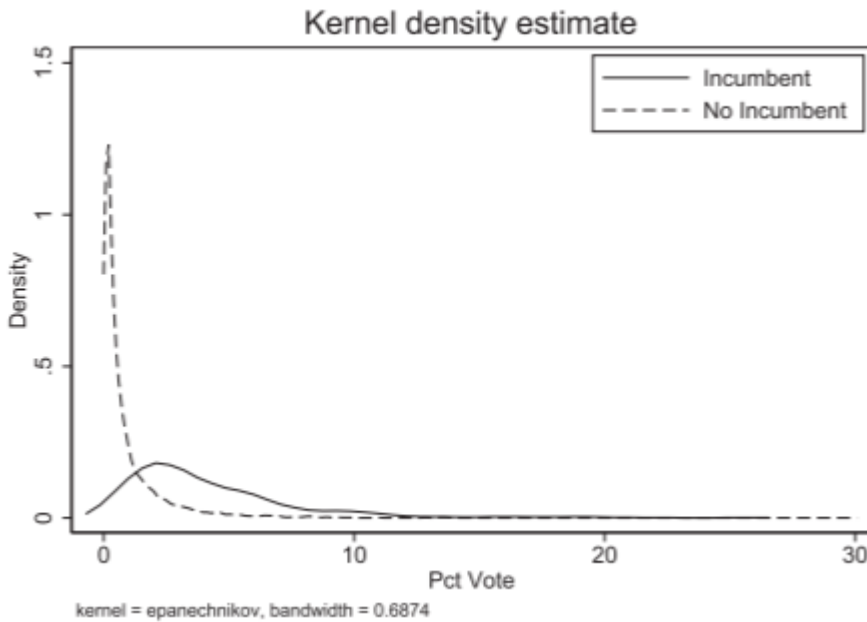


Fig. 2. Candidate vote share by incumbency status.



4.4. Testing the effects of incumbency and list position

The descriptive plot in Fig. 2 is suggestive evidence of an incumbency advantage in Indonesian legislative elections. In this section, we turn to regression analysis to further substantiate this finding. Specifically, we assess the relationship between incumbency status and three core outcomes: candidate vote share, list position, and whether the candidate won a seat. Vote share and winning a seat are the two best outcome measures for measuring incumbency effects. But we also consider list position, because this variable might be an intermediate outcome that can be part of the mechanism that links incumbency status to either vote share or winning a seat. Incumbents can use their political influence and electoral viability to extract a low list position from the party, which contributes to electoral success.

In order to estimate the effect of incumbency we must also consider confounding factors. In particular, the established literature on incumbency effects has drawn attention to the problem of separating candidate ability from incumbency status when estimating the effects of incumbency itself. Most recently, empirical analyses have relied on regression discontinuity designs to identify the causal effect of incumbency. Due to the lack of data on a second round of elections, we are unable to implement such a design. Instead, we rely on regression adjustment to distinguish candidate quality from incumbency.

Specifically, we estimate regression models of the following form: $y_{id} = \alpha_d + \beta I_{id} + \gamma X_{id} + \epsilon_{id}$ where y_{id} is a measure of one of our three outcomes, α_d is an electoral district fixed effect, and X_{id} is a vector of observable candidate characteristics. I_{id} , our main variable of interest, is a dummy variable that captures whether candidate i is an incumbent in district d .⁸ This model specification accounts for important district-level confounders, like district magnitude and baseline levels of party support, via the inclusion of the district fixed effects. To limit confounding via candidate quality we include an extensive battery of candidate-level variables that capture those candidate characteristics that might proxy for candidate quality – in particular variables measuring educational background and work history. We include an indicator that measures the level of educational attainment of each candidate, ranging from 1 (elementary school) to 4 (higher education).

⁸ For our main analysis we rely on a narrow definition of incumbency, i.e., candidates who currently hold a seat. For our robustness checks we also consider the slightly broader definition of incumbency, which also includes candidates who used to be incumbents but vacated their seat in the five year period prior to the 2014 election. This probably dilutes our estimate of the strength of incumbency advantage, since candidates that abandoned their seats before the election have fewer resources attached to their office to draw on.

We also include dummy variables for our work history categories. These cover a multitude of experiences, ranging from government service, to civil society work, private sector experience, to celebrity status. In addition to educational background and work history, we include candidate age as well as dummy variables for female gender, candidates' party affiliation, and religion. Taken together, this rich set of candidate-level controls should account for a large portion of candidate quality, party label effects, or unobserved district characteristics that might confound the effect of incumbency. Summary statistics for all variables are reported in Table A1 in the Appendix.

For vote share and list position we estimate standard OLS models with electoral district fixed effects and standard errors clustered at the electoral district level to account for arbitrary serial correlation and heteroskedasticity. For the dummy variable that measures whether a candidate actually won a seat, we estimate a logistic regression model.

Table 3 presents our main results. Before we discuss the effects of incumbency, we briefly highlight the results for some particularly interesting control variables. We find, first, that female candidates are penalized across the board. They receive a smaller share of the vote, receive a worse (i.e., higher) list position, and have an overall lower probability of winning a seat. We see a similar bias against older candidates. Educational background seems to matter less – our indicator has a statistically significant relationship with list position at the 5% level, but not with any of the other outcomes. Looking at a candidate's work history, a number of factors stand out as relevant predictors of electoral success and list position. Experience in local government or as a parliamentarian or minister each significantly increase vote share, improve list position, and elevate the probability of winning a seat. Religious affiliation does not seem to exert large effects. Although Christian candidates receive, on average, a worse list position, this does not affect their vote share or probability of winning a seat. Last, our set of party affiliation dummies capture any overall party label effects on individual candidates' vote shares. These effects have to be interpreted with respect to the omitted party category of Golkar – the former ruling party during the New Order regime. As can be seen, affiliation with any of the other parties, except PDI-P, carries a penalty for candidate's vote share. This is not too surprising, since Golkar and PDI-P are two of Indonesia's most established parties.

Turning to our main variable of interest, our indicator for incumbency is positive and statistically significant for vote share and winning a seat. The effect of incumbency is negative and statistically significant for list position (because lower list positions are better). Substantively, incumbents can expect to receive a vote share that is higher by 2.67 percentage points than non-incumbents. That is about 1.4 standard deviations. Given that the average seat winning vote share was 5.45%, this is a substantively meaningful effect. They are also, on average, ranked two list positions better than other candidates and the overall probability of winning a seat is about 25 percentage points higher for incumbents (the baseline probability of winning is only 8.5%).

Table 3. Incumbency advantage, main results.

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Vote Share, OLS	List, OLS	Won Seat, Logit
Female	-0.50*** (0.05)	0.38*** (0.07)	-0.97*** (0.14)
Age	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.03*** (0.00)	-0.02** (0.01)
Education Level	0.08+ (0.05)	-0.20** (0.06)	-0.04 (0.16)
Religion			
Buddhist	-0.04 (0.38)	0.57 (0.70)	0.31 (0.48)
Hindu	0.24 (0.32)	0.24 (0.17)	0.22 (0.72)
Christian	0.05 (0.08)	0.55*** (0.10)	-0.12 (0.16)
Party			
PAN	-0.75*** (0.14)	-0.28*** (0.06)	-0.37* (0.16)
Crescent Star	-1.45*** (0.11)	-0.53*** (0.06)	-
PDI-P	0.19 (0.17)	-0.22** (0.07)	0.46*** (0.12)
PD	-1.06*** (0.14)	0.26*** (0.07)	-0.95*** (0.17)
Gerindra	-0.26* (0.12)	-0.41*** (0.06)	0.36*** (0.11)
People's Conscience	-1.04*** (0.12)	-0.45*** (0.05)	-1.25*** (0.23)
Justice and Unity	-1.49*** (0.12)	-0.71*** (0.06)	-
PKS	-0.98*** (0.13)	-0.61*** (0.08)	-0.77*** (0.17)
PKB	-0.63*** (0.14)	-0.48*** (0.07)	-0.36* (0.14)
NasDem	-0.70*** (0.13)	-0.54*** (0.05)	-0.16 (0.18)
PPP	-0.85*** (0.11)	-0.40*** (0.07)	-0.46** (0.15)
Work Experience			
Ambassador	-0.06 (0.55)	-0.43 (0.54)	0.95 (1.24)
Bureaucrat	-0.12+ (0.06)	-0.02 (0.07)	-0.31* (0.15)
Celebrity	-0.01 (0.21)	-1.86*** (0.20)	11.07*** (1.08)
Cooperative	0.02 (0.14)	0.31 (0.23)	-0.23 (0.40)
Education	-0.03 (0.05)	-0.18** (0.06)	-0.07 (0.14)
Executive	-0.32 (0.22)	1.44** (0.43)	-0.43 (0.82)
International	-0.15 (0.12)	-0.28 (0.20)	-0.32 (0.49)
Law	-0.08 (0.06)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.29 (0.23)
Local Gov	0.49*** (0.11)	-0.05 (0.08)	0.58*** (0.17)
Media	-0.12 (0.09)	0.11 (0.11)	-0.32 (0.23)
Medical	-0.01 (0.14)	-0.01 (0.15)	-0.01 (0.31)
Military	-0.14 (0.15)	-0.18 (0.18)	0.01 (0.32)
Minister	3.90* (1.89)	-2.04*** (0.41)	2.07** (0.70)
Parliament	0.60*** (0.09)	-0.67*** (0.09)	0.88*** (0.13)
Party	0.21 (0.26)	-0.21 (0.21)	-0.11 (0.32)
Private Sector	-0.02 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.06)	-0.00 (0.12)
Public Sector	-0.01 (0.10)	0.06 (0.18)	0.18 (0.34)
Religious	0.11 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.17)	0.19 (0.31)
Sports/Celebrity	0.18 (0.13)	1.63*** (0.09)	-10.48*** (1.03)
Incumbency Advantage			
Incumbent	2.66*** (0.19)	-2.22*** (0.13)	2.24*** (0.16)
Constant	1.88*** (0.22)	6.95*** (0.31)	-0.96 (0.68)
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	6043	6052	5108
Log-Likelihood	-11263.87	-13059.87	-1333.04
AIC	22 599.74	26 191.74	2822.08

Clustered standard errors in parentheses.

Omitted category for Religion is Muslim, omitted category for Party is Golkar.

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Our appendix shows models that test the robustness of this finding. For example, since candidate vote share is bound between 0 and 1, we estimate a fractional logit model with electoral district dummies. As an alternative to the logit model, we also estimate a linear probability model, with no substantive changes to our results (see Table A2 and A3 in the Appendix). We also broaden the definition of incumbency to include candidates who relinquished their seat before the election but decided to run again. Similarly, we also estimate a model with a categorical definition of incumbency that separates these different types of incumbents (see Tables A4 and A5 in the Appendix).

Table 4 further explores how incumbency and list position work together to realize incumbency advantage. The first two columns estimate the vote share models and the logit model for winning a seat, but include as an additional control the list position of the candidate. Since list position is post-treatment with respect to incumbency status, these regressions only estimate the partial effect of incumbency, after having already accounted for the effect of list position. Again, we find a statistically significant effect of incumbency status. Moreover, coefficients in Table 4 are smaller than those in Table 3 (2.19 versus 2.66 for vote share, 1.32 versus 2.24 for winning a seat). This suggests that list position captures some of the effects of incumbency, but the incumbency advantage effect is realized to a large extent independently of list position. Models (3) and (4) in Table 4 estimate the same models but also include an interaction term between list position and incumbency status. To judge the statistical and substantive importance of the interaction, Fig. 3 displays the predicted vote share for incumbents and non-incumbents by list position, based on Model (3).

Table 4. Incumbency advantage, interaction models.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Vote Share, OLS	Won Seat, Logit	Vote Share, OLS	Won Seat, Logit
Incumbency Advantage				
List Position	-0.21*** (0.01)	-0.59*** (0.06)	-0.20*** (0.01)	-0.55*** (0.06)
Incumbent	2.19*** (0.19)	1.32*** (0.17)	3.19*** (0.25)	2.06*** (0.37)
Incumbent* List Position			-0.50*** (0.08)	-0.45* (0.24)
Constant	3.35*** (0.22)	2.07** (0.73)	3.23*** (0.22)	1.90** (0.74)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
District FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	6043	5108	6043	5108
Log-Likelihood	-11010.14	-1158.98	-10958.83	-1153.36
AIC	22 094.29	2473.95	21 993.66	2388.73

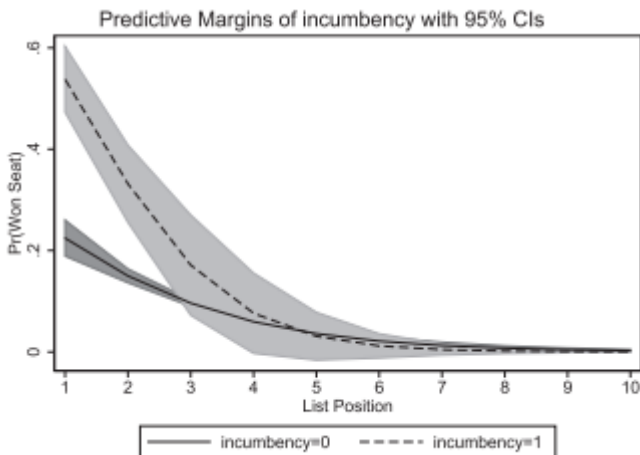
Clustered standard errors in parentheses.
 + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Fig. 3 shows that incumbents receive a higher vote share than non-incumbents for low list positions. Similarly, lower list position statistically significantly reduces candidates' vote share. Importantly, the positive effect of being an incumbent is more dramatic for top list positions. This difference in slope itself is statistically significant and suggests that incumbency is amplified by list position. This difference in effects becomes smaller and eventually statistically insignificant for higher list positions – in part because few incumbents receive poor list positions. In other words, incumbents that enjoy a low list position do particularly well, while highly placed candidates – incumbent or not – do poorly. For example, of the 34 incumbents who received a list position of five or higher, only three won a seat. This success rate of 9% is roughly comparable to the success rate of non-incumbents of similar list position, who won a seat at a rate of 2%.⁹

Finally, we provide some exploratory evidence on the heterogeneity of incumbency advantage. We estimate a series of interaction models for final vote share, in which we interact our incumbency measure with candidates' gender, educational background, party affiliation, religion, and district magnitude. Detailed regression results are provided in Table A7 in the Appendix; here we simply highlight the most interesting findings.

⁹ These success rates are based purely on descriptive statistics and do not account for other aspects of candidates' profiles that affect the success probability as estimated in our multivariate models. As Fig. 3 illustrates, the probability of winning a seat at list position 5 is basically the same for incumbents and non-incumbents

Fig. 3. Incumbency, list position, and vote share.



First, on partisan and district characteristics. We find that incumbency advantage is particularly weak for candidates from the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI), the Crescent Star Party (PBB), and the Democrat Party (PD) – relative to the baseline category of a Golkar candidate. PD’s low level of incumbency advantage is probably due to the collapse of the party’s electoral support as a whole at the end of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono’s presidency. Candidates from the NasDem party are even subject to a negative incumbency effect relative to a Golkar candidate; NasDem was founded only in 2011, but it does have a few incumbents who had switched parties to join the party prior to 2014. Conversely, incumbency advantage is large and positive for candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) and Golkar (effect sizes between candidates from Golkar and PDI-P are statistically indistinguishable from each other). One explanation for these differential results is party institutionalization: PDI-P and Golkar are two of Indonesia’s oldest political parties, PDI-P being a successor to PDI, an opposition party created in the early years of Indonesia’s New Order regime (1966–1998) and Golkar being the former autocratic ruling party. The other parties except for PPP were all founded after 1998, with NasDem the newest, dating only to 2011. Similar to Moral et al. (2015) in Turkey, we also find that incumbency advantage is much smaller in districts with higher district magnitude. This might reflect the additional opportunities for otherwise marginal challengers to succeed in such elections, since voters may have less information about the reputation of incumbents.

Turning to candidates’ individual characteristics, we do not find any differences in incumbency effects between female and male candidates. Thus, whereas Shair-Rosenfield (2012) identifies incumbency as an important determinant of women’s electoral success using data from Indonesia’s 2009 legislative elections, looking at the 2014 legislative elections we find that female candidates are no more likely to benefit from incumbency than are men, conditional on the other covariates we have include in our models.¹⁰

Given the strong connection between list position and vote share, it is perhaps surprising that parties do not always place incumbents at the top of the party list. There are several reasons why parties do not do so. First, parties may reward candidates with low list positions in response to unobserved candidate characteristics such as party loyalty (Golden and Picci, 2015) or personal connections. It is also possible that, as under the closed-list system, challengers are simply buying low list positions.

Yet another possibility is parties strategically choose to place some incumbents in higher list positions. If parties believe that an incumbent has a reputation for being corrupt or incompetent, or pre-election survey results (increasingly common in Indonesia, see Mietzner, 2009) indicate that a more popular candidate than the incumbent has entered the race, then they will push the incumbent further up the list. If parties believe incumbents are somehow tainted in the eyes of the public, they should push them to higher list positions. In theory, it is also possible that parties are trying to maximize total party votes in order to gain the most number

¹⁰ If we exclude all covariates and simply include female gender, incumbency, and their interaction as predictors, we still find no evidence that female candidates are more likely to benefit from incumbency than men.

of seats, no matter who wins the seat. Although we have no evidence that this has occurred in Indonesia, placing popular incumbents at higher list positions might lead parties to place popular but untried candidates at lower positions. Unfortunately, we are unable to systematically evaluate the motivations of parties in how they place candidates.

Given the lack of systematic data, we cannot test whether or how incumbents are using the resources of office to increase their likelihood of winning a seat. Certainly, field research from the 2014 elections has found that legislative candidates sought to build up their personal reputation in order to boost their vote share (Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016). Incumbents also benefit from heuristics such as better list position and name recognition (for example through newspaper and television coverage throughout their terms), complementing direct constituency service or campaign effects. The finding that incumbency effects diminish as district magnitude grows also suggests that the reach of personally-centered campaigns, including patronage, has its limits. Research on clientelism and vote buying in Indonesia and in other contexts suggests this to be the case (see discussion in Aspinall and Sukmajati, 2016, 35.)

Our finding of a personal incumbency advantage in Indonesia naturally raises another question. Why would Indonesia not conform to expectations of an incumbency disadvantage as found in other new democracies? We highlight three factors. First, the role of information shortcuts among voters looms large. Faced with long lists of candidates, many of whom have tried to build personal (not party) reputations, voters may default to using incumbency, list position, name recognition, gender, or other heuristics to make their decisions. Second, given widespread reports and research suggesting the ubiquity of patronage and vote buying, incumbents are better positioned to distribute resources to build up their vote. Third, it is also possible that Indonesia's national legislators are not penalized for poor performance in the way that the new incumbency disadvantage literature predicts. The national legislature is not held in high regard by ordinary Indonesians. A 2014 poll by the respected LSI survey institute found that 37% of survey respondents reported having not much or no confidence at all in the national legislature to address issues in their community and country, and respondents rated it as being the most corrupt institution in the country (LSI, 2014). At the same time, national legislators are often distant from the issues affecting quality of life in their districts. The decisions over infrastructure, road provision, civil service hiring, and other issues directly affecting voters are under the purview of local or regional politicians: governors, mayors, district heads, and district legislatures, in the case of Indonesia. While Indonesian voters may not have a high regard for national legislators, they may not have enough information about their behavior, or see them as responsible for poor local outcomes, to penalize them during elections.

5. Conclusion

This article has documented a strong personal incumbency advantage in Indonesia's open-list PR system. We have also shown that personal incumbency is mediated by how parties choose to rank incumbents and challengers on their party lists, and also by candidate characteristics. This analysis, the first of its kind in Indonesia, suggests several new areas of research on incumbency effects in new democracies and in open-list PR systems.

Most importantly, our contributions open an avenue into further research on personal incumbency that looks more systematically and comprehensively at candidates' personal and professional backgrounds. While having previously held elective office offers a compelling proxy for candidate quality, we have shown that other aspects of candidate background such as education or other types of work history affect can affect incumbency as well. Our rich data on incumbent and challenger characteristics allow us to investigate how these interact with incumbency status and list position in open-list PR systems. Going forward, we see the central question to be not whether or not an incumbency advantage exists in open-list PR systems such as Indonesia, but where it comes from.

Our findings also naturally help us to better understand the trajectory of democratic consolidation in countries like Indonesia, where scholars have engaged in debates over change and continuity among the country's political elite since its democratic transition. Our findings depart from the majority of recent published work that finds evidence of an incumbency disadvantage in new democracies (see a critical review in Fowler and Hall, 2016). The Indonesian case appears to be more typical of advanced industrial democracies: incumbency

offers a consistent advantage to candidates for legislative elections, one that cannot be reduced to any systematically observable candidate characteristics.

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