

Silent Political Apathy in Urban Society: The Case of Medan 2018 Election

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Abstract

Studies on non-voting behavior and which depart from social perspectives have long been stagnated due to the dominance of analysis that puts systems, institutionalization, political mechanisms and participation as the main viewpoints of the studies. This study using social perspectives is useful to explain why voters were not present at polling stations during the Medan 2018 Election. It elaborates the social aspects that influenced non-voting behavior in the urban area of Medan in North Sumatra, Indonesia during the 2018 gubernatorial election. Utilizing mix-method strategies, instead of citing social aspects as a mere research context, this article argues that social aspects in the form of social cleavages worked behind the silent apathy, namely apathy that was implicitly indicated by voters who were not present at polling stations. Social cleavages including ethnicity, religion and gender indicated a paradox since they – with the exception of gender – were used by candidates as the main campaign substance. On the other hand, large numbers of people showed disinterest in these social cleavages during the election. This article explains why abstained voters hid their disinterest behind their excuses for not being present at the polling stations for economic (working activities) and other reasons.

Keywords:

apathy; election; non-voting behavior; social cleavage; voter abstention

Introduction

The sociological perspective has rarely been used to analyze non-voting behavior rather than the political science approach. If the latter is very productive in yielding studies about the system and institutionalization of elections (i.e., Blais & Aarts, 2006; Delwit, 2013; Kang, 2004; Power & Roberts, 1995), non-supportive electoral mechanisms and institutions (i.e., lima 1990 in Power & Roberts, 1995), alienation of candidates (Adams, Dow, & Merrill, 2006), and technicalities of electoral administration (Downs, 1957; Freixas &

Zwicker, 2003), studies that depart from a social perspective experience stagnation.

This stagnation is in line with the strengthening of behavioral approaches that prioritize voter rationality (i.e., Delwit, 2013) and political culture which prioritize welfare rather than class mobility (Achterberg, 2006). The use of social perspective is more associated with studies on non-economic factors such as the strengthening levels of education and technocraticism that affect changes in social cleavage structure (Jansen, De Graaf, & Need, 2011). Also, studies on social obligations, social

pressure¹ and low motivation for “social act”² (Sternheimer, 2012) rather than social cleavage and its implications for voting behavior. Hence, social class, religion, regional identity and ethnicity that were previously formed the constellation of political parties are no longer known as the main antecedents that greatly influence the decision to vote (Elff, 2007).

Evans (2004) on the other hand, reminds the relationship between social studies and voting behavior when she identified two kinds of study, namely the political sociology explanation and the sociology of political explanation. If the first one discusses the mobilization based on social cleavages, the second one discusses the social cleavages’ influence on voting behavior. The social cleavages include religion, ethnicity and gender.

This article follows the second perspective in explaining a number of social indications that arise from previous research. Study about the 2018 gubernatorial election in Medan North Sumatra Indonesia that the authors were involved explored explicit aspects as explanation for voter absence in polling stations. The survey stage found that economic activity was the main reason for voter abstention while the qualitative discussion elaborated more on technical and administrative aspects of the election. (Budi, et.al., 2018; 2020 upcoming). Some social indications such as religion, ethnicity, and gender stand out but have not been discussed as social aspects that affect voter abstention.

Instead of revising findings from previous research, this article intends to take a different point of view. Voter abstention is identified as political apathy, referring to the classic definition that places any activity absent from polling stations as political apathy (Rosenberg,

1956; Dean, 1965). The term “silent” is placed as an adjective to indicate the implicit tone or level of apathy, meanwhile social cleavages are placed as social aspects that influence political apathy as Evans indicated in her study (2004).

This article intends to answer the question of: how do those social indicators affect political apathy? This article argues that social cleavages influence silent apathy. Ethnic, religious, and gender worked as social cleavages in which members respond to the social and political situations by deciding not to vote, without necessarily directly linking it to ideological reasons. Social cleavages also revealed a paradox because in the midst of the trend of candidates using ethnic, religious and gender issues as campaign material, voters who came from the three cleavages actually showed silent apathy.

As indicated earlier, this article utilizes data on Voters Abstention in the 2018 Medan gubernatorial election (Budi et.al., 2018). Medan, the metropolitan city in North Sumatra Indonesia has been acknowledged as the city with the highest level of abstention. Between 2000 and 2018, the voter abstention was ranged from 36.62 to 74.62%. In 2018, despite its dramatically reduced to 41.62%, Medan still maintains its image as an area with high abstention³. The social background is not only characterized by their economic profile, but also social groupings based on religion, ethnicity and gender, which in the 2018 elections indicate certain trends.

This article analyzes surveys as well as qualitative data about abstained voters with further investigation that includes the contribution of social indicators. Hence, this paper considers interview results including those with the head and members of KPU (General Elections Commissions) in Medan and North Sumatra, Bawaslu (Election Supervisory

¹ See for example <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~hkwarner/PublicFinancePage10.html>

² A sense of being involved in the community while attending the polling stations.

³ The average abstention in Indonesia is usually below 40%.

Body) in Medan, electoral technical officers, political parties, academics, local journalists, and activists. This paper also includes official election documents, government statistics, and media news as data sources.

Social Cleavage and Silent Political Apathy

Political apathy is a global phenomenon whose emergence tends to strengthen from time to time (Fieldhouse, Tranmer, & Russell, 2007; Henn, Weinstein, & Forrest, 2005). Scholars tend to define political apathy through narrow and concise definitions, sometimes indicating different perspectives. Classical research indicates that “political apathy, or its converse, political participation, has generally been defined simply as voting or non-voting.” Political apathy arises because of indifference related to powerlessness (Dean, 1965). The absence of political interest and activity can be determined by many reasons, including “social restraints, feelings of futility, and the absence of spurs to action all tended to inhibit participation in the democratic process” (Rosenberg, 1954: 349).

DeLuca (1995) refers to C. Wright Mills and Herbert Marcuse, on the other hand, saying that political apathy is related to the loss of political space that causes alienation. It does not necessarily indicate public apathy towards the political process (Martin, 2012) and many of those who are apathetic to electoral politics are actually involved in activities such as volunteering, demonstrations and petitions (Dalton, 2010). However, it is very common that political apathy causes the non-voting behavior or voter abstention (Carlin 2006 in Runciman, 2016).

Although many do not associate political apathy with ideology, some others attribute this to ideological expressions that come from “dislike of politicians, lack of variety among candidates, lack of trust in government, and negative media coverage of subjects involved in politics” (Windber, 2020) or ideological

opposition (Budi et al., 2018). In the midst of various definitions indicating different levels or ranges of political apathy, this article puts political apathy simply as the non-voting behavior which is indicated through the absence of voters at the polling stations. The term of silent apathy may rarely be found in existing studies but this article appears to show the tone or level of apathy, which in this case study appears not explicitly but is indicated through several sociological indicators.

This article follows a structuralist line of thinking that indicates a link between social cleavage and voting behavior. Evans (2004) identified two explanatory trends, namely the political sociology explanation and the sociology of political explanation. The first trend, which is political sociology explanation, mainly puts Lipset & Rokkan’s study (1967) as the most influential writing. They indicate that social divisions such as ethnicity, religion, and the development of the post-industrial revolution produces social and political divisions. If education and materialistic oriented working class produce cleavages based on center-periphery, rural-urban, church-state, and class, and worker-owner (Pierides, 2009), cleavages affects individual’s party choice and provide opportunities for political elites to mobilize voting (Evans, 2004).

In Indonesian current politics, social cleavages are more prominent compared to secularism (Higashikata & Kawamura, 2015). Classical studies have shown that cleavages in the form of ethnicity and religion underlined the constellation of political parties in Indonesian 1950’s election (Feith, 2007; 1963). Feith’s statement regarding political streams (*politik aliran*) even became an influential argument in political science studies until now. In the 2018 Gubernatorial election in Medan, this issue still arises as an explanation for the preferences of first-time voters to vote (Damanik, 2018a). Previously in 2017 during the Jakarta Gubernatorial Election, studies

also indicate that religious cleavage worked stronger compared to socio-economic factors, even becoming the basis for voting behavior (Panggabean, 2017).

Ethnic divisions and beliefs are suspected to fill the dimensions of voters' religio-political identity which strengthens along with the weakening of the political party function (Trihartono & Patriadi, 2016). Gender, that globally "has never been a clear-cut cleavage determining electoral choice" (Abendschon & Steinmetz, 2014; Inglehart & Norris, 2000) started to get attention as soon as there is a shift in the trend in research. Female voter behavior associated with conservatism, religious belief, and secularism (Abendschon & Steinmetz, 2014) indicates gender gap of development that affects their participation in elections⁴ thus contribute to analysis that links election with socio-structural and situational aspects⁵ (McClurg, Wade, & Philips, 2012).

Evans' (2004: 43-90) second identification of trend, which is the sociology of political explanation, does not place cleavage-based political mobilization as the center of discussion. She puts her attention on Sartori's famous writing in the 1960s and studies of Columbia school which mentioned a number of social indicators as social cleavages including gender, religion, and ethnicity as important aspects that influence voting. These social indicators work on the basis of differentiation which is characterized by shared characteristics and interests, intergenerational transmission of values, and contacts characterized by long individual membership in a social community. This article therefore uses Evan's second categorization, the sociology of political explanation, as a general guide for the analysis.

To elaborate social aspects, this article reflects the perspective of Evans (2004), who sees voting as a unique activity related to the role of all eligible voters. She indicates that voters' decisions are influenced by various social considerations related to their positions in the social structure. Therefore, a vote usually reflects any element of the social structure that may affect the voter.

Evans (2004 p. 43) provides four bases of analysis to examine the relationship between social structure and voting behavior. First, the social context in which a person grows may influence their political choices since the series of beliefs, values, culture and actions are inherent in a person through the process of internalization and socialization. Second, members of the group usually face various distinguishing categories. These include age, gender, education level, economic level, occupation and so on. The joining of someone in a group causes them to feel the same experiences and interactions in the same group. Through this description, everyone from the same group will develop a common trait because of the same process of development and experience. Third, political parties tend to target specific social groups in the community to mobilize support (votes). They very likely attract support through their common view over a community group since it is impossible to satisfy everyone's interests. Fourth, in order to mobilize this large group of voters, a party is like playing a gambling. It means that one party's benefits are the other party's loss and vice versa.

Explaining Voter Abstention through Mixed-method Analysis

Mixed-method strategy which is manifested in the form of combining quantitative and qualitative methods is referring to dynamic interconnections among factors (see for example Hesse-Biber, 2010). The advantage of this method is the possibility to cross-check the

⁴ Women who work and are economically independent have higher levels of participation and exposure to feminist ideas than men (Jelen, Thomas, & Wilcox, 1994) (Jelen et al., 1994)

⁵ This includes women's and men's role in work, family and society.

overlapping aspects of a phenomenon (Greene, et.al., 1989 in Hesse-Biber, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Therefore, data analysis applies a combined technique, including demographic data, surveys and observations, and social mapping.

This research utilizes complementarity as a type of methodological design. Hence, the relation between quantitative and qualitative approaches is cross-validation. Technically, the sampling is conducted through a multilevel strategy with different levels of respondent/informant to enrich the explanation dimension. The selection of sample also refers to the research objective of answering questions with a richer perspective (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This means that the sample of respondents/informants in the quantitative and qualitative phases is different in consideration of filling the same dimensions that are related with the investigated issue.

In the quantitative phase, the survey was conducted using a multi-stage stratified random sampling involving 400 respondents spread across 21 sub districts (*kecamatan*) in Medan. They were voters from the Final Voter List (DPT) who were identified as not present at the polling stations (TPS). In this case, data access from the Election Commission (KPU) was crucial since it allowed researchers to obtain information about abstained voters. Random sampling was carried out at forty polling stations where ten respondents were each taken. This data collection also applied the principle of proportional gender where male and female respondents were targeted in the same composition.

Meanwhile, the qualitative phase applied a non-random sampling strategy. This was conducted through targeted interviews and focus group discussions (FGD). In this phase, quantitative enumerators, some members of the City Election Commission (KPU Medan), the Subdistrict Election Committee (PPK), the voting committee (PPS), the "success team"

of candidates, NGO activists and academics involved in the process.

The Context, Main Findings, and the Indication for Further Analysis

Medan, the capital city of North Sumatra is the biggest metropolitan city in the northern part of the island. Built around the end of the 18th century by the Dutch Colonial ruler, Medan was the main location for plantation business and the trading of estate crops commodities (Reid, 2014; Stoler, 2005). The 265.1 km² city now plays an important role as a trading city in the Malacca Strait. This has implications for at least two things, namely the composition of a heterogeneous population (see Damanik, 2018b) and the economic structure characterized by services and manufacturing business.

The consistent migration from the beginning to the present resulted in ethnic diversity. Here, the Javanese descent dominates the population quantitatively and Batak (and its sub-ethnics) – the indigenous ones – have been politically important since many strong politicians in Medan and Jakarta are members of this tribe. Beside them, Medan is also known by Chinese, Tamil/Indian, and Arabic descent migrants. Their presence strengthens the city's profile as a business area with unique configuration of ethnics. Medan is even known as the largest distribution area for Javanese, Chinese, Tamil/Indian, and Arabic descendants of migrants in Indonesia.

In the midst of ethnic heterogeneity, the issue of social cleavage surrounds the Chinese descent and Batak populations. For several centuries, the Chinese-descents have occupied residential areas where no other ethnic groups lived in the same location (Christie, 2013). In addition to their domination upon the economic sector, the use of Hokkien Chinese rather than Bahasa in their daily lives and their settlement patterns raised the stereotype of exclusive citizens (Faraidiany, 2016)⁶. This pattern of

⁶ Also being explained by Thomas Hutoyo (pseudonym),

Table 1.
Ethnic Composition and Distribution in 2004

No.	Tribe	Percentage	Kecamatan (Main District of Distribution)
1	Java	12,85-59,42	Medan Deli, Medan Marelan, Medan Polonia
2	Malay	2,22-23,65	Medan Labuhan, Medan Marelan, Medan Belawan
3	Tapanuli/Toba*	5,31-26,78	Medan Kota, Medan Denai, Medan Helvetia
4	Chinese descent	0,2-29,94	Medan Area, Medan Kota, Medan Maimun, Medan Petisah, Medan Barat
5	South Tapanuli/Madina	4,48-24,36	Medan Tembung, Medan Barat, Medan Timur, Medan Amplas
6	Karo*	0,64-32,5	Medan Baru, Medan Selayang, Medan Tuntungan
7	Simalungun*	0,63-3,28	Medan Selayang dan Medan Tuntungan
8	Pakpak/Dairi*	0,2-2,48	Medan Johor, Medan Tuntungan
9	Nias	0,18-1,82	Medan Tuntungan, Medan Johor, Medan Amplas
10	Coastal/Middle Tapanuli*	0,09-0,61	Medan Barat, Medan Belawan, Medan Johor
11	Minangkabau	2,77-30,93	Medan Area, Medan Denai, Medan Maimun, Medan Kota
12	Tamil/India	0,09-6,27	Medan Polonia, Medan Petisah, Medan Baru
13	Arab	0,20-0,35	Medan Area, Medan Timur, Medan Perjuangan
Total		100,00%	

Source: BPS Kota Medan 2004 in Mukmin & Damanik (2018). *Batak Sub-tribe

residents is reminiscent of the distribution of the Batak and its sub-tribes that is divided into ecological and religious boundaries. Where, the distribution of their population as mountainous and coastal communities shows the spread of non-Muslim and Muslim religions in North Sumatra⁷.

However, in contrast to the Batak, the issue of exclusivity of Chinese descendants resulted in serious problems in 1998. Then, the non-Chinese residents were considered as conducting social unrest to the Chinese-descendants. The riot caused significant economic, social and political losses to the attacked community. However, stereotypes upon this community as migrants with their own way of life declined along with the revitalization of their role in national and local politics. The evidence of their involvement in politics can be traced from their involvement in legislative elections both at national and local level (Faraidiany, 2016).

With the cleavage tendency, this issue of ethnic cleavage does not appear to be the

main social problem nowadays despite its effect on abstention as will be discussed later. Politically, the issue of ethnicity during the 2018 gubernatorial election appeared more on the Javanese and Batak issues that transcended spatial barriers. This issue also competed with other identity issues such as politicization of religion. Thomas (1988) explains that most Muslims in Medan received a militantly orthodox religious teaching. With population reaching 65 percent Muslim of the total population (BPS 2018) and the strengthening of identity politics, politicization of religious became relevant to Medan.

Hence, the two governor candidates appeared to be aiming for identity issues in different ways. The first pair of candidates, Edy Rahmayadi and Musa Rajekshah, seemed to bring their profiles closer to the Muslims. Therefore, their profile as non-indigenous was less important. Their use of religious strategy involved designing campaigns which were combined with religious events. They even utilized the largest Islamic religious institution (MUI) and controversial clerics to support their winning agenda. Rahmayadi's profile as a military general and Rajekshah's profile as

the Chinese descent resident in Medan, June 2018

⁷ Interviews with two academicians for The North Sumatra University, June 2018

a businessman with a background of Pemuda Pancasila - a mass organization established by the New Order⁸ - were then managed to strengthen the candidates' masculine character which was important for voters⁹.

The second pair of candidates, Djarot Saiful Hidayat and Sihar Sitorus highlighted the issue of Javanese and Batak ethnicity to attract voters. Hidayat, the former Governor of Jakarta who took the position after Ahok's controversial imprisonment in 2017¹⁰, appeared to approach the largest ethnic voter group, which was the population of Javanese descents. With a weak connectivity with the voters—even those of Javanese descent—Hidayat unwisely chose a local politician with a minority religious background. Sitorus, the young entrepreneur, highlighted his profile as a Catholic Batak. Highlights on ethnic profiles amid the tendency to politicization of religion made it difficult for them to win the election. Rahmayadi and Rajekshah eventually won the battle with 57.57% at the North Sumatra level, and more than 60% at Medan.

Concerning the economic structure, Medan relies on the service sector. The contribution of these sectors to the gross regional domestic income reaches about 42% of total revenue¹¹. The strength of this sector, compared to manufacturing

and agriculture, was also evident for the type of employed population. Government statistical data showed that 97% of the labor force totaling 972,274 worked in the service sector (BPS, 2018)¹².

However, beside the working category, Medan also faced residents in the productive age who were not economically active. This group of 594,983 people included students (32%), housekeeping (54%) and others (13%). Interestingly, in terms of gender, the total population of those who were economically inactive was largely women. Where, their number reaches 68% of the total of non-labor force (BPS, 2018). There were many factors that caused women to be in economically non-productive sectors, including employment and culture. However, in terms of education level, women were not far left behind. Most of them graduated from high school. Their numbers were also superior to men at certain educational levels, namely at Diploma I / II / III / Academy levels. This indicated that in terms of gender most women in Medan had a good level of education. Hence, the issue of abstention due to weak literacy can hardly be pinned on women (BPS, 2018).

Identification of the economic structure and employment is important because the general findings of voter behavior in this city show that working activity was the main reason for abstention in the 2018 gubernatorial election.

The table above shows interesting data as there were quite a lot of respondents who did not put their answers into the table of reasons. A total of 22.19% of respondents chose another answer and 11.22% chose not to answer this question. Beyond that, skepticism about the election also seemed to characterize the results. This is for example indicated by the answer that the election will not have an impact on their life (13.01%). The above results are interesting when juxtaposed with the findings from the qualitative stages as follows.

⁸ Pemuda Pancasila is a youth organization formed by the New Order regime. Being one of the state corporatist institutions, this organization has long been known for its image as a gangster organization that supported authoritarian government. At the end of the New Order era in 1998, they devoted a "considerable effort to correct the impression" by claiming to be an organization that "vows to defend Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution" (Ryter, 2001). After 1998, this organization still exists especially in regions. They often take the role as important political supporters for local head candidates as, for example, seen in the 2014 gubernatorial election in North Sumatra (Amin, 2014).

⁹ Despite its character as a metropolitan city, Medan keeps aspects of locality which include the voters' imagination about the personality of masculine leader. Interview with Walid, campaign team spokesman, July 2018.

¹⁰ Ahok or Basuki Cahaya Purnama was defeated and his case became an evidence about strong identity politics in Jakarta, even Indonesia.

¹¹ At current prices (BPS, 2018, pp. 45-6).

¹² Total population was 2.247.425 (BPS, 2018).

Table 2.
Reasons for Voter Abstention

Reasons for Non-voting/Not Coming to the Poll Station	Percentage (%)
Being influenced by family/close relatives	3.57
Being influenced by neighborhood/neighbors	2.30
Election will not change/give any impact on life	13.01
Do not know the candidate	5.36
Busy with working activity	34.18
Not registered as voter/ other administrative obstacles	7.91
Beliefs/ religious beliefs	0.26
Others	22.19
Do not know/ do not answer the question	11.22

Source: Budi et.al, 2018

Table 3.
Cross Tabulation on the question “Why did you not come to the polling station?”

Respondent Based on Employment/Activity	The Reasons for Non-voting									Total	Percent
	(1)*	(2)*	(3)*	(4)*	(5)*	(6)*	(7)*	(8)*	(9)*		
Labor	2	2	7	1	12	1	1	1	3	30	8
Teacher/lecturer	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	2	2	6	2
Housewife	5	1	12	3	14	8	0	24	9	76	19
Student	1	0	4	3	11	8	0	13	9	49	13
Fisherman	1	0	1	1	2	0	0	1	0	6	2
Small trader	1	1	4	2	13	2	0	4	5	32	8
Civil servant	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	2	1
Private employees	0	0	11	0	42	1	0	14	9	77	20
Businessman	2	0	2	4	8	0	0	3	0	19	5
Retired	0	0	2	1	0	0	0	6	1	10	3
Farmer	0	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	6	2
Professional	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	2	1
Seeking employment	0	0	2	2	3	4	0	5	4	20	5
Entrepreneur	0	0	3	1	12	5	0	9	1	31	8
Do not know/do not answer the question	2	2	2	3	10	2	0	4	1	26	7
	14	9	51	21	134	31	1	87	44	392	100
Percent	4	2	13	5	34	8	0	22	11	100	

Note: (1) Being influenced by family/close relatives; (2) Being influenced by neighborhood/ neighbors; (3) Election will not change/give any impact on life; (4) Do not know the candidate; (5) Busy with working activity; (6) Not registered as voter/ other administrative obstacles; (7) Beliefs/ religious beliefs; (8) Others; (9) Do not know/ do not answer the question.

Source: Budi et.al. (2018)

Discussion: The Indication of Social Cleavage and Silent Apathy in Voter Abstention

The cross tabulation analysis that combines the answers of the question about “the reasons for non-voting” and the “type of respondent’s employment” showed that the top three respondents with the answer of “busy with working activity” were private

employees (31%), housewives (10%) and small traders (10%). The high percentage of private employees who claimed to prioritize working activities indicated that some economic activities still operated during the polling day that was designated as a holiday¹³. Looking

¹³ The Government of Indonesia designates polling day

at the character of work, the private sector was likely to be an informal service sector which, among others, was demonstrated by active online taxi fleets on polling day. Meanwhile the existence of respondents with household activities and small traders were also interesting. These groups of employment could easily be associated as those with flexible activities, where the members have more flexible time to come at the polling stations. However, they decided not to go thus not vote in the election. Similarly, things were shown by the group of respondents with self-employed work (entrepreneur).

Is the reason: “busy with working activities” the final answer to abstained behavior? Beyond the main answer, the survey pointed to other aspects that silently contribute to people’s choices to prioritize jobs or economic activities rather than giving their votes. Their answer to the question of “level of satisfaction with the provincial government” indicated that most of the respondents were dissatisfied with the performance of the provincial government. Table 6 shows that the total answer for “very dissatisfied” and “dissatisfied” reached 53%, meanwhile those who “satisfied” and “very satisfied” with the provincial government reached 37%.

Table 4.
Level of Satisfaction with the Provincial Government

Level of Satisfaction	Percent (%)
Very dissatisfied	5
Dissatisfied	48
Satisfied	36
Very satisfied	1
Invalid	1
Do not know / Do not answer the question	10
	100

Source: Budi et.al. (2018)

as a holiday to encourage participation.

As the survey did not trace further about the source of dissatisfaction, the qualitative phase of the study even found out that one of the causes for dissatisfaction was related to the government’s slow response for the roadwork on one hand, but rampant corruption on the other hand¹⁴. North Sumatra was considered as one of the most corrupt regions in Indonesia. The Corruption Eradication Commission put the province as a red zone as indicator for severe corruption. In 2015, Governor Gatot Pujo Nugroho and his wife were arrested and charged with corruption. The case also ensnared several parliament members for their involvement in the conspiracy. In 2018, 38 members and former members of the provincial parliament who worked for the 2009-2014 and 2014-2019 periods were also charged with corruption¹⁵. Those cases indicate that the local political situation potentially contributed to the people’s reluctance to vote. Hence, the Medan case even shows that a voter’s decision to prioritize work does not merely reflect the work ethic of urban society. However, this was also influenced by their dissatisfaction with the government’s performance. Checking these three aspects results in allegations of soft apathy or disregard for elections as explained below.

Social Cleavage and Silent Apathy in Gender Aspect

In terms of gender, the number of abstained voters in each sub-district studied was equal between men and women. This condition represented the situation in all districts where the percentage of abstention between the two genders was nearly equal. Both half of them were considered as being abstained. However, the level of abstention of women was slightly lower than men, thus

¹⁴ As mentioned by some taxi drivers during the research, June 2018

¹⁵ At least two former mayors and one former vice mayor of Medan were also arrested and charged with corruption. <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2018/07/19/08421331/9-kepala-daerah-did-sumatera-utara-yang-terjerat-korupsi?page=all>



indicated that gender cleavage appeared in Medan.

Table 5.
Comparison of Abstention Rates from the Gender Perspective

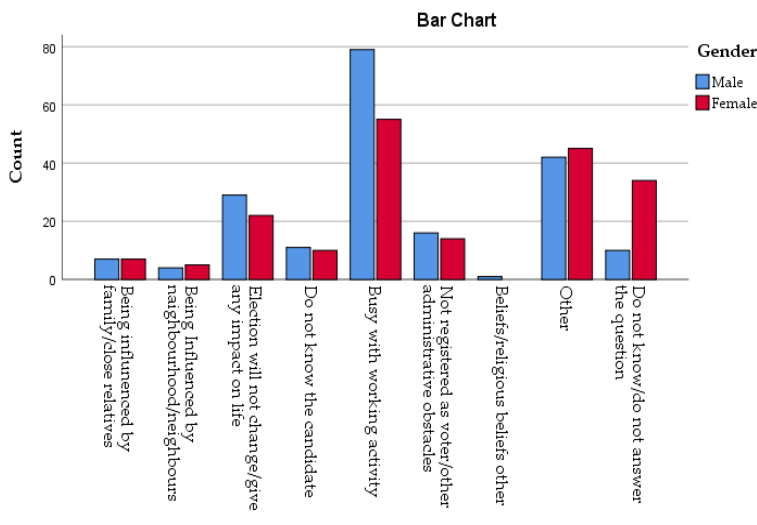
No	Subdistrict	Non-Voter/ Abstention (Percent)	
		Male	Female
1	Medan Selayang	53	47
2	Medan Timur	53	47
3	Medan Petisah	53	47
4	Medan Perjuangan	53	47
5	Medan Polonia	53	47
6	Medan Baru	55	45
7	Medan Maimun	53	47
8	Medan Tembung	53	47
9	Medan Labuhan	53	47
10	Medan Marelan	52	48
11	Medan Johor	53	47
12	Medan Area	52	48
13	Medan Amplas	53	47
14	Medan Belawan	55	45
15	Medan Tuntungan	54	46
16	Medan Deli	52	48
17	Medan Barat	54	46
18	Medan Denai	53	47
19	Medan Helvetia	54	46
20	Medan Sunggal	53	47
21	Medan Kota	53	47

Source: KPU Medan 2018 database.

The table indicated that women voters could possibly build more active voter sentiment, thus strengthening the general assumption about gender and voting behavior. However, in terms of abstention, women also showed a tendency of reasons that were nearly similar to men. Where, the composition of reasons for abstention was evenly distributed across all possibilities of answers with the exception in two cases. First, both women and men chose “busy with working activities” as the main answer. Secondly, more female respondents hid their true reasons by choosing either “Other reason” or “Do not know/did not answer the question” (Figure 1).

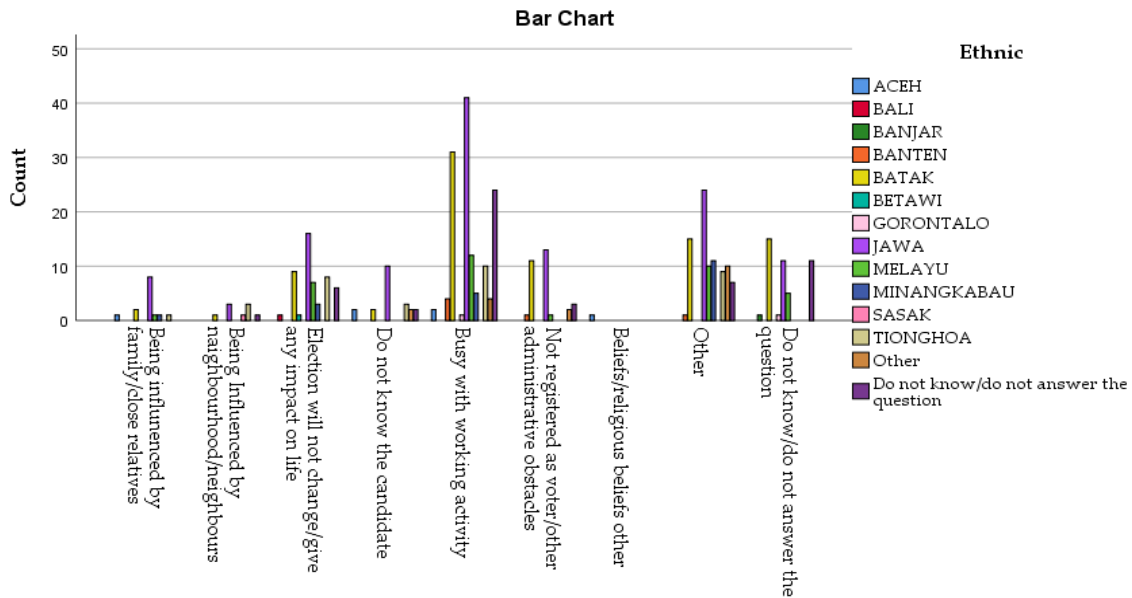
Furthermore, an analysis of gender became more interesting when it was associated with the results of cross tabulations between “types of work” and “reasons for abstention” (Table 3). In this table, many women who answered “busy with working activities” were housewives. This group of women working in the domestic area was also noted as the largest group that hides reasons by answering “Other” or not answering the questions. This indicates women’s disinterest or even skepticism towards the gubernatorial election:

Figure 1.
Variation of Reasons for Abstention Based on Gender



Source: research result, cross tabulation of reasons for abstention and gender

Figure 2.
Crosstab on Ethnic and Reasons for Abstention



Source: Research result, cross tabulation of reasons for abstention and ethnic

The voters from this dominant ethnic group also stated that the election will not give any change to their lives (around 18 respondents).

Secondly, this research failed to capture the reasons of Chinese voters not to come to the polling stations. The number of abstained voters from this Chinese descendant cluster was indicated significant but researchers failed to get their willingness to be interviewed for filling out the questionnaires¹⁹. This community group has a sizable contribution to Medan’s economy but was considered as not interested in the election²⁰. In the midst of difficulties in

identifying their significant contribution to abstention, the general picture in sub-districts which were identified as their settlement area shows a high level of abstention.

Table 6.
Level of Abstention in Sub-districts with Chinese descendant Residents

Main Subdistricts	Average of Abstention (Percent)
Medan Area	27-56
Medan Kota	44-61
Medan Maimun	50-54
Medan Petisah	33-60
Medan Barat	42-58

Source: DAA-KWK1 (KPU Medan, 2018)

In addition, in one of the sample polling stations with Chinese-descendant residents (Titi Kuning polling station in Medan Johor sub district), the abstention rate reached 63 %²¹.

¹⁹ The quantitative data is unavailable. However, the quick identification based on the Chinese names listed in the list of attendees indicated the issue. Similarly, the Focus Group Discussions both with enumerators and stakeholders of election in June 2018 also revealed the indication.

²⁰ Chinese descendants play an important role in the economy in Medan. Their contribution to the economic and trade sectors is shown among others by the presence of traders who control traditional markets to modern markets. Although, nowadays, their existence is quantitatively competing with traders from various ethnic backgrounds. Their presence in the business sector has been known since the Dutch colonial period

(around 1930s). <https://kumparan.com/potongan-nostalgia/sekilas-etnis-tionghoa-di-medan>. See also Maskur Abdullah in <https://www.kompasiana.com/maskurabdullah/5a6fbcd7bde57533184973f2/benarkah-dominasi-bisnis-tionghoa-mulai-bergeser?page=all>

²¹ <https://infopemilu.kpu.go.id/pilkada2018/pemilih/>

While from Sekip 10 polling station in Medan Petisah Sub district, abstained voters reached 50 %. The percentage at that polling station was quite moderate as the abstention in each polling station in this sub district reached 24-70 % or an average of 33-60 % at the sub district level²².

In an interview with Thomas Hutoyo (pseudonym), a Chinese descent, voters in his community tend not to vote because they prioritize security and economic business interests²³. The potential for riots during the election was a concern for many Chinese descent residents. Some of them recalled the miserable social unrest in 1998²⁴ which targeted the Chinese descent residents and caused economic and social losses²⁵. Many of them also mentioned that the election had no impact on their lives. Therefore, the preferred for vacationing or business travels during the polling day. Regarding the issue of impact on life, Hutoyo illustrated that his community generally viewed that their struggles of economic life have been excluded from state's support. In this aspect, skepticism about elections as a political activity that will benefit their lives seemed strongly narrated.

Social Cleavage and Silent Apathy in Religion

The 2018 North Sumatra Gubernatorial election was a barometer for gubernatorial elections in western Indonesia. The sociological aspect of the election was quite dynamic, including the use of religious issues for election purposes. Utilizing such issues, sympathizers of both candidate pairs expressed

their support and tried to influence prospective voters. This was for example by putting up campaign banners on their own initiative and engaged in discourse war on social media. Observations and interviewees also confirmed that Medan in 2018 showed a symptom of religious issues replication as in the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017. This situation was seen, among others, with the banners and mobilization of the masses, some were designed by the candidate winning team, but some also showed an element of voluntary. One symptom of voluntary was fundraising through *infaq* (donations) in mosques as a support for one of the candidates, especially Rahmayadi-Rajekshah.

Furthermore, indication for cleavage in religion aspect was slightly showed by the social divisions in urban areas of Medan, whereas many Muslims were resided in the east coast area while the non-Muslim were resided in the west coast²⁶. Although the indication for social cleavage was not as strong as in different area in Indonesia such as in Ambon (see Rahmawati, Prasetyo, & Marantika, 2019), the political atmosphere in Medan during the gubernatorial election had heated up due to religious issues. The first candidate pair, Rahmayadi-Rajekshah, clearly utilized Islamic religious moments for the campaign and efforts to win votes. They held several major recitals and religious gatherings before and after the Eid al-Fitr. The Islamic conservatives and hardliners seemed to gain the opportunity to show their political strength while being active in those momentums. This also shows the symptoms of religious-based cleavage.

However, data on abstention shows that in the midst of politicization of Islam during the election, voters embraced this religion even showed their unwillingness to be present at the polling stations. Muslims actually contribute

dpt/1/SUMATERA%20UTARA/KOTA%20MEDAN/MEDAN%20JOHOR/TITI%20KUNING/3. Also, DAA-KWK1-1271111002-TITI KUNING (KPU Medan, 2018)

²² (DA1-KWK1-127119-MEDAN PETISAH (KPU Medan, 2018)

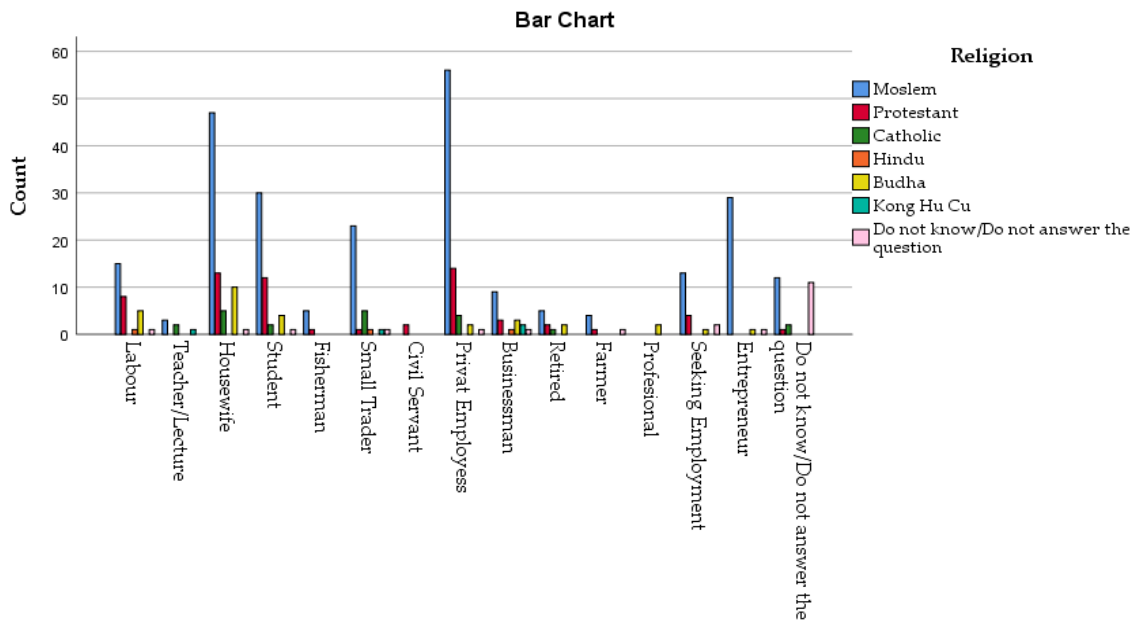
²³ Interview, June 2018

²⁴ <https://newnaratif.com/journalism/sebuah-isu-politik-mengingat-kerusuhan-di-medan-tahun-1998/>

²⁵ As mentioned by the informant. Also see <https://newnaratif.com/journalism/sebuah-isu-politik-mengingat-kerusuhan-di-medan-tahun-1998/>

²⁶ Interview with two academics from the North Sumatra University, June 2018.

Figure 3.
Abstained Voters Based on Religious Division



Source: research result, cross tabulation of respondents' occupation and religion

Table 7.
Comparison of Abstention and Population based on Religious Aspects

	Islam	Christian	Catholic	Hindu	Buddha	Others	Did not answer the question
Population based on Religious Aspect*	65.1%	20.7%	5.0%	1.0%	8.1%	0.1%	-
Abstained Voters	64,03%	15,82%	5,36%	0,77%	7,65%	1,02%	5,36%

Source: * BPS 2018

the largest percentage to abstention (see Figure 3). This raises the question whether there is apathy from Muslim voters?

In terms of percentage, the high abstention rate of Muslims was still in balance with the composition of followers of this religion in Medan. However, this did not show a comparable effect to the strong politicization of this religion during the campaign. Meanwhile, a smaller percentage of abstention compared to the composition of religious adherents in Medan was indicated by Christian voters. This indicates their response to religious sentiment during the campaign by increasing voter participation (Table 7).

In this aspect, Islamic voters who abstained indicate apathy towards the politicization of religion during the election. Meanwhile, the less percentage of Christian abstention proves that religious cleavage also had a positive impact in terms of increasing participation (or decreasing abstention). In this case, Christian voters seemed to respond with strong politicization of religion by participating in the election. However, it is possible that Christian voters did not answer the question instead of identifying themselves as Christian voters. If this happens, the possibility of social cleavage based on religion only appeared among Muslims as explained.

Conclusion

Departing from social perspective, this study reveals that social cleavages possibly create silent apathy, which is apathy that implicitly influences voters not to come to polling stations. This phenomenon can be seen after bringing up the analysis of both survey results and other findings that were collected through qualitative strategies.

As discussed above, social cleavage in the 2018 gubernatorial election in Medan appeared in the form of ethnic, religious and gender. These three social aspects did not appear merely as social context but rather as cleavages that worked behind the abstention. When parties and interest groups utilized them as a basis for consideration of political actions, groups of people from those three social cleavages even indicated apathy. This ultimately resulted in a paradox.

Gender cleavage, which usually explains the tendency of women to participate in elections compared to men, in this study even shows an opposite tendency, which is hiding more disinterest in election compared to men. They show this tendency by providing vague answers such as “busy with work,” “others,” and “did not answer the questions. This prompted a small group of women activists to take an initiative to offer voice mobilization in exchange for bringing up a few issues about women in the campaign.

Ethnicity and religion also appeared as strong social cleavages that influenced non-voting behavior. When candidates use ethnicity and religion as campaign strategies, several groups of voters from the two cleavages even decided not to attend the polling stations. Despite their light excuse for not being at the polling station, they indicated disinterest or apathy towards the election.

Most research relates cleavage to voting propensity, and thus encourages candidates to take advantage of strategic issues favored by

targeted cleavage members. Candidates seem to ignore the possibility that a large number of abstained voters are actually members of the same cleavage which they consider capable of contributing a large number of votes. Whereas, these abstained groups do not see elections as an opportunity for change. They do not consider that the flexibility of working time on polling day, which in Indonesia has been designated as a national holiday, is an incentive. Hence, they hide their disinterest to this momentum through activities that are more beneficial to them such as working or doing other activities.

The above phenomenon proves that social cleavage should be considered as an important aspect to explain voters who are not present at the polling stations. The case study not only strengthens the repertoire of literature on non-voting behavior but can also contribute a consideration for participants and voter organizers to formulate a campaign strategy that can better embrace these groups of people with the right to vote.

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