

The Impact of Indonesia's Village Fund (Dana Desa) on Village Head Election: Evidence from Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, Indonesia

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Abstract

Through the implementation of the Village Law in 2014, the Indonesian government seeks to promote rural development and village autonomy by decentralizing power. The 2014 Village Law has two important points: the village fund and the extension of a village head's term. This article tested to what extent the village fund has impacted the village head election and whether the village fund has improved villagers' political participation in running for the village head election. The method used in this study is quantitative through a survey of 96 random village head candidates in the 2016 village head election in 117 villages in Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan. The findings show that the village funds have an impact on the quality of the nomination of village heads and facilitate the public's involvement in the election. This phenomenon underscores the importance of village funds in encouraging democratic practices and the grassroots community's participation in village governance. Changes in regulations of village fund implementation influence the participation of village residents in running for village head election, encouraging them to participate in the democratic process at the village level.

Keywords: Village Fund; Village Head Election; Political Participation

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government implemented the 2014 Village Law to support rural development and promote village autonomy through the decentralization of power. According to data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), the current number of villages in the country stands at 83,734. In particular, this study's location, the Banjar Regency, South Kalimantan, is home to 277 villages. This shows the rich and diverse rural communities that make up the Indonesian village governance landscape. It also highlights the importance of local governance structures and the role of village heads in managing and leading their respective communities. Understanding the scale and complexity of rural regions is critical for policymakers, researchers, and development practitioners seeking to promote sustainable

development and inclusive growth in Indonesia.

The 2014 Village Law comprises two essential components: the establishment of *Dana Desa* or village fund and an extension of the village head's term to three six-year periods. Prior to the enactment of this law, grants were distributed to regency governments and passed to village governments. These governments are independent of each other. Meanwhile, the village fund initiative mandates that a minimum of 10% of the fiscal balance funds for local governments from the state budget (APBN) be allocated to villages. This amounted to IDR 72 trillion (USD 4.6 billion) in 2022. Furthermore, the article proposes that elected village heads must be trained in effective fund management to promote the sustainability of rural areas and empower village communities



to have greater autonomy. The village fund from the central government and the allocation of funds from regencies to villages significantly contribute to the rise in the village budget. Figure 3 shows that in Banjar Regency, the tax share to local revenue was minimal and remained consistent at around IDR 3 billion (USD 191,826) from 2009 to 2016. However, there was a significant growth to IDR 6 billion (USD 383,655) in 2017. Before the implementation of the 2014 Village Law, Banjar Regency allocated about IDR 130 million (USD 8,312) per village. After the implementation, one village was granted around IDR 1 billion (USD 63,942), which is a ten-fold increase. As independent local entities, villages need to identify their own sources of revenue. However, this is challenging for villages in Banjar Regency.

Aside from village funds, the implementation of the 2014

Village Law also has an impact on the village election. Nonetheless, to date, research on villagers' participation in village elections before and after the law enactment has been limited. Aspinall and Rohman (2017) highlight the lack of systematic research on village politics, with most research focusing on specific locations. This limitation has created gaps in the understanding of the dynamics of village politics in general, which warrants further research. Furthermore, Aspinall and Rohman (2017) investigated the practice of vote buying in village elections, particularly among the elites and affluent class in the community. Connections with the district government also allowed village elites to sway votes, as they could win government projects by lobbying the district government officials. In terms of village head elections, studies have examined local elections at

the village/rural level in Indonesia. For example, Kis-Katos & Sjahrir (2017) found that direct local elections offer no beneficial effects on local development. Sjahrir, et al. (2013) found that incumbents in direct local elections have significantly larger political budgets when running for re-election. In Indonesia's election, Aspinall (2014) identified three types of election brokers, namely activist brokers, clientelist brokers, and opportunist brokers. Brokers' roles in elections, in terms of their loyalty towards election candidates, are to carry out predation and defection. This affects the chance of becoming a candidate in a village head election. Aspinall's study identifies the prevalence of clientelism amongst candidates, as well as the effectiveness of local actors in capturing the attention of the village community. These observations

highlight the significance of local actors in shaping the electoral outcomes of village head elections and underline the importance of understanding the dynamics of candidate-client relationships in such contexts.

An incumbent village head's election rerun is motivated by increases in the village budget (due to increased village funds and other village grants) and the three-term opportunity. The village head, as the top leader in the village, has the authority to control and utilize the village budget. Furthermore, as the budget has increased, the 2014 Village Law has mandated that village heads and officials should be paid well. In other words, the elements in the 2014 Village Law have made village politics and competition for the village head position more attractive to village residents to compete in the election. This makes participating in the village



government attractive for residents seeking jobs.

In addition, there is a discourse surrounding the proposed revision of the village law in 2023, which is a subject of local political debate. It has been proposed that there will be an increase in village funding to almost IDR 5 billion (USD 320,056). This, and the three-term occupancy, motivate village heads to run for the next term and create small oligarchies at the village level. The village head association organized a demonstration at the national House of Representatives in response to the proposed term of office extension. The existing term spans six years and is intended to be prolonged to nine years. Furthermore, the village head suggested augmenting the village budget, citing the need for a more effective allocation of funds. The discussion is centered around the extension of the term

and the allocation of additional funds to the villages. To date, local political battles at the village level have been escalating because the proposal to extend the term of office and increase the village fund budget has become a draft law, so the competition for village heads has become fiercer.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article aims to answer two questions: (1) To what extent has the existence of the village fund impacted the village head election? (2) How has the village fund impacted the village residents' political participation in the running for a village head? To answer the question, this article used a quantitative method. Banjar Regency was chosen for this study because, considering the note of Vel et al. (2016), Indonesia village studies are dominantly based in Java Island and thus needed more research outside that Island. The

Banjar Regency is situated in the southern part of Kalimantan Island, covering an area of 4,688 square kilometers. In 2017, the region was home to a population of 571,573 individuals. The area is demarcated into 20 sub-districts, 277 hamlets, and 13 residential areas. The 2016 village head elections in Banjar Regency were conducted across 117 villages, indicating that the present village fund conditions may have motivated residents to become village heads.

A questionnaire was distributed to 96 randomly selected candidates for the position of village head. The survey did not classify the respondents based on any special criteria to determine the sample size before and after the existence of village funds. This field survey only collected information available in some villages in Banjar Regency. The survey used a 10-point rating

system ranging from 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest). The questions aimed to indicate the candidates' motives and confidence levels in certain competencies and were not divided into categories based on the rating ranges.

The survey questionnaire was composed of two principal inquiries aimed at measuring the motivation of ordinary citizens to contest the role of the village head. The first question asked participants to evaluate their reasons for running for the election. Six motives were provided for the candidates to assess, namely: security, facilities, power, prestige, salary, and budget (increase in budget due to the village fund). Five of the six motives were derived from Dunleavy's (1991) bureaucrat self-interest motive, as the village head is considered a village-level bureaucrat responsible for overseeing the village government. The second



question asked respondents to rate their competence as a candidate for village head. The candidates were given seven non-technical skills, including honesty, empathy, anti-corruption spirit, loyalty, leadership, coordination and cooperation, and supervision, as well as four technical skills, namely budgeting, accounting, planning, and computer literacy. The non-technical and technical skills were identified and interpreted by the author from the competencies required in compliance with the regulations stipulated in the 2014 Village Law. This research focuses on these two aspects of the questionnaire. In addition, the supplementary questions in the questionnaire covered general respondent characteristics.

The statistics of village head elections focus on three key variables: the education level, the age of candidates, and the

number of contenders per village. The data was analyzed against the conditions before and after the introduction of village funds (Village Law Number 6 of 2014) based on the information from 96 candidates across villages in Banjar Regency. The analysis was carried out through a sample t-test using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The study seeks to determine whether the three variables remain consistent before and after the introduction of village funds. Additionally, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to find out if there is a correlation between village conditions and citizen participation in village head elections. The analysis considers factors such as population, poverty rate, area, and village development index. The study also examines the motivation of people to run for village head and the presence or absence of



village funds to identify the correlation between the two. The analysis looked at the number of candidates running for village head, as well as the percentage of the population that voted in the election. The study aims to gain insights into the influence of village funds on the dynamics of village head elections. The village development index was established by the National Planning Board (BAPPENAS) and Statistics Indonesia (BPS) in 2015. The composite index for measuring the level of development in a village comprises five components, with a range of 0 to 100: (1) the basic service index represents villages' education and health facilities (2) the infrastructure index represents infrastructure facilities for the economy, connection and information, power, clean water and hygiene (3) transportation index represents village transportation

and access (4) the index of public service represents the provision of amenities for public health and athletics (5) the governance index measures the autonomy and performance of village apparatus.

The motivation and competency sub-variables were respectively accumulated into a single variable, i.e., the total motivation value to be a village head variable and the total competence value of the village head variable. The variables were then placed with other variables, namely education level, age, and experience being a village head, to understand their relationships with the voting result. The purpose is to see which variables have a strong relationship with winning the village head election. The analysis applied Pearson correlation to know the relationship between motivation, (self-measured) competency,



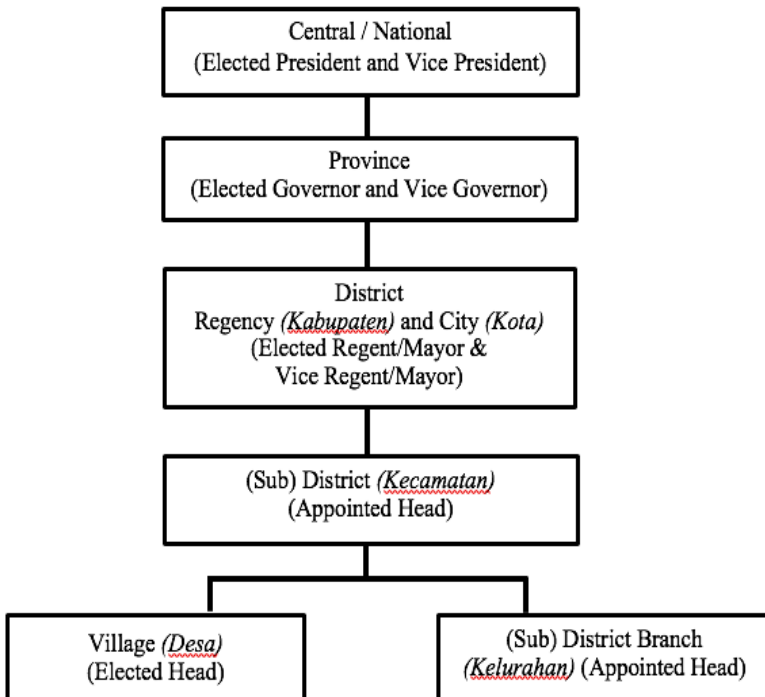
and other factors with the percent of votes.

INDONESIAN ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM AND VILLAGE FUND: A CONTEXT

Indonesia's administrative hierarchy comprises three levels, as depicted in Figure 1. The

government is divided into different levels, including the central government with the president and national entities, the provincial administration called *provinsi*, the district administration consisting of cities (*kota*) and regencies (*kabupaten*), and the (sub)district

Figure 1. Indonesia's Levels of Government



Source: Local Government Law No. 23/2014.

(*kecamatan*), which is the lowest level of government. At the village level, there are two types of government: *desa* for rural areas and *kelurahan* for urban regions with high population density.

In Indonesia, the village government is overseen by (sub)districts, which function as the representatives of the regency government. These villages, known as *desa* in Indonesian, derive their name from the Indian term *swadesi*, which means origin, hometown, or ancestor land. *Desa* refers to a community or group of individuals who share a strong bond based on shared customs and norms and who reside within established boundaries (Wasistiono & Taher, 2007). In Indonesia, a legally recognized community referred to as a village is characterized by territorial boundaries. It holds responsibility for enacting governmental functions that

align with the community's societal requirements, traditions, and customs. This accountability is acknowledged by the government and serves as a means of ensuring effective governance within the community (Rahayu, 2018). In addition, Paryoto (2015) offers a comprehensive definition of a village as a self-contained entity within a larger country, specifically Indonesia, with its own unique territory, governmental structures, population, local institutions, and economic resources. This characterization emphasizes the distinct responsibilities and functions that villages hold in ensuring effective governance and meeting the societal needs of their respective communities. Meanwhile, a village, from a political perspective, is understood as an organization of power that has certain authority



in the structure of state government (Pratikno, 2000).

In 2014, the legislation governing local government was divided into three distinct laws: Law 23/2004; Law 1/2014, which concerned local elections; and Law 6/2014, which concerned villages. This separation of local government Law 32/2004 was the hallmark of the next level of government decentralization. Decentralization from central governments to local governments began in 2001, but the village level only started in 2015. The key feature was the provision of substantial grants for villages, which influence all aspects of village governance, including village politics. According to research results by Briando et al. (2017), fiscal decentralization creates more efficient budget allocations, stimulates economic growth in the region, and has a larger impact on various sectors.

Overall, this will have implications for inter-regional development activities and rural autonomy. In this case, a greater emphasis on financial equilibrium between central and regional governing bodies is needed. The division of the legislation that governs local government in 2014 led to the establishment of three distinct laws, including Law 23/2004. The demarcation has become even more apparent with the introduction of Law Number 6 of 2014, which pertains to villages, and Government Regulation Number 43 of 2014, which elaborates on the stipulations for implementing this law. These regulations have broadened the scope of fiscal decentralization in villages, underscoring the importance of effective governance and financial management at the local level.

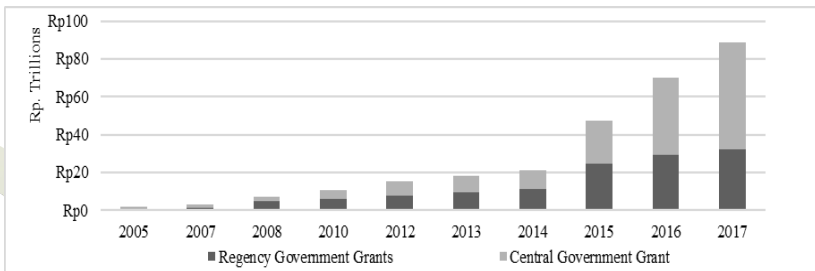
Figure 2 depicts the national grants allocated for Indonesian villages. These grants comprise



the village fund funded by the central government and the regency village allocation fund. Figure 3 shows the grants for villages in the Banjar Regency. There was a significant disparity in the allocation of grants to villages at both the national and regency levels between 2014 and 2015. Specifically, the total amount of grants disbursed by the central and regency governments in 2014 amounted to IDR 22 trillion (USD 1.406 billion). However, this number increased dramatically by the end of 2015, with a total of IDR 47 trillion (USD 3.005 billion). In 2016, this sum further increased

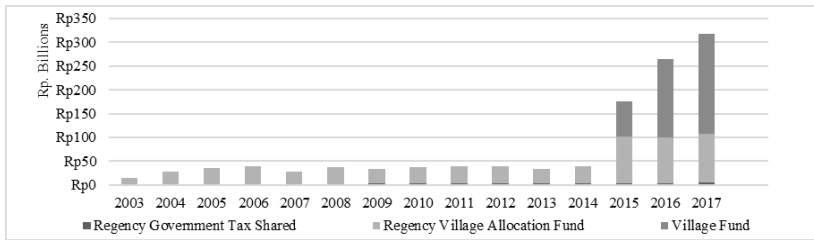
to IDR 70 trillion (USD 4.475 billion). The allocation of funds to rural areas has steadily increased over the years. In 2014, villages received a budgetary increase of IDR 39 billion (USD 2.493 million) from the regency, which gradually increased to IDR 175 billion (USD 11.188 million) in 2015, and further rose to IDR 265 billion (USD 16.942 million) in 2016, and finally reached IDR 316 billion (USD 20.205 million) in 2017. Given that villages are local entities, it is crucial for them to identify their own sources of revenue.

Figure 2. Grants for Villages in Indonesia (2005–2017)



Source: Indonesia’s Village Government Financial Statistics 2005-2017

Figure 3. Grants for Villages in Banjar Regency (2003–2017)



Source: Banjar Regency (2017)

PARTICIPATION IN KEY CONCEPTS AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This article explores the concept of political participation. According to Nelson & Huntington (1994), political participation can be categorized into two categories: autonomous and mobilization participation. Autonomous participation is motivated by a desire to engage in political activity, either due to one’s responsibility to civic life or to advance one’s own interests or the interests of one’s group. In contrast, mobilization participation refers to political involvement that is prompted, requested, or even compelled by

others. Typically, people’s political participation is derived from specific socio-political foundations.

In the context of public political participation, Nelson & Huntington (1994) have categorized the various bases of political participation into several groups, such as those with a similar social status, income, and occupation. The group or communal participation also involves individuals who share similar racial, religious, linguistic, or ethnic origins. Meanwhile, neighborhood participation is characterized by individuals who reside in close proximity to one another and share a common

interest in political issues that concern their immediate community. Political parties consist of individuals who identify with a formal organization seeking to achieve or maintain control over the executive and legislative spheres. Finally, factions are groups of individuals who share similar racial, religious, linguistic, or ethnic origins and who eventually form patron-client relationships with those with unequal levels of social, educational, and economic status.

According to Naidoo & Finn (2001), studies have shown the impact of village funds on community-driven development. The village fund impacts how the community is involved in making decisions related to regional development and optimizing the use of resource areas that suit the village's needs. Similar studies in Thailand and the Philippines show the same

impact. A successful example of community-driven development in Thailand is the Thai Village Fund (2001-present). It is a microfinance program that provides micro-credit to communities in 78,000 villages through credit committees that provide short-term credit loans and agricultural investment. There was also a program called Laban Sa Kahirapan Kapit-big-Comprehensive and Integrated Delivery of Social Services in the Philippines (2002-2014). This was a clean water infrastructure development program, 50% for school construction, 28% for basic transportation, and 22% for entrepreneurial community facilities. The program distribution mechanism was through the empowerment of local communities to collaborate with local governments (barangay). In India, the Andhra Pradesh District Poverty Initiative Program (2000-2016) focuses on



microfinance activities for household activities, 30% agriculture, 29% non-agricultural trade and livestock farming, 10% and microcredit and other productive activities in six regions, the poorest in the Andhra Pradesh region.

In Indonesia, the optimal utilization of village funds is geared towards the development and empowerment of rural communities. This requires a focus on enhancing the quality of life, reducing poverty, and promoting overall community welfare, which is determined by a specific formula: 10% for the total population, 50% poor population, 15% for the area, 25% for geographic difficulty level, and 3% for underdeveloped villages and very underdeveloped villages.

According to research results by Wibowo et al. (2019:176), "The Village Fund empirically increases the achievement of infrastructure, health, education

outcomes, and improves economic performance that serves as an economic catalyst and balancer." The evaluation results show that the impact of allocating village funds to new welfare can be enjoyed in the long run. However, it has not been able to reduce poverty, unemployment, and inequality and increase the income index of the people.

The person elected as village head holds the highest level of authority over the village's finances, including the village fund and budget. Additionally, the village head serves as the official representative of the village government and is responsible for managing the village's assets. The village head's authority over village finances includes stipulating the village budget policy, appointing the technical officer for village finances, assigning the officers who collect the village revenue, approving



village expenditures, and initiating actions funded by the village budget. Therefore, the position of village head is strategic with regard to control of the village fund and/or village budget.

Residents in the village directly elect the person who will serve as the village head. Every resident who meets the village head candidate requirements is eligible to register to compete in the election. Promotion by political parties is not necessary. In the village, the election of the village head is a fundamental representation of democracy and acknowledges the village's independent legal status. With the village fund contributing to significant budget surges, leadership roles in the village have become substantially more attractive.

Village elections before and after the 2014 Village Law differ. First, before the 2014 Village Law,

village heads could only run for two six-year terms. After the enactment of the law, they could run for three terms. Second, before, the timing for village elections differed depending on each village, and the elections were run independently. Now, all village elections are held on the same day, simultaneously with other villages. Also, after the stipulation of the 2014 Village law, the timing is set into a maximum of three periods (not held every year). Third, in terms of jurisprudence, the provision of financial resources for village elections was predominantly dependent upon the village head candidates and the village administration, with limited contributions from the regency government. Now, it is fully funded by the regency government, with some additional funding from the village government. As such, the village candidates do not have to



spend any money from their personal budget. Fourth, after the law, each village's candidacy is limited to five village head candidates. When more than five people register as village head candidates, the committee conducts a selection process to narrow down the possibilities to five candidates.

FINDINGS

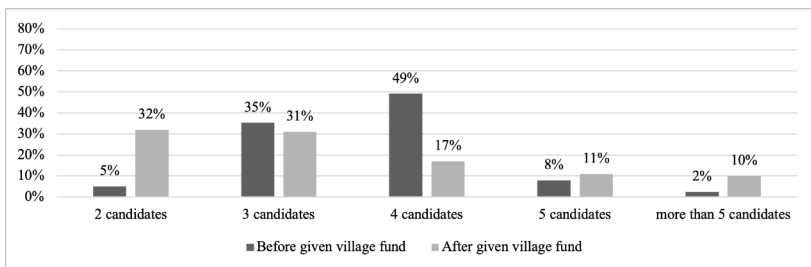
This research results in five main findings. *First*, the analysis compares village candidates before and after the 2014 Village Law/Village Fund. As shown in Figure 4, there are variations in

the level of competition in village head elections.

Second, the regency conducts a qualification test in village elections when the number of candidates exceeds five. In 2016, eleven villages studied in this research had to administer the test. This test helps to ensure that the number of candidates is limited and manageable budget-wise. However, this scheme limits participation.

Third, in terms of age (see Figure 5), our survey shows that there are more older participants (between 41-50 years, 51-60

Figure 4. Numbers of Candidates in Village Head Elections



Note: The sample contains 103 villages before the village fund and 117 villages after the village fund.

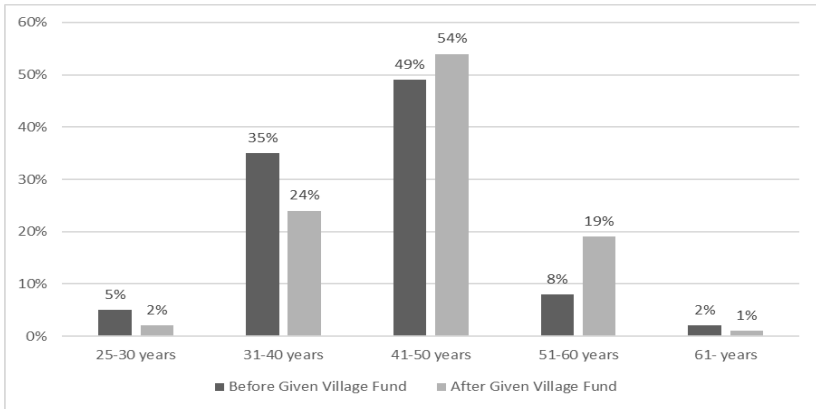
Source: Authors' survey 2017 in Banjar Regency.



years old, and more than 61 years old), and there are fewer candidates aged between 31-40 years old as well as 25-30 years old. It means that the new village law has attracted more older generations, but this is not the case among younger generations. The average age of village head candidates has also increased from 41.87 years old to 44.99 years old (see Table 1).

high school (6% increase) and university background (4%). This could be beneficial because higher education can help elected candidates assume their roles better. The average education level has increased from 2.68 to 2.82 after the implementation of the village fund (see Table 1). This increase shows that there has been an improvement in the education level of village head

Figure 5. The Ages of Village Head Candidates



Fourth, in terms of education (see Figure 6), there has been an increased number of candidates with an education background of

candidates. While the majority of candidates graduated from junior or senior high school, there are also candidates with a bachelor's

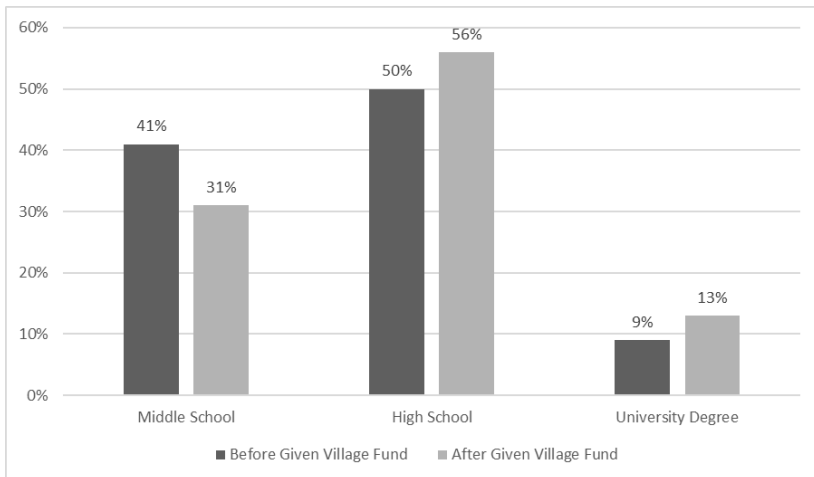


or postgraduate degree. Meanwhile, the average number of candidates running for village head has increased from 2.82 to 3.44 after the implementation of the Village Law and village funds, indicating an increase in community participation in running for village head and

voting participation in the village head election process.

In summary, as can be seen in Table 1, education, age, and rate of competitiveness increased after village funds were introduced. They all have a statistically significant difference, as evidenced by a p-value of less than <0.05 .

Figure 6. Educational Background of Village Head Candidates



Note: The sample contains 291 village head candidates before the village fund and 123 village head candidates after the village fund

Source: Authors' survey 2017 in Banjar Regency



Table 1. Social background of Village Head Candidates: A Comparison Before and After the Village Fund

No	Variables	Sample Position		P-Value	Inference
		Before receiving village funds (Mean)	After receiving village funds (Mean)		
1	Education level of village head candidates	2.68	2.82	0.039*	Different Mean (significant)
2	Age of village head candidates	41.87	44.99	0.000*	Different Mean (significant)
3	Number of competing village head candidates in one village	2.82	3.44	0.000*	Different Mean (significant)

Note: Education level: 2 = junior high school, 3 = high school, 4 = university degree; Age of village head candidates in years, number of competing village head candidates in person; p-value > 0.05 = same/no different; * denotes p-value < 0.05 = different.

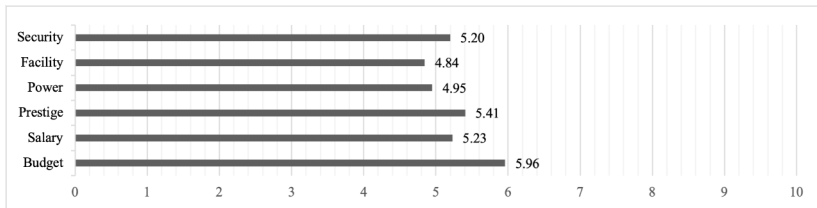
Source: Authors' calculation

Five, on motivation for becoming village head, Figure 7 shows that budget control is the main motivation, and the lowest one is on obtaining the perks/facilities. Candidates indicated that they could work effectively as village heads with their current abilities and that they had less

motivation to satisfy their personal interests when elected. Also, the respondents did not want to appear to have a vested interest and highly motivated because they would seem too eager to become the village leader.



Figure 7. Candidates' Motivation to be Village Head



Note: Score value from 1 to 10 for a sample of 96 village head candidates in the 2016 village head election. The value/score is the mean score of every sub-variable.

Source: Authors' survey 2017 in Banjar Regency.

Figure 7 compares the six motives, using the mean scores from 96 village head candidates. The motive of managing the budget is the highest. This finding indicates that the policy of providing a fund to villages motivates the residents to compete in the village head election, as the residents hope to gain control over the village fund. The motive ranked second highest is prestige, namely being the number one person in the village. Besides material things, prestige is pursued by many village candidates. For these

candidates, being the village head could offer self-satisfaction. The third motive is the salary or the payment received as village head. The lowest-ranked three motives are job security or life stability improvement when being village head, followed by power or the authority enjoyed as the village head, and facilities like owning an office and official vehicle .

CONCLUSION

The increase in village funds accompanied by changes in regulations on the use of village funds is one of the motivations

for village residents to run as village head candidates in the village elections. After the increase in village funds, there was an increase in the number of village head candidates in Banjar Regency. The educational level of the candidates also increased slightly, even though the minimum educational requirements were only up to junior high school level and the majority of candidates were high school graduates. In addition, there was a slight increase in the average age of prospective village heads, from 41.87 years to 44.99 years, which indicates that the older generation remained interested in joining the game. A village with a bigger population resulted in a larger number of village head candidates, but the number of voters who voted in the village head election would be smaller if the population were larger. Regarding the poverty level in the village, villages whose

income was still classified as poor had a greater number of candidates than villages with a lower poverty level.

The highest motivation for becoming a village head, based on the survey, was the interest in the control over the village funds. This finding suggests that the fund has influenced political participation at the village level by making positions in the village government more attractive, especially the position of the village head. The survey aimed to look at the confidence of village head candidates in a number of competencies required to become a village head. Candidates were more confident with non-technical competencies than with technical competencies. It can be concluded that candidates running for the position of village head realized that they would have the support of the village government apparatus in their



executive role and that the attraction of village funds made them put more effort into becoming village heads. Nevertheless, it is imperative for the district government to provide appropriate training for newly elected village heads to ensure the continued effectiveness of the village head and village government.

Finally, there are factors/variables that have a relationship with the selection of village head candidates. The two factors that had a significantly positive relationship with the election were motivation to become a village head and experience as a village head. A candidate with experience of being a village head was more likely to be re-elected. It is conceivable that aspirations to achieve certain goals may have influenced candidates' decisions to compete for the position of village head. In other words, the

higher the motivation, the greater the effort in campaigning, which will affect the election. Some even went as far as to spend personal funds to attract attention so that they would be elected as village heads.

In summary, the main findings of this article show that village funds as grants or transfers motivate citizens to engage in the village head election process. The academic implication of this article is in the study of fiscal decentralization and the study of local/independent communities that grant funds, which could be transformed into community-driven self-development. This study also suggests that the political participation of citizens to become community leaders also has an impact on the management of the village budget. In addition, the management of village funds by the village government is one of the drivers to demonstrate the



integrity and quality of a village to carry out a decentralization in a small scope.

As a suggestion for future research, political practices at the village level need to be studied related to the practice of money politics through campaign activities by distributing cash, goods, donations, and political promises to voters, which causes indications of misconduct in the village head election. In carrying out their actions, village head candidates are motivated by economic benefits. The provision of village funds as grants or transfers appears to incentivize citizens to participate in the village head election process, leading to greater competition for positions among various parties in the village. The focus of village heads on extending their tenure and increasing budget allocations for the village demonstrates their desire to retain power. This persistence

has resulted in significant influence over the local political environment, which has implications for the effective functioning of higher levels of government. In addition, it shapes the way people perceive the government, particularly in relation to village governance, and impacts their trust in the government.



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