Of Power and Learning: District Head, Bureaucracy, and Education Policies in Indonesia's Decentralized Political System

Sirojuddin Arif, Risa W. Nihayah, Niken Rarasati, Shintia Revina, Syaikhu Usman

April 10th, 2022

Key message:

1. Constraint on the discretionary power of district heads → Bureaucratic Capacity → Learning-Enhancing Policies

2. Political leadership can matter for the development of learning-enhancing policies but faces the risk of a policy reversal.

Outline of Presentations

- I.   Background
- II.   Theoretical Framework
- III.   Case Selection
- IV.   Results
- V.   Conclusion

Learning Crisis: Research Background

- ## Improving learning quality is a daunting but pressing task.

  - Progress toward adult literacy remains slow (Some 125 million children did not attain functional literacy or numeracy (World Bank 2017)

- ## Decentralization has mixed effects on education (Elacqua et al., 2021; Jeong et al., 2017; Leer, 2016)
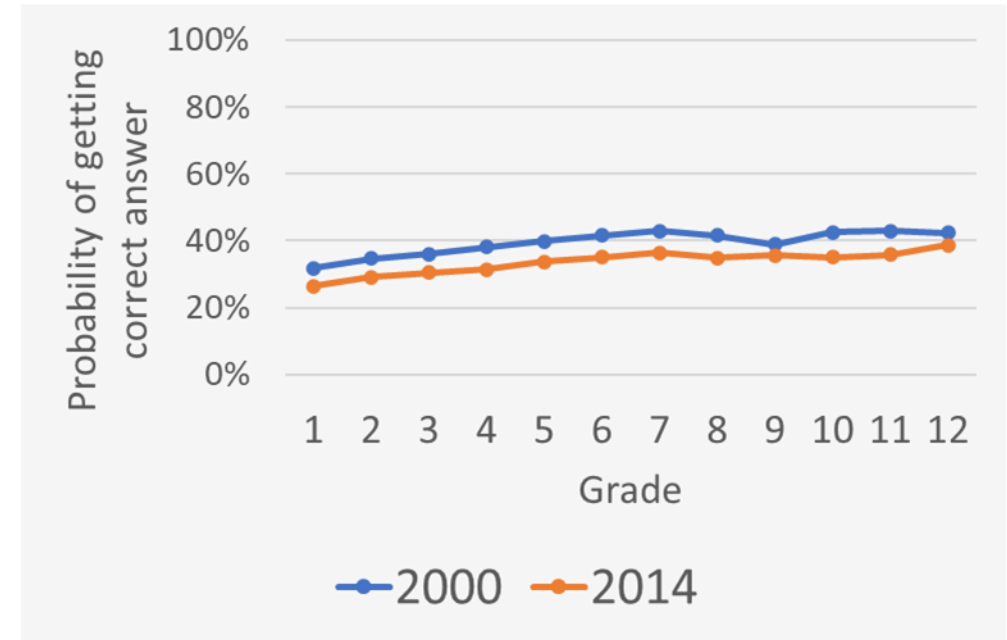
(Beatty et al. 2018)

Research Problem

- Lack of a clear understanding of how decentralization works to improve education quality

- Research question: "Under what conditions do local governments promote learning enhancing policies?"

- Focus: local politics, bureaucratic capacity, and the development of learning-enhancing policies in Indonesia's decentralized political system.

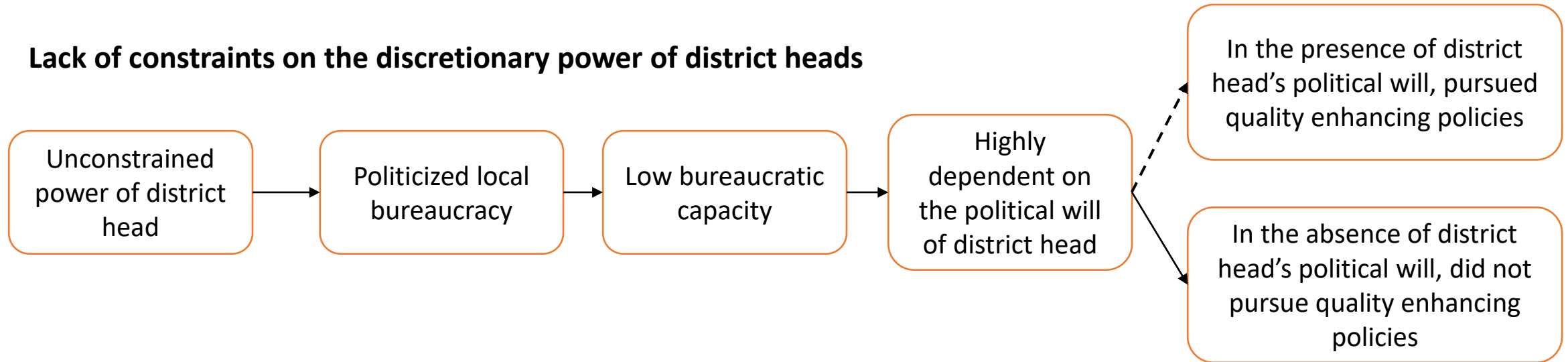# Decentralization Does Not Always Lead to More Effective Governments

- Decentralization affects local political institutions differently across regions
  - Can empower lower social groups
  - May pave the way for the consolidation of local, predatory political elites
- Education policies: access and quality

→ The effect of decentralization on learning-enhancing policies will depend on the extent to which decentralization shapes the developmental capacity of local governments

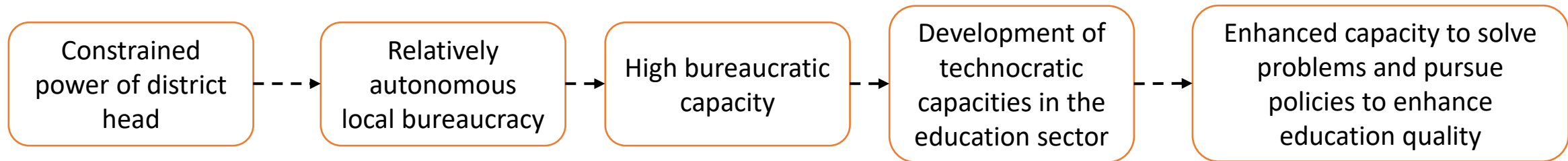# Constraints on the Discretionary Power of District Heads Can Matter

- Political settlements and the role of political leaders

- Not the typology of the prevailing political settlements, but how the political settlement shapes the behavior of district heads
  - Constrained District Heads
  - Autonomous District Heads

Divergent Paths To Quality-Enhancing Policies

Lack of constraints on the discretionary power of district heads

| Unconstrained power of district head | → | Politicized local bureaucracy | → | Low bureaucratic capacity | → | Highly dependent on the political will of district head |

In the presence of district head's political will, pursued quality enhancing policies

In the absence of district head's political will, did not pursue quality enhancing policies

Constraints on the discretionary power of district heads

| Constrained power of district head | ⇢ | Relatively autonomous local bureaucracy | → | High bureaucratic capacity | → | Development of technocratic capacities in the education sector | ⇢ | Enhanced capacity to solve problems and pursue policies to enhance education quality |

- - → Necessary condition

——→ Sufficient condition

Decentralization and Education in Indonesia

Decentralization has varied impacts on local politics

- More political opportunities for various social groups (Antlov, 2003; Aspinall 2014; Rosser, Roesad, and Edwin 2005)
- Consolidation of old, political elites (Buehler, 2010, Hadiz, 2003, 2010)

The policy did not always have positive effects on education

- No significant impacts on numeracy and literacy (Beatty et al. 2018; Leer 2016)
- Impacts on educational attainment are negligible (Muttaqin et al 2015)
- Teachers' efforts declined after decentralization (Leer 2016)

Only a few districts had quality education policies (Zulfa et al 2019)

Case Selection

Two pairs of districts represent the socio-economic heterogeneity of Indonesia. Kawi and Nagari are urban areas while Lontara and Siliwangi are rural ones.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**
Districts	Lontara	Siliwangi	Kawi	Nagari
Ed. Policies	Learning	Access	A shift from learning to access	Learning

Informants:
- Political leaders
- Legislators
- Bureaucrats
- *Dewan Pendidikan*
- School principals
- Teachers and their association
- Parents
- CSOs
- Journalists
- Local academics.

The Constrained-District Head Pathway

	Nagari	**Kawi**
Education Policies	Learning-Enhancing Policies	Switch from Learning-Enhancing to Access-Broadening Policies
Constraints on the Discretionary Power of District Heads	Yes	No
Bureaucratic Capacity	**High**	**Low**
Leader's Commitment to Learning	Low	Switched from High to Low

The Political Leadership Pathway

	Lontara	**Siliwangi**
Education Policies	Learning-Enhancing Policies	Access-Broadening Policies
Constraints on the Discretionary Power of District Heads	No	No
Bureaucratic Capacity	Low	Low
Leader's Commitment to Learning	**High**	**Low**

Conclusion

- Politics does matter for student learning in a decentralized political system.

- The importance of the long route of accountability to address learning deficit problems.

Dependent and Explanatory Vars.	Nagari	Kawi	Siliwangi	Lontara
Education policies	Quality	Shift from Quality to Access	Access	Quality
Constraints on the discretionary power of district heads	Strong	Weak	Weak	Weak
Bureaucratic Capacity	High	Low	Low	Low
District head's attention to learning	Low	Low	Low	High
Political settlement	Competitive-Clientelist	Competitive-Clientelist	Dominant-Personalised	Dominant-Personalised
Control Variables				
Education budget (as share of district government spending)	11.36%	10.87%	11.29%	16.21%
GDP per capita 2014-2018 (USD)	62.65	49.53	37.72	25.06
Population	121,028	132,434	6,088,233	785,836
Poverty rate	4.92 %	4.94 %	8.57%	8,42%
No. of sub-districts	3	3	40	18
Area	25.24 km²	20.21 km²	2,663 km²	1,888 km²
Year of establishment	1938	1918	1482	1950
Middle-class and aspiring middle-class (AMC)[1]	8% of the population AMC rate: 51%	9% of the population AMC rate: 51%	no data available	no data available
Educational attainment (2020; average years)[2]	11.33	10.25	8.30	8.19