

The Politics of Universal Free Basic Education in Decentralized Indonesia: Insights from Yogyakarta*

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ABSTRACT

Since the fall of Suharto's New Order, Indonesia's central government has substantially strengthened the legal and financial basis of universal free basic education (UFBE). Yet sub-national governments have varied considerably in their responses to the issue, with some supporting UFBE and others not. Why has this happened? What are the implications for the future of UFBE in Indonesia? And what does Indonesia's sub-national experience tell us about the political preconditions for UFBE in developing countries? We try to shed some light on these questions by examining the politics of UFBE in Bantul and Sleman, two districts in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. We argue (1) that these districts' different responses to UFBE have reflected the extent to which their *bupati* have pursued populist strategies for mobilizing votes at election time and there has been resistance to UFBE from groups such as business, the middle classes and teachers; (2) that Indonesia's sub-national experience suggests that there is an alternative pathway to UFBE besides organization of the poor by political entrepreneurs; and (3) that the future of UFBE in Indonesia thus rests on the nature of *bupatis*' strategies for advancing their careers and the strength of local groups opposed to UFBE.

KEYWORDS: Indonesia; basic education; schools; Yogyakarta; politics

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Introduction

Free access to basic education is widely recognized as a human right: for instance, Article 26 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that “[e]ducation shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.” Yet, realizing universal free basic education (UFBE) in

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developing countries has often proven difficult.¹ Indonesia is no exception in this respect. During the “New Order” period (1965-1998), Indonesian schools were permitted to charge fees for a wide range of services, products and activities despite the fact that the government formally subscribed to UFBE.² At the same time, many teachers reportedly charged illegal fees for, among other things, releasing students’ grades or allowing students to advance year levels.³

Since the fall of the New Order, the central government has introduced several regulatory and other initiatives that have provided UFBE with a stronger legal and financial basis (see following section). However, district governments⁴—which have had primary responsibility for education policy since the implementation of decentralization in 2001—have varied considerably in their response to the issue. While many have supported UFBE—and in a few cases even extended it to include free senior secondary education⁵—others have opposed UFBE on the grounds that their citizens are willing to pay for higher quality education and/or that they have other budgetary priorities.⁶ Likewise, provincial governments have also varied considerably in their responses, with the result that in some regions different levels of local government have been pulling in different directions. In Central Java, for instance, the provincial government has reportedly refused to provide top-up grants to support district governments’ efforts to realize UFBE on the grounds that its own policy is to promote affordable, not free, education.⁷ In South Sulawesi, a conflict has emerged over the reverse situation: a decision by the Makassar city administration to abandon free education, a policy supported by the provincial government, in favour of “subsidised education.”⁸

What explains these varied responses on the part of sub-national governments? What are the implications for the future of UFBE in Indonesia?

¹ Stephen Kosack, “Realising Education for All: Defining and Using the Political Will to Invest in Primary Education,” *Comparative Education* 45 no. 4 (2009): 495-523.

² “Basic education” in the Indonesian context refers to the years of primary and junior secondary education.

³ Andrew Rosser and Anuradha Joshi, “From User Fee to Fee Free: The Politics of Realising Universal Free Basic Education in Indonesia,” *Journal of Development Studies*, forthcoming.

⁴ “District governments,” as we use that term here, refers to both governments of *kabupaten* (districts) and *kotamadya* (cities).

⁵ See, for instance, Government of Jember “Pendidikan,” available at: <http://www.jembranakab.go.id/index.php?module=pendidikan>, last accessed 28 December 2012.

⁶ For examples, see *Antara* “Pemprov Gorontalo Beri Subsidi Sekolah Swasta,” 28 June 2012, <http://www.antaragorontalo.com/berita/846/pemprov-gorontalo-beri-subsidi-sekolah-swasta.html>, last accessed 28 December 2012; and *Surabaya Post Online*, “Kadispendik Tolak Pendidikan Gratis,” 30 May 2011, <http://www.surabayapost.co.id/?mnu=berita&act=view&id=7ec255f36c17207b2d7c35c6f31624f5&jenis=1679091c5a880faf6fb5e6087eb1b2dc>, last accessed 28 December 2012.

⁷ See RTI International, *Study of the Legal Framework for the Indonesian Basic Education Sector* (2009), http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADT232.pdf, last accessed 15 May 2012, 102.

⁸ *Seputar Indonesia*, “Rencana Penghapusan Pendidikan Gratis Dikritisi,” 24 May 2011, <http://www.seputar-indonesia.com/ediscetak/content/view/400953/>, last accessed 28 December 2012.

And what does Indonesia's sub-national experience tell us about the political conditions under which governments in developing countries pursue UFBE? The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on these questions by examining the politics of UFBE in Bantul and Sleman, two districts in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY). These districts' governments have adopted different positions in relation to UFBE. The Bantul government (GoB) adopted a free basic education program for the poor in the early 2000s and readily accepted central government efforts to promote UFBE from the mid-2000s. By contrast, the Sleman government (GoS) initially opposed free basic education, even for the poor, on the grounds that it would undermine educational quality and strain local government finances. Following a change of leadership in 2008 and the national implementation of UFBE in 2009, the GoS has moved closer to the GoB's position. But subtle differences in their approaches remain.

We argue that these governments' different responses to the issue of UFBE have reflected the extent to which (i) *bupati* (district heads) have employed populist strategies to mobilize votes at election time; and (2) groups such as business, the middle classes and teachers have effectively resisted UFBE. Drawing on the experiences of Brazil, Taiwan and Ghana, Stephen Kosack has argued that developing country governments have been more likely to adopt pro-poor education policies—and UFBE in particular—when “political entrepreneurs” have helped to organize the poor.⁹ Our cases, however, suggest that governments may adopt UFBE in the absence of organization by the poor so long as political leaders judge that it is in their electoral interest to promote UFBE and there is weak resistance from groups opposed to it. In this respect, we suggest that there is an alternative pathway to UFBE besides that discussed by Kosack. With regards to the likely future of UFBE in Indonesia, we conclude accordingly that it will rest on the nature of *bupatis*' future political strategies and the strength of local groups opposed to UFBE.

In presenting this argument, we begin by discussing the national and provincial context within which the GoB and GoS have addressed the issue of UFBE and the nature of local-level politics in Indonesia. We then examine the district case studies, beginning with Bantul and moving on to Sleman. We conclude the paper with a discussion of the comparative implications of our analysis and the likely future trajectory of UFBE in Indonesia.

The National and Provincial Context

The politics of UFBE in Bantul and Sleman need to be understood within the context of a range of central government initiatives to promote UFBE

⁹ Kosack, “Realising Education”; and “The Logic of Pro-Poor Policymaking: Political Entrepreneurship and Mass Education,” *British Journal of Political Science*, available on CJO 2013 doi:10.1017/S0007123412000695.

and equivocation over the issue by the DIY provincial government. Between 2000 and 2009, the central government introduced several legislative changes that have provided UFBE with a much stronger legal basis than it had under the New Order. For instance, in 2000, members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR), the highest legislative body in the country, amended the 1945 Constitution to provide all Indonesian citizens with (among other rights) the right to obtain an education.¹⁰ In 2002, they amended the Constitution again to introduce requirements for the government to fund a compulsory basic education program.¹¹ In 2003, the national parliament (DPR) reinforced these changes by passing Law 20/2003 on the National Education System. Article 34 (2) of this law states that the central government and sub-national governments will, between them, "guarantee the implementation of compulsory education at a minimum at the basic education level *without charging any costs*" (italics added). Finally, in 2008, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed off on two government regulations—47/2008 on Compulsory Education and 48/2008 on Education Funding—that provided the regulatory framework for implementation of (not quite) universal free basic education. It was "not quite" universal in the sense that these regulations explicitly excused "international standard schools" (SBI) and "pilot international standard schools" (RSBI),¹² both of which are mainly attended by middle-class children, from the requirement to abolish formal user fees. Following enactment of these regulations, then minister of national education Bambang Sudibyo directed sub-national governments to implement the central government's policies from 2009.

At the same time, the central government also moved to provide UFBE with stronger financial foundations by introducing the School Operational Assistance (BOS) program in 2005. This program provides funding to government and private primary and junior secondary schools on a per pupil basis to cover "operational" costs such as those related to student registration, textbook purchases and the production of report cards.¹³ When the program was first introduced, schools that collected less in fees than the amount they were entitled to in BOS grants—the vast majority of schools—were required to eliminate fees altogether while schools that collected more in fees were required to eliminate fees by the same amount as they were entitled to receive in BOS funds while giving priority to poor students. Following negotiations between the Department of National Education (DONE) and the Ministry of Finance over the growing size of the national education budget, it was

¹⁰ Article 28C(1).

¹¹ Article 31(2).

¹² SBI are schools that meet officially designated standards of quality regarding curriculum, staff qualifications and so on while RSBI are schools that are in the process of upgrading to these standards.

¹³ Between 2005 and 2010, these funds were transferred directly from the central government to schools. Since 2011 they have gone via sub-national governments.

decided to limit free basic education to less well-off students only, significantly reducing the cost of the program.¹⁴ Accordingly, in 2006, the DONE revised the guidelines governing the BOS program such that it was now aimed at “releasing less well-off students from education costs and reducing the costs for other students” rather than realizing *universal* free basic education. Following the issuance of Government Regulations 47/2008 and 48/2008, the DONE again revised the BOS guidelines. This time, it stipulated that *all* students at primary and junior secondary schools that received BOS funds would be freed from paying the operational costs of schooling *except* at SBI and RSBI. The effect was to push the BOS program back in the direction of providing for UFBE.

In contrast to the central government’s efforts to promote UFBE, the DIY provincial government has equivocated over the issue. Under legislation passed early in the post-New Order period, the Sultan of Yogyakarta automatically becomes the Governor of DIY without going through an election. At the same time, as the leading cultural and religious figure in DIY, he exercises significant influence on public opinion. However, he has not used this political and moral authority to impose a uniform approach to UFBE throughout DIY.

Following a severe earthquake in DIY in 2006 that killed thousands of people and destroyed many houses and buildings, education activists, student organizations and NGOs in DIY initiated a region-wide public campaign for “free schooling,” forming a coalition known as the Working Group on Free Education and Consortium on Basic Social Services for Needy Children (hereafter WGFE). This group argued that people have a right to education, the government has an obligation to fund it, free education is in line with the central government’s policy of compulsory basic education, and free education helps to provide social justice for all.¹⁵

The Sultan initially supported this campaign in an apparent attempt to bolster his local popularity in the run-up to the 2009 presidential election (he was intending to run as a candidate) and shore up local support for negotiations with the central government over a new national law on the special status of DIY.¹⁶ However, this proved to be a momentary flirtation. Internal divisions within the campaign emerged over whether all students or only poor students should receive free education and which costs should be funded. At the same time, opposition to UFBE emerged from schools reliant on fee income, teachers concerned about the impact of reduced fees on teacher welfare, and middle-class parents concerned about the impact

¹⁴ Rosser and Joshi, “From User Fee.”

¹⁵ See Kelompok Kerja Pendidikan Gratis, *Menuju Pendidikan Gratis di Yogyakarta* (Yogyakarta: Sekretariat Kelompok Kerja Pendidikan Gratis, 2007), 5-6 and 48-49.

¹⁶ Interviews with activists at the Yogyakarta Regional Ombudsman’s Office (LOD), Yogyakarta, December 2012.

of UFBE on educational quality. Concerns were also expressed about the budgetary impact of UFBE. As the presumed political benefits for the Sultan began to evaporate, he withdrew his support for the campaign.¹⁷ It has only been since the national implementation of UFBE in 2009 that he has taken concrete steps to support UFBE, issuing in 2010 a gubernatorial regulation providing for top-up grants to support the BOS program.¹⁸ But this has been less about leading the push for UFBE in DIY than a response to demands from district governments for the provincial government to help address their funding difficulties.¹⁹

For our purposes, the most important point about this national and provincial context is that it has left district governments with significant discretion over how they respond to the issue of UFBE. First, it was only from the beginning of 2009 that the central government formally implemented UFBE. From 2001, when decentralization was implemented until 2009, district governments had full discretion over whether they provided for free basic education within their respective regions and, if they did, to whom. Second, district governments have had complete discretion over whether to financially support the BOS program. BOS has not always fully covered schools' operational costs,²⁰ and district governments (like provincial governments) have had authority to "top up" BOS funds by providing their own operational assistance grants to schools (generally known as district BOP or BOSDA).²¹ But they have not been compelled to do so. Third, district governments have had greater financial capacity to support UFBE than they had during the New Order because they have received additional resources under decentralization. Finally, the fact that the Sultan equivocated over the issue of UFBE has meant that district governments within DIY have not been under significant provincial government pressure to pursue a particular approach.

The remainder of this paper focuses on how the GoB and GoS have exercised this discretion and the way in which political factors have shaped their choices in this respect. Before we examine the district case studies in detail, however, it is necessary to make a few points about the nature of local-level policy making in Indonesia.

¹⁷ Interviews with activists at LOD and Eko Prasetyo, Centre for Human Rights, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, December 2012. Both organizations helped establish the WGFE.

¹⁸ See Peraturan Gubernur Nomor 14 Tahun 2010 Tentang Bantuan Operasional Sekolah Daerah.

¹⁹ In recent years, district governments in DIY have argued that funds available through the BOS program, combined with district governments' own top-up grants, have been inadequate to cover all of schools' operational costs, making provincial government contributions essential. See, for instance, Eny Prihuyani, "Pemrov Seharusnya Ikut Mengucurkan Dana BOS Tambahan," Kompas.com, <http://edukasi.kompas.com/read/2009/11/13/18424122/Pemprov.Seharusnya.Ikut.Mengucurkan.Dana.BOS.Tambahan>, last accessed 31 December 2012.

²⁰ Rosser and Joshi, "From User Fee."

²¹ BOP stands for Educational Operational Assistance (*Bantuan Operasional Pendidikan*) while BOSDA stands for Regional BOS (*BOS Daerah*).

Understanding Local-level Policy Making in Indonesia

The simultaneous democratization and decentralization of Indonesia's political system since the late 1990s have produced significant change in the nature of local-level policy making. In broad terms, they have produced a shift in authority away from the central government towards district governments and away from local executives (*bupati*) towards local parliaments (DPRDs).²² However, local executives have nevertheless remained the dominant institutional actor at the district level. While in formal legal terms DPRDs issue local regulations jointly with *bupati*, in practice the latter have initiated the vast majority of these regulations and dominated deliberations over their formulation. At the same time, Law 32/2004 on regional government, one of two laws introduced in 2004 that revised the country's initial (1999) decentralization laws, has made it harder for DPRDs to impeach *bupati*, given *bupati* the authority to intervene in the work of DPRDs in certain ways, and strengthened their hand in budget preparation and management.²³ Similarly, the introduction of direct elections for regional heads in 2004—prior to this time, *bupati* were elected by members of the district DPRD—further enhanced their authority by giving them an independent mandate to govern.²⁴ In the 2004-2007 elections, candidates for *bupati* had to be selected and endorsed by one or more political parties that collectively had at least 15 percent of the votes/seats in the local parliament, meaning that they remained tied to some extent to the interests of the major political parties.²⁵ But, nevertheless, the overall trend has been to strengthen *bupati* at the expense of DPRDs. To understand local-level policy making in Indonesia, it is thus important to give analytical attention to *bupati* and the political strategies they pursue.

Accordingly, in this paper, we give special attention to the nature of *bupati*'s political strategies in our two district cases. Much analysis of local-level politics during the post-New Order period suggests that, in general, *bupati* have been motivated by predatory agendas.²⁶ At the same time, however, it is clear that predatory agendas have exercised greater influence on some *bupati* than others: while none have been completely autonomous of predatory networks

²² Michael Buehler, "Decentralisation and Local Democracy in Indonesia: The Marginalisation of the Public Sphere," in *Problems of Democratization in Indonesia: Elections, Institutions and Society*, eds. Ed Aspinall and Marcus Mietzner (Singapore: ISEAS, 2009), 267-285.

²³ Buehler, "Decentralisation and Local Democracy," 278-279.

²⁴ Jim Schiller, "Electing District Heads in Indonesia: Democratic Deepening or Elite Entrenchment," in *Deepening Democracy in Indonesia? Direct Elections for Local Leaders (Pilkada)*, eds. Maribeth Erb and Priyambudi Sulistiyanto (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 151-152.

²⁵ See Priyambudi Sulistiyanto and Maribeth Erb, "Indonesia and the Quest for 'Democracy,'" in *Deepening Democracy in Indonesia? Direct Elections for Local Leaders (Pilkada)*, eds. Maribeth Erb and Priyambudi Sulistiyanto (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2009), 20.

²⁶ See, for instance, Vedi Hadiz, "Reorganising Political Power in Indonesia: A Reconsideration of So-called 'Democratic Transitions,'" *Pacific Review* 16 no. 4 (2003): 591-611.

given the broader structure of power and influence in Indonesia, in some districts, they have opted to prioritize pro-poor populist policies. In broad terms, then, we suggest that *bupati* can be seen as employing strategies that lie along a spectrum ranging from, at one end, mobilization of votes through populist policies to, at the other end, the cultivation of predatory patronage networks. Such an approach recognizes that, in practice, most *bupati*'s political strategies typically represent a blend of these elements. However, in some cases the balance will be more towards the populist side of the spectrum; in others, it will be more towards the predatory side.

In proposing an analytical focus on *bupati*'s strategies, we also recognize that *bupati* do not act in a political and social vacuum. *Bupati*'s respective abilities to pursue their political strategies are constrained by the extent to which they encounter resistance from local groups whose interests are harmed by these strategies and successfully manage this through processes of co-optation and intimidation. The point is simply that *bupati* have some scope for agency in devising their political strategies: while the structural context may impose serious constraints, it is not all-determining. Accordingly, in the following sections, we focus on the nature of *bupati*'s political strategies, the position of UFBE within these strategies, the extent to which groups opposed to their approaches have been willing and able to mobilize against them, and the way in which resistance from these has in turn promoted compromise.

In simplified terms, our argument in the following sections can be summarized as follows.

Table 1
Summary of Argument

District	Dominant Tendency in <i>Bupati</i> Strategy	<i>Bupati</i> View re UFBE	Resistance to UFBE	Policy Outcome
Bantul	Populism	Pro-UFBE	Low	Adoption of UFBE
Sleman under Subiyanto	Cultivation of predatory networks	Anti-UFBE	High	Maintenance of fees
Sleman under Sri Purnomo	Populism	Pro-UFBE	High	Adoption of UFBE but with substantial room for voluntary contributions

The Case of Bantul²⁷

District Profile

Bantul is a poor district located in the southern part of DIY. Its economy is dominated by agriculture and services that plug into DIY's tourism industry although there is also some manufacturing activity.²⁸ It is home to several sites of social and cultural significance including Imogiri, the location of a royal gravesite; Kasongan, DIY's pottery centre; and Parangtritis, a popular beach resort. It has an estimated population of around 900,000 people,²⁹ many of whom work as farmers, traders, home industry workers and tourism workers. Because of its proximity to the city of Yogyakarta, many Bantul residents commute to work in the city, contributing to their daily incomes and economic activity in both places. The district was more severely affected by the 2006 earthquake than other districts in DIY but has largely recovered. Education levels in the district have historically been low, reflecting the high cost of education compared to local incomes: in 2002, for instance, Bantul's residents had completed on average only 7.6 years of schooling, much lower than wealthier neighbouring districts such as Sleman (9.7 years) and Yogyakarta City (10.7).³⁰

Politics in Bantul

During the post-New Order period, Bantul's politics have been dominated by Idham Samawi, a figure best known before his political career as the proprietor of *Kedaulatan Rakyat (KR)*, a Yogyakarta-based newspaper. During the New Order, Samawi was involved in a range of organizations besides *KR*, including the local branches of the Indonesian Publishers Association (SPS), the Indonesian Journalists Association and the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce (KADIN); Taman Siswa, a nationalist educational movement based in Yogyakarta committed to promoting education as a means of attaining personal and national autonomy; and Golkar, the New Order's

²⁷ The case studies presented here are based on primary and secondary material, much of which was collected during fieldwork in 2010 and 2012. Primary material was collected through interviews with district-level government officials, civil society activists, political party representatives, and leaders of local religious organizations. Some informants asked not to be identified. A reliance on interview data poses some methodological problems. Where possible, we have double-checked information collected through interviews with other interviewees or secondary sources. Secondary material was collected from on-line media outlets, government publications, donor reports and academic studies. We also examined, where relevant, local regulations sourced from informants or online.

²⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik Kabupaten Bantul, *Bantul Dalam Angka 2008* (Bantul: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2008), 373.

²⁹ Badan Pusat Statistik DIY, "Penduduk," <http://yogyakarta.bps.go.id/kependudukan.html>, last accessed 3 January 2013.

³⁰ See Badan Pusat Statistik DIY, *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Dalam Angka 2008* (Yogyakarta: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2008), 233. Residents in DIY's two other districts, Kulon Progo and Gunungkidul, both attended school for on average 7.3 years.

electoral vehicle.³¹ He also developed a close friendship with Sultan Hamengkubuwono X during his student days in the 1970s and maintained this during the 1980s when they worked together in the local branch of Golkar. At some point, he decided to join Megawati's faction of the Indonesian Democratic Party (PDI), the predecessor to the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). This move left him well positioned to run for *bupati* of Bantul following the collapse of the New Order. As a prominent local figure with the backing of a local newspaper, good nationalist credentials (by virtue of *KR's* alignment with the independence movement in the 1940s, his status as an indigenous entrepreneur, and his involvement in Taman Siswa), good reform credentials (by virtue of his early conversion to the PDI-P and journalistic background), personal wealth and a close connection to the Sultan, he had all the characteristics that the PDI-P wanted in a candidate for *bupati*. He thus secured the PDI-P's nomination and, with the PDI-P winning a large number of seats in Bantul's parliament in the 1999 elections, subsequent election as *bupati*.

In power, Samawi pursued a political strategy that had three main components and which, broadly speaking, lay towards the populist end of the strategy spectrum discussed earlier. The first of these components was the introduction of social and economic programs aimed at securing the support of Bantul's many poor people. From the beginning, Samawi visited villages regularly to learn about the problems facing poor farmers. He also held regular meetings with NGO activists, sponsored academic fora and seminars at which their ideas were discussed, and sought to incorporate these ideas into policy. The result was the introduction of schemes to provide farmers with subsidies for pesticides, cheap loans and stable prices for basic commodities; health schemes and educational assistance programs for poor families; and *babonisasi*, an initiative in which primary-school students received two hens to help them save money and improve nutrition levels. His policy agenda also included a ban on the building of new shopping malls and mini-marts in places where traditional markets were in operation, a measure aimed at protecting small traders. In pursuing this component of his strategy, Samawi was able to exploit his good connections to the local media. *KR* gave him regular positive coverage while TVRI, a local government television channel, gave him his own local TV show, a dialogue forum that often examined issues of concern to farmers and small traders in Bantul. Through these media, Samawi was able to reach out to poor voters in Bantul.

The second component of his strategy was to enhance Bantul's appeal as a site for business investment. To this end, he established dedicated zones for industrial activity, introduced a range of new business development

³¹ Idham Samawi (nd), "Mengenal Lebih Dekat HM Idham Samawi," <http://bregodosapujagat.blogspot.com/2009/05/mengenal-lebih-dekat-hm-idham-samawi.html>, last accessed January 2011.

programs, and dramatically simplified business registration procedures.³² In 2004, *SWA*, a national business magazine, included him in its list of “pro-business *bupati*.”³³ Bantul also received a high score in the Economic Governance Index published by Regional Autonomy Watch and the Asia Foundation in 2007.³⁴ In part, this reflected the fact that respondents had a positive evaluation of Bantul in terms of the integrity and capacity of its *bupati*, one of the indicators that made up the index. However, when the interests of the business community ran up against his desire to pursue populist pro-poor initiatives—as they did, for instance, in relation to the issue of shopping-mall and mini-mart construction—he was willing to sacrifice the former. In contrast to Ibnu Subiyanto in Sleman, his government was never totally captured by business interests.

The final component of his strategy was the use of patronage resources and intimidation to secure and maintain the support of the local elite. He actively made deals with local parliamentarians over the allocation of government budgetary resources and senior government positions to ensure continued support within the DPRD while at the same time appointing loyal followers to sub-district head positions, many of whom were former friends from his university days.³⁵ He also wooed the major local Islamic organizations, Nahdatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, by regularly visiting Islamic leaders, donating funds and other facilities to their schools, and splitting the district’s lucrative education portfolio into two agencies, one under the control of an NU leader and the other under the control of a Muhammadiyah leader.³⁶ Similarly, he used *KR* to sponsor various events within the district, attended local cultural activities, and implemented government plans to make Bantul a cultural hub, all of which served to enhance his standing in local cultural and business circles.³⁷ Finally, he appears to have used threats to deal with recalcitrant officials and political opponents, an approach about which he was remarkably candid in interview.³⁸ According to one informant, in these respects, Samawi’s rule has been similar to Suharto’s New Order.³⁹

³² Cungki Kusdarjito, “Program Pengentasan Kemiskinan,” 2007, available at <http://www.forplid.net/studi-kasus/8-kepemimpinan-kepemimpinan-/119-program-pengentasan-kemiskinan>, last accessed 23 February 2011; and Regional Autonomy Watch and the Asia Foundation, *Local Economic Governance in Indonesia: A Survey of Businesses in 243 Regencies/Cities in Indonesia* (Jakarta: KPPOD, USAID and Asia Foundation, 2007), 2.

³³ See Ishak Rafick, “Inilah Para Penguasa Daerah Probisnis,” *SWA*, 15 April 2004, <http://202.59.162.82/swamajalah/sajian/details.php?cid=1&id=409>, last accessed 21 February 2011.

³⁴ Regional Autonomy Watch and the Asia Foundation, *Local Economic Governance*.

³⁵ Interviews with an opposition political party representative and a local political researcher, David Efendi, December 2012.

³⁶ Interview with representatives from the Sleman branch of Muhammadiyah, Sleman, December 2012.

³⁷ One cultural initiative was the establishment of an art market in Gabusan village in 2003, although it proved unsuccessful. Interview with an NGO activist, Bantul, January 2010.

³⁸ In interview, he frequently used the word “memaksa” (to force) when talking about how he managed people who opposed his wishes. Interview, Bantul, December 2012.

³⁹ Interview, Yogyakarta, December 2012.

This three-pronged strategy was enormously successful in promoting Samawi's political career. It allowed him to simultaneously gain the confidence of the local business community, maintain the backing of the PDI-P, secure support in the DPRD and local bureaucracy, and achieve widespread popularity among the general public. This popularity in turn enabled him to win easily a second term as *bupati* in 2005 on a joint ticket with Sumarno, a career bureaucrat, and engineer the election of his wife, Sri Suryawidati (Ida Samawi), as *bupati* when his second term ended in 2010,⁴⁰ giving him continuing influence in government.⁴¹ Finally, he was recently promoted to a position in the PDI-P national council.

The Politics of UFBE

As part of the first component of his political strategy, Samawi pursued an approach to education policy that one of his senior officials described as "justice-based education" (*pendidikan yang berkeadilan*).⁴² At the heart of this approach has been the idea that no child, no matter how poor, should be denied access to school because education is a fundamental human right, an idea that resonates closely with thinking on education issues in Taman Siswa and NGO circles.⁴³ Initially, the GoB pursued this approach by funding a free education scheme under which children from poor families in rural areas could attend primary through to high school without paying fees. After the BOS program was introduced, it then shifted to providing free basic education in accordance with this program, supporting it through top-up grants initially called BOP and then BOSDA. Its commitment to this policy was tested when the 2006 earthquake struck. But rather than abandon the policy, it responded with a range of initiatives aimed at ensuring that students, especially from poor backgrounds, continued to have free access to schooling, notwithstanding the fact that reconstruction efforts placed it under serious budgetary pressure. These initiatives included the local education agency issuing a memo to all school principals instructing them to assist students who were already in school and new students who were about to start; the abolition of extra curriculum fees; increases in education funding from the district government budget; a decision to make uniforms non-compulsory; and increased financial assistance from school committees (*Komite Sekolah*) for students from poor backgrounds. Disaster relief funding was also used to rebuild schools in villages throughout Bantul. Finally, when the minister of national education directed district governments to implement UFBE in

⁴⁰ Under Indonesia's election laws, *bupati* are only permitted a maximum of two terms in office.

⁴¹ It is widely believed that Samawi has continued to call the shots in Bantul, despite being replaced by his wife.

⁴² Interview with Trisakti, head of Bantul's Regional Development Agency, Bantul, December 2012.

⁴³ Interviews with Idham Samawi and Sahari, Bantul, December 2012.

2009, the GoB accepted the policy having, by that time, already introduced BOSDA, the key policy implication of compliance.

Samawi claims that the introduction of these policies was motivated by a desire to help “develop the intellectual life of the nation” (*mencerdaskan kehidupan bangsa*), a principle advanced in the preamble to the 1945 Constitution.⁴⁴ While evidence is scant, these policies do appear to have reduced the cost of basic education for poor children in Bantul and, in so doing, probably helped to improve school enrolment rates, even though they do not appear to have eliminated all costs that parents face.⁴⁵ Samawi claims that they have also led to a big improvement in the academic performance of schoolchildren in Bantul as measured by, for instance, national exam results.⁴⁶ Whatever the truth of these claims, however, these policies were almost certainly simultaneously intended to help Samawi and his wife attract votes from the poor at election time. Samawi’s education policies are widely cited as one of the main reasons for his and his wife’s successful election campaigns in 2005 and 2010 respectively.⁴⁷

In promoting his education policies, Samawi was helped by the fact that there was little organized resistance to them. To fund his education reforms, he made cuts to other areas of government spending, targeting travel and overtime expenses that he considered wasteful, and rationalized both school class sizes and the number of schools. These changes initially provoked a hostile response from the local DPRD fuelled, according to Samawi, by bureaucratic resentment to the cuts.⁴⁸ However, this dissipated over time as Samawi gained greater control over local government institutions through his strategy of co-opting and intimidating DPRD representatives and social organizations.

Two other political factors also served to reduce resistance. The first is the relatively small size and influence of Bantul’s middle class, something that is reflected in the fact that Bantul has very few SBI/RSBI and that Muhammadiyah schools in the district tend to charge lower fees than their counterparts in Sleman, or at least its more affluent parts.⁴⁹ As such, the local constituency for prioritizing educational quality over universal access to basic education has been relatively weak in Bantul compared to Sleman. Middle-class Bantul residents dissatisfied with the quality of education in Bantul have generally chosen to school their children in neighbouring districts, rather than directly challenge Samawi’s policies through political action.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Interview, Bantul, December 2012.

⁴⁵ Interviews with residents of Mulyodadi village, July 2010.

⁴⁶ Interview, Bantul, December 2012.

⁴⁷ I Ketut Putera Erawan, “Tracing the Progress of Local Governments Since Decentralisation,” in *Indonesia: Democracy and the Promise of Good Governance*, eds. Ross McLeod and Andrew MacIntyre (Singapore: ISEAS, 2007), 55-72.

⁴⁸ Interview, Bantul, December 2012.

⁴⁹ Interview with Trisakti, Head, Bantul Regional Development Agency, Bantul, December 2012.

⁵⁰ We wish to thank Juli Nugroho for this information.

The second factor is Samawi's co-optation of and control over teachers and the various actors represented on the district Education Council. Teachers have been a key source of opposition to UFBE in Indonesia, reflecting the fact that user fees have been a key source of extra income for teachers.⁵¹ To reduce the likelihood that they would oppose his educational reforms while at the same time help him build a political base through the education system, Samawi introduced salary increases for teachers and bonuses for teachers who upgraded their qualifications. He also increased the number of contract teachers.⁵² At the same time, rather than sideline the Indonesian Teachers Union (PGRI) (which, as we will see, happened in Sleman), he brought this institution into the fold, appointing the head of its local arm, Sahari, to lead the district Basic Education Agency.⁵³ Finally, Samawi has ensured that the district's Education Council, a body that represents key stakeholders in the education sector including parents and heads of religious organizations such as Muhammadiyah, has remained firmly under his control. During his terms in office, the council was stacked with loyal government officials.⁵⁴ Since then, Samawi has become the council's chairperson himself, ensuring that it does not act independently of the government, as we will see it did in Sleman.

The political effect of these measures has been to enhance Samawi's base of support in the education system while reducing the potential for effective mobilization of dissent. In interview the head of the local branch of Muhammadiyah, an organization that has an extensive network of schools within the district, made clear the level of support: all schools, he said, had done well under Samawi's and his wife's stewardship, including both state and privately run Islamic schools.⁵⁵ Another source told us that teachers, especially in preschools (which are numerous and spread throughout the district), were active in getting out the vote for Ida Samawi at election time.⁵⁶ This has in turn facilitated the district's shift towards UFBE.

The Case of Sleman

District Profile

Sleman is located in the northern part of DIY. Its economy is dominated by the services sector—in particular, trade, hotels, restaurants, property and transportation—although manufacturing and agriculture are also significant.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Rosser and Joshi, "From User Fee."

⁵² Interviews with Idham Samawi and Sahari, Bantul, December 2012.

⁵³ Interview with Sahari, Bantul, December 2012. Sahari is also the NU leader referred to earlier.

⁵⁴ Erawan, "Tracing the Progress," 66.

⁵⁵ Interview with Saebani, Bantul, December 2012.

⁵⁶ Interview with Eko Prasetyo, Sleman, December 2012.

⁵⁷ See Badan Pusat Statistik Sleman, *Kabupaten Sleman Dalam Angka 2008* (Sleman: Badan Pusat Statistik, 2008), 380-381.

It has about 1.1 million people,⁵⁸ many of whom work as farmers, while the rest are traders, teachers, university lecturers and public servants. Although a significant proportion of the district's population lives below the poverty line—about 12.5 percent in 2007 according to the Central Bureau of Statistics⁵⁹—it is a wealthier area than most other districts in DIY, including Bantul, and has a more substantial middle class. Those who live on the border between Sleman and Yogyakarta City have seen the expansion of housing estates and there is substantial business and industrial activity in the area. This part of Sleman is urbanized, pluralist and cosmopolitan. Gadjah Mada University, one of the country's top universities, is located there, attracting national and international visitors. Compared to Bantul, Sleman has a large number of high-quality schools, many of which are run by Muhammadiyah, including a large number of SBI/RSBI. As noted earlier, it also has a more educated population.

Politics in Sleman

Just as politics in Bantul has been dominated by Samawi, so politics in Sleman has been dominated by its *bupati* for most of the post-New Order period, Ibnu Subiyanto—or at least it was until he stood down amidst corruption allegations in 2008. Subiyanto never had the same degree of personal authority as Samawi, reflecting his more limited personal wealth, weaker connections to the Sultan (in fact his relationship with the Sultan was reportedly quite tense), limited control over the local media (his relationship with the media was also tense), and the more organized and empowered nature of civil society compared to Bantul. Nevertheless, he wielded enormous authority, reflecting the power invested in the office of *bupati* under decentralization, his strong connections to the local business community, and the electoral success in Sleman of the PDI-P, the political party he represented, throughout his tenure in office.

During the New Order period, Subiyanto pursued a career as an accountant and accounting lecturer at Yogyakarta's College of Economic Studies and the Faculty of Economics at Gadjah Mada. He became an executive at the Yogyakarta branch of the Association of Indonesian Accountants in 1990, enhancing his links to local business groups. Like Samawi, he joined Megawati's faction of the PDI.⁶⁰ By the time that Suharto

⁵⁸ Badan Pusat Statistik DIY, "Penduduk," <http://yogyakarta.bps.go.id/kependudukan.html>, last accessed 3 January 2013.

⁵⁹ Badan Pusat Statistik DIY, *Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta: Dalam Angka* (Yogyakarta: Central Bureau of Statistics, Special Region of Yogyakarta, 2008), 232. By contrast, 19.4 percent of Bantul's population lived below the poverty line.

⁶⁰ For a biography of Ibnu Subiyanto, see Nur Faidati et al., *Kampanye Pilkada Langsung 2005: Peran Kampanye sebagai sarana Pendidikan Politik Masyarakat di Kabupaten Sleman* (Yogyakarta: Program S2 Politik Lokal dan Otonomi Daerah, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2005).

fell in 1998, Subiyanto was thus well placed to run for *bupati* of Sleman. Combining strong nationalist credentials (by virtue of his association with Megawati and the PDI and earlier involvement in a nationalist student group) with his potential ability to mobilize resources from the business sector, he was an attractive candidate. When the PDI-P won the largest number of seats in the Sleman DPRD in the 1999 elections, Subiyanto gained its nomination for *bupati*, and subsequent election to the position.

In power, Subiyanto pursued a political strategy centred on the cultivation of predatory business networks and the distribution of patronage resources to secure and maintain the support of local elites. From the beginning, he actively promoted property developments and infrastructure projects while also emphasizing a general need for Sleman to be “business-friendly.” Many businesses supported his political campaigns in exchange for special access to licences and approvals to develop housing estates in highly populated areas. At the same time, he reportedly used financial resources to buy support within the DPRD and wider voting public at election time.⁶¹ Finally, he restructured the bureaucracy by appointing loyal supporters to important positions from the district to village level and cultivated the support of Muhammadiyah and NU, organizations that besides their role in running Islamic schools, are the political base for two important Islamic political parties, the National Mandate Party (PAN) and the National Awakening Party (PKB), respectively.

During his first term in office, he also promoted a range of pro-poor programs in an attempt to secure the electoral support of Sleman’s poor, particularly in rural areas. These included schemes providing cheap credit, subsidized fertilizers, and rural development funds and targeting the Millennium Development Goals. But his commitment to populist, pro-poor programs was much weaker than Samawi’s, and importantly, for our purposes, did not extend to promoting free basic education, even for the poor let alone on a universal basis (see below). During his second term in office, such programs disappeared from his agenda entirely in favour of an increased focus on promoting property and infrastructure projects. Overall, his strategy was located towards the predatory end of the strategy spectrum discussed earlier.

With a weak reputation for supporting the poor, Subiyanto relied heavily on a strategic alliance with PAN and its ability to draw on Muhammadiyah networks to persuade the poor to vote in his favour during the 2005 district election. Running on a joint ticket with PAN’s Sri Purnomo, he won more than 30 percent of the vote, just enough to get elected. Most of his votes

⁶¹ Wahyudi Kumorotomo, “Serving the Political Parties: Issues of Fragmented Public Policy and Accountability in Decentralised Indonesia,” paper presented at the Fourth International Conference on Public Policy and Management (CPPM), Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, India, 9-12 August 2009, 16-18.

appear to have come from rural areas and Muhammadiyah supporters in particular.⁶²

In 2006, things began to turn sour for Subiyanto when Mount Merapi erupted, killing more than one hundred people. The GoS was slow to respond to the disaster and relief efforts were disorganized, leading to media and NGO criticism of Subiyanto for being focused on deal-making with business cronies rather than the needs of the people.⁶³ Not long after this, he was investigated and indicted on corruption charges related to a government contract for the purchase of school textbooks. He was replaced by Sri Purnomo as *bupati* in 2008 and jailed in 2009.

The Politics of UFBE Under Subiyanto

In power, Subiyanto pursued an approach to UFBE that reflected his limited focus on populist pro-poor reform and preference for supporting predatory business networks. In contrast to Samawi, he resisted the introduction of UFBE on the grounds that reductions in school fees would undermine the quality of education and the GoS could not afford to provide BOSDA. The only students who were entitled to government-funded scholarships during his tenure were academic high achievers.⁶⁴ Otherwise, all parents were required to pay user fees, even poor ones. According to one informant, this approach was underpinned by a “neo-liberal” outlook and, in particular, a view that if people were “spoilt” (*dimanjakan*), they would become dependent and weak.⁶⁵ Subiyanto wanted to build strength by promoting self-reliance.

This position accorded with the interests of three groups: middle-class residents in Sleman, whose main concern was that their children received high-quality education; business, which wanted to minimize government spending and, in turn, local business taxes; and local teachers concerned about the impact of UFBE on teachers’ incomes.⁶⁶ However, it clashed with the agenda of activists in the WGFE and the interests of the low-fee private religious schools in Sleman run by Muhammadiyah and NU, which stood to benefit from the introduction of district BOSDA. In this respect, the issue of UFBE posed a contradiction for Subiyanto between two elements of his political strategy: promoting the interests of business and keeping Muhammadiyah and NU on board. In opposing UFBE, he was picking a fight with the latter organizations and the political parties to which they were linked, most notably the PAN, which had substantial representation in the DPRD and was part of his governing coalition.

⁶² Faidati et al., *Kampanye Pilkada Langsung 2005*, 43; interview with a senior district government official, Yogyakarta, January 2010.

⁶³ Interview with an NGO activist, Sleman, February 2010.

⁶⁴ Interview with Sudiyo, Head, Sleman branch of the PGRI, Sleman, December 2012.

⁶⁵ Interview with Purwanto, Chair, Sleman Education Council and lecturer in sociology, Gadjah Mada University, Sleman, December 2012.

⁶⁶ Interview with activists at the LOD, Yogyakarta, December 2012.

Things came to a head when a debate on education issues began in the DPRD in 2008, following the introduction of a draft regional regulation (*rapenda*) on education by two Islamic political parties, the PAN and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). During hearings held in March that year, education experts and the public were invited to give their views on the draft regulation.⁶⁷ UFBE emerged as the most controversial issue. On one side, the PAN and the PKS supported UFBE, drawing on the advice and backing of the WGFE.⁶⁸ On the other side, the GoS showed a lack of commitment, claiming that it did not have the financial resources to implement UFBE and in particular provide BOSDA.⁶⁹ It was supported in its opposition by the PGRI.⁷⁰ Eventually, as a compromise, Subiyanto proposed that the government should pursue “affordable and better quality education” (*pendidikan yang terjangkau dan berkualitas*).⁷¹ However, by the end of the hearings both sides remained in disagreement. At this point, Subiyanto proposed to the DPRD that the government take over the legislation for further improvement. The DPRD agreed, in so doing making a tactical error because he never reintroduced the draft legislation. This ensured, for the moment, continuation of Subiyanto’s preferred approach.

The Politics of UFBE Under Purnomo

Since becoming *bupati*, Purnomo has pursued a political strategy that is more populist in orientation than Subiyanto’s. Like Subiyanto, he has been keen to promote Sleman’s business sector, declaring that Sleman will be “open to investment.”⁷² But he has been careful to present a cleaner image to the public. A year after replacing Subiyanto, Purnomo successfully ran for the position of *bupati* in the 2009 district head elections on a joint ticket with the PDI-P’s Yuni Satia Rahayu. He chose Rahayu as his running mate because of her strong civil society credentials—she is a well-known women’s activist—and reputation for incorruptibility.⁷³ He has also publicly signed, along with his senior officials, an integrity pact declaring a commitment to prevent and eradicate corruption.⁷⁴ At the same time, he has prioritized initiatives aimed

⁶⁷ Details can be found in Sekretariat Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, *Notulen Public Hearing Dalam Rangka Penyusunan Draft Rancangan Peraturan Daerah Prakarsa DPRD Tentang Penyelenggaraan Pendidikan, Sabtu, 15 Maret 2008* (Sleman: Sekretariat Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, Kabupaten Sleman, 2008).

⁶⁸ Interviews with activists at the LOD, Yogyakarta, December 2012.

⁶⁹ Interviews with a senior government official, Sleman, January 2010 and activists at the LOD, December 2012.

⁷⁰ Interview with activists at the LOD, December 2012.

⁷¹ Interview with a senior government official, January 2010.

⁷² See “Profil Bupati dan Wakil Bupati Sleman Periode 2010-2015,” <http://www.slemankab.go.id/806/profil-bupati-dan-wakil-bupati-sleman-periode-2010-2015.slm>, last accessed 6 January 2013.

⁷³ Interview with an NGO activist, Sleman, February 2010.

⁷⁴ Antara “Pemkab Sleman Tandatangan Pakta Integritas,” <http://jogja.antaranews.com/berita/298780/pemkab-sleman-tandatangan-pakta-integritas>, last accessed 6 January 2013.

at making access to quality education more equitable. GoS spending on education increased from 38 percent of the regional budget in 2008 to 51 percent in 2011. Importantly for our purposes, much of this increase has taken the form of new BOSDA grants for primary and junior secondary schools, including those run by Muhammadiyah, effectively bringing Sleman into line with national requirements to implement UFBE.⁷⁵ He has also introduced new grants to help poor children attend senior secondary school.

However, Purnomo has not given fully-fledged public endorsement to UFBE. GoS rhetoric in relation to basic education has remained centred on the principles of affordability and quality. The language of rights, particularly poor people's rights to education, quite prominent in Bantul, remains largely absent in Sleman. At the same time, schools in Sleman have been given tacit encouragement to seek "voluntary contributions" from parents in place of user fees. Such voluntary contributions are permissible everywhere in Indonesia under a recent ministerial government regulation.⁷⁶ But in Sleman, there appears to be a broad understanding that schools *should* seek such contributions to promote educational quality. Finally, Purnomo has still not signed the education *raperda*.⁷⁷

His reluctance to publicly endorse UFBE and his decision to tacitly encourage schools to raise voluntary contributions have reflected the fact that Sleman's middle classes, business community, and teachers remain actively opposed to UFBE. For instance, following the national implementation of UFBE in 2009, the Sleman Education Council, a body representing key education stakeholders including parents, teachers and business, mobilized in an effort to point out to the local government the problems that this policy had caused. Led by a professional academic at UGM with extensive experience as a parent representative on school committees—in short, an informed member of the middle class—the education council carried out extensive research on the effects of UFBE on education quality and teacher performance at schools in Sleman and found them to be largely negative. It presented a detailed report on these findings to the GoS along with a list of demands for policy change.⁷⁸

To help manage the tensions created by the introduction of UFBE, Purnomo has sought to develop a closer relationship with the PGRI. Although Subiyanto and the PGRI were united in their opposition to the education *raperda*, Subiyanto largely ignored the PGRI during his time in office, refusing to attend most of its events, openly disparaging teachers when he did, and

⁷⁵ See *Peraturan Bupati Sleman Nomor 26 Tahun 2009 Tentang Bantuan Operasional Sekolah Daerah Untuk Sekolah Dasar dan Sekolah Menengah Pertama*.

⁷⁶ The relevant regulation in this respect is *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia Nomor 44 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pungutan dan Sumbangan Biaya Pendidikan Pada Satuan Pendidikan Dasar*.

⁷⁷ "Raperda Pendidikan Dipecah," *Harian Jogja*, 22 April 2010.

⁷⁸ Interview with Purwanto, Sleman, December 2012.

ignoring its advice in relation to education policy issues. By contrast, Purnomo, a former teacher, has been highly supportive of the union's activities, even supporting them with grants from the district budget.⁷⁹ His government has also put some money into pay raises and incentives for teachers, mirroring the Bantul model.⁸⁰

Conclusion

This paper has examined the political dynamics shaping district government responses to the issue of UFBE in Bantul and Sleman, DIY. The two *bupati* who have been the main focus of the analysis, Idham Samawi and Ibnu Subiyanto, have both operated within a context characterized by the political dominance of predatory interests nurtured during the New Order period and an institutional environment defined by the country's particular approach to democratic decentralization.⁸¹ Yet governments in the two districts have responded in quite different ways to the issue of UFBE. We have explained these differences in terms of the influence of two variables. The first is the extent to which *bupati* have pursued populist strategies for mobilizing votes at election time. Where *bupati* have pursued such strategies, as in Bantul and Sleman under Sri Purnomo, district governments have promoted UFBE and supported it with initiatives such as district BOSDA. By contrast, where *bupati* have pursued strategies focused on promoting predatory networks and patronage distribution, as in Sleman under Subiyanto, district governments have resisted UFBE on the grounds that it is unaffordable or will undermine education quality. The second variable has been the extent to which there has been resistance to UFBE from groups such as business, the middle classes and teachers. Where such resistance has, for one reason or another, been low, as in Bantul, efforts by *bupati* to promote UFBE have gone more or less uncontested. However, where it has been strong, as in Sleman under Sri Purnomo, it has resulted in a compromise not fully consistent with UFBE.

As noted earlier, Kosack argues that governments in developing countries have been more likely to adopt pro-poor education policies—and UFBE in particular—when “political entrepreneurs” have helped to organize the poor.⁸² Although the poor have some ability to influence policy through the ballot box in democratic political systems, he suggests, it is only when they have been organized that they have been politically important—and political entrepreneurs have been crucial to making this happen. In our cases, however, political leaders who promoted UFBE do not appear to have actively

⁷⁹ Interview with Sudiyo, Sleman, December 2012.

⁸⁰ Interview with Arif Haryono, Head of the Sleman Education Agency, Sleman, December 2012.

⁸¹ Vedi Hadiz, “Reorganising Political Power.”

⁸² Kosack, “Realising Education”; and “The Logic.”

sought to organize the poor so much as appeal to them through pro-poor policies. Our analysis thus suggests that there is an alternative pathway to UFBE. Specifically, the introduction of UFBE is possible in the absence of organization by the poor so long as political leaders believe it will help them advance their political careers and groups opposed to UFBE are weak, co-opted or otherwise subdued.⁸³

Two further points follow. First, we should not dismiss the potential of the ballot box to make a difference *vis-à-vis* UFBE, even if we should also recognize that it may do so only under particular conditions. In this respect, there is something to the conventional wisdom that democratization leads to pro-poor outcomes, especially if combined with decentralization. The second point concerns the notion of political entrepreneurship. Kosack defines this notion in narrow terms—as efforts by political leaders to develop “organizational structures through which poor citizens could overcome their collective action disadvantages and coalesce into a credible source of political support.”⁸⁴ Our analysis suggests that a broader understanding of political entrepreneurship is required, one that recognizes that political leaders can mobilize support in different ways—not just by organizing the poor but also by designing policies to attract their votes. *Contra* Kosack, the latter can happen in the absence of the former.

What does all this suggest about the likely future trajectory of UFBE in Indonesia? To answer this question, it is important to note that UFBE has not been well institutionalized in either Bantul or Sleman. In neither district has the policy been supported by a regional regulation passed by the DPRD. As we have seen in Sleman, the draft regional regulation on education produced by the DPRD has still not been signed off by the new *bupati* and the government’s provision of BOSDA rests on a form of regulation (*peraturan bupati*) that could easily be revoked down the track by the current or a future *bupati*. In Bantul, the situation is much the same. Samawi developed a reputation for making decisions by executive fiat rather than with the formal approval of the DPRD. UFBE appears to have been no different in this respect—we could find no evidence that Samawi and the Bantul DPRD had produced a regional regulation on free education. As such, a shift in policy *vis-à-vis* UFBE in both districts only requires a change in attitude towards UFBE on the part of the *bupati*.

The fact that UFBE is national policy is only a limited constraint in this respect. While in theory the central government can seek to enforce conformity with national policy by taking district governments to court, in practice this is difficult because of the potentially huge number of cases—Indonesia has around 500 districts each doing their own thing across a range of policy issues—and the enormous difficulties that even the central

⁸³ This is not to deny the political importance of organizing the poor where it is possible.

⁸⁴ Kosack, “The Logic,” 2.

government can have in getting court decisions implemented. At the same time, district governments still have more or less complete discretion over whether and, to what extent, they choose to support UFBE financially. In this environment, the political strategies pursued by current and future *bupati* in Bantul and Sleman will have a key influence on future policy decisions regarding UFBE in these districts as will the extent to which groups such as business, the middle classes and teachers are willing and able to mobilize effectively against UFBE.

As such, the analysis here suggests that the future of UFBE in Indonesia is highly contingent. Since the fall of the New Order, the political context in Indonesia has clearly changed in favour of UFBE, offering significant promise for realization of the policy. This is not least because democratic decentralization has given rise to political leaders whose political strategies have incorporated promotion of UFBE. However, with predatory bureaucratic and business interests continuing to exercise significant influence at the local level and the middle classes having reservations about UFBE, one cannot assume that UFBE will prevail in all areas. The struggle over UFBE will continue in many parts of Indonesia for some time to come.

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