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ONE BALLOT, MANY INDONESIAS: REREADING INDONESIA'S FIRST GENERAL ELECTION OF 1955 FROM SOUTH SULAWESI FOR HISTORY LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's first general election in 1955 is usually remembered through its national result, in which four parties won almost four-fifths of the vote and none won a majority. That national picture hides very different regional experiences, and school history rarely asks students to look beyond it. This article rereads the 1955 election from South Sulawesi, a region where voting took place under the threat of the Darul Islam/Tentara Islam Indonesia (DI/TII) insurgency. Using a qualitative historical method of heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography, it examines Law No. 7/1953, published national and regional results, and regional studies built on provincial archives and contemporary newspapers. National and regional data were compiled into comparative tables and cross-checked. The findings show that the election was designed to be inclusive, with 118 contestants in the parliamentary vote and a national valid-vote rate of about 87.7 percent of registered voters. In South/Southeast Sulawesi, however, Masyumi won about 41 percent of the vote, roughly twice its national share, while the PKI won only 1.6 percent and no parliamentary seat. Combining the regional figures, the authors estimate that only about two-thirds of registered voters there cast valid ballots. In Parepare, a quarter of the local polling committees could not function and election officials were killed or kidnapped. The article concludes that the 1955 election was one ballot read through many local Indonesias, and it proposes a source-based learning design that uses regional election data to train historical thinking and democratic awareness.

Keywords: *1955 general election, democratic literacy, history learning, local history, South Sulawesi.*

INTRODUCTION

On 29 September 1955, millions of Indonesians walked to polling stations to choose a parliament for the first time. Eleven weeks later, on 15 December, they voted again for a Constituent Assembly that was to write a permanent constitution (Ayu et al., 2020). The event has a secure place in national memory. Textbooks call it the first democratic election, and popular accounts recall long queues, high turnout, and a peaceful polling day.

The road to that day was long. Under the Provisional Constitution of 1950, Indonesia was governed by a parliamentary system in which cabinets depended on shifting coalitions in an appointed legislature. Seven cabinets, from Natsir to Djuanda,

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rose and fell between 1950 and July 1959 (Ruhdiara et al., 2022). An elected parliament was expected to give government a firmer mandate, and the legal basis for it, Law No. 7/1953, was finally enacted in 1953 (Republik Indonesia, 1953). Election committees were then formed from the national level down to the villages, and voter registration in South Sulawesi was planned to start on 1 May 1954 (Irdaniah et al., 2022).

That memory is not wrong, but it is incomplete. The national result is usually summarized in a single line: the Indonesian National Party (PNI), Masyumi, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), and the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) won 22.3, 20.9, 18.4, and 16.4 percent of the vote respectively (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Behind that line lay sixteen electoral districts with very different societies, party networks, and security conditions (Republik Indonesia, 1953, Pasal 15). In Central Java, the PNI and the PKI dominated the count (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). In Jakarta, Masyumi narrowly beat the PNI after an intense media and mosque-based campaign (Ayu et al., 2020). In South Sulawesi, voters went to the polls while the DI/TII movement of Kahar Muzakkar controlled parts of the interior, and the region was one of three "red zones" for election security alongside West Java and Aceh (Anwar et al., 2021).

Historical scholarship on the 1955 election is substantial. Feith's classic account remains the standard narrative of how the election was organized and how calmly polling day passed (Feith, 2007). Recent studies have moved the lens to the regions. They examine campaign discourse in Central Java (T. A. Ahmad, 2016), Masyumi's strategy in Jakarta (Ayu et al., 2020), the organization of the vote in Parepare (Irdaniah et al., 2022), and the failure of the PKI in South/Southeast Sulawesi (Anwar et al., 2021; T. Ahmad, 2014). A general synthesis of the election's dynamics has also appeared (Ruhdiara et al., 2022). Yet these regional studies seldom speak to one another. Each describes one place, and few place their numbers side by side to ask how one national ballot produced such different local outcomes.

A second gap concerns history education. Darmawan and Mulyana (2020) show that Indonesian textbooks have long judged the liberal democracy period through shifting ideological lenses, presenting it in some curricula as a time of disorder and in others as a period of "learning for democracy." Students therefore meet 1955 as a national fact to memorize rather than as evidence to examine. The current curriculum asks for more. In Phase F, students study the governments of Liberal and Guided Democracy (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan [BSKAP], 2024) and are expected to practise the steps of historical research, including the criticism and selection of sources (BSKAP, 2024). Local history offers a route to that goal, because it brings the past closer to students' own surroundings and makes learning more contextual (Kurniawanti, 2026). In South Sulawesi, the local value of *maradeka*, which carries the meaning of freedom and democracy in the *pappaseng* tradition, has already been identified as material for character-based local history learning (Bahri et al., 2023).

This article responds to both gaps. It rereads the 1955 election through a comparative frame that sets the national result beside three regional cases, with South Sulawesi as the main lens. Three questions guide the study: (1) how the legal design of

the 1955 election shaped who could take part and how votes became seats; (2) how the results in South Sulawesi differed from the national pattern and from other regions, and why; and (3) how these findings can be turned into source-based history learning. The novelty of the article lies in two moves. It assembles scattered regional data into a single comparison and subjects them to source criticism, and it uses that comparison to design learning that treats election data as historical evidence.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is qualitative research using the historical method, which proceeds through four stages: heuristics, source criticism, interpretation, and historiography (Kuntowijoyo, 2013). The same four stages have been used in regional studies of the 1955 election, which allows the present synthesis to build on comparable work (Irdaniah et al., 2022).

In the heuristic stage, sources were gathered in two groups. The primary group consists of Law No. 7/1953 on the Election of Members of the Constituent Assembly and the House of Representatives (DPR) and the officially published results of the 1955 election as reproduced in recent studies (Republik Indonesia, 1953; Ruhdiara et al., 2022). The second group consists of regional studies that rest on archival material and contemporary newspapers. The Parepare study draws on registers of the South Sulawesi Provincial Archives and on the newspapers *Pedoman Rakyat* and *Indonesia Raya* (Irdaniah et al., 2022), while the South/Southeast Sulawesi study of the PKI uses government reports and the regional press (Anwar et al., 2021). Studies of Central Java and Jakarta supplied comparative data (T. A. Ahmad, 2016; Ayu et al., 2020). The two comparison cases were chosen deliberately. Central Java was the heartland of the PNI and the PKI and, together with Yogyakarta, supplied almost a quarter of all national votes (T. A. Ahmad, 2016), while Jakarta was the political capital where the national parties concentrated their media and leadership. Set against these two centres, South Sulawesi represents a periphery in which the state, the parties, and an armed movement competed for the loyalty of the same villages.

This reliance on regional studies has a methodological cost. The archival registers, government reports, and newspapers behind the regional figures were not examined directly for this article; they are known only as they were selected, transcribed, summarized, and sometimes rounded by the authors of those studies. Three risks follow. Figures may have been copied or added up incorrectly, as the internal inconsistencies of the Parepare data discussed below suggest; documents that did not serve the aims of the original studies may have been left out; and the context of each document, such as who compiled a report and for what purpose, is only partly visible. The study addresses these risks in three ways: it compares figures across studies wherever the same quantity is reported more than once, it recalculates totals and percentages instead of accepting them, and it reports every discrepancy it finds. These steps reduce but do not remove the dependence on secondary transcription. The regional findings should therefore be read as a critical synthesis of the published evidence, and their verification against the original

registers of the South Sulawesi Provincial Archives and the national election records remains a task for further research.

Source criticism focused on the numbers. Every figure was traced to the page where it appears, compared with the same figure in another source where possible, and checked for arithmetic consistency. Where sources disagreed, the disagreement was recorded rather than smoothed over, since such gaps are themselves evidence of how the election was counted and reported. Where no source gave a figure directly, it was estimated transparently from figures that were given. To keep documented figures apart from the authors' own work, three categories are distinguished throughout the article. Figures reported in a source are given as they appear, with a citation of the source. Figures that the authors recalculated from reported figures, such as sums, totals, and percentages, are marked [calc.]. Figures that the authors estimated by combining reported figures from different sources, and that appear in no source, are marked [est.]. Table and figure notes repeat this distinction, so that no estimated value should be read as an official election statistic. The participation estimate for South/Southeast Sulawesi, for example, divides Masyumi's reported vote by its reported share to obtain the district total and then compares that total with the registered electorate; the result is then checked against the PKI's reported share. Interpretation arranged the verified and estimated data into comparative tables and a chart, and the findings were written up as a chronological and analytical narrative. Table 1 summarizes the procedure.

Table 1. Research Stages, Sources, and Procedures

Stage	Sources and data	Procedure
Heuristics	Law No. 7/1953; published national results; regional studies of Central Java, Jakarta, Parepare, and South/Southeast Sulawesi based on archives and newspapers	Collecting legal texts, result tables, and regional data
Source criticism	Vote counts, seat counts, registered voters, polling committees, dates	Tracing each figure to its page; cross-checking sources; recording discrepancies; labelling calculated [calc.] and estimated [est.] figures
Interpretation	Verified national and regional data	Building comparative tables; estimating participation; explaining regional differences
Historiography	Tables, chart, and learning design	Writing an analytical narrative; deriving a source-based learning sequence

Source: Authors' research design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Designing an Inclusive First Election

Law No. 7/1953 laid the foundations of the vote. It divided Indonesia into sixteen electoral districts, from East Java to Irian Barat, and listed South and Southeast Sulawesi as a single district that included Makassar, Bone, and Bonthain (Republik Indonesia,

1953, Pasal 15). Each district was to elect members in proportion to its citizen population. For the Constituent Assembly the quota was one seat per 150,000 citizens, and for the DPR the figure was set at 300,000 (Republik Indonesia, 1953, Pasal 32–33).

The law was also generous about who could compete. Candidates could be nominated by political parties, by other organizations, or as individuals (Republik Indonesia, 1953, Pasal 36, 41). The result was a crowded field. The DPR election attracted 118 contestants, made up of 36 political parties, 34 organizations, and 48 individuals, while the Constituent Assembly election drew 91 contestants (Ruhdiara et al., 2022). Elections were run by a national committee of five to nine members appointed by the President (Republik Indonesia, 1953, Pasal 20), with district, sub-district, and village committees below it; in South Sulawesi these included the district committee of Daerah Pemilihan XII and the sub-district committee of Parepare (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Table 2 summarizes these design choices.

Table 2. Key Features of the Electoral Design of 1955

Feature	Provision or fact	Source
Legal basis	Law No. 7/1953 on the election of members of the Constituent Assembly and the DPR	Republik Indonesia (1953)
Electoral districts	16 districts, including South and Southeast Sulawesi as one district	Pasal 15
Seat quota	DPR: one seat per 300,000 citizens; Constituent Assembly: one per 150,000	Pasal 32–33
Contestants	Parties, organizations, and individuals; 118 in the DPR election, 91 in the Constituent Assembly election	Pasal 36, 41; Ruhdiara et al. (2022)
Polling days	DPR: 29 September 1955; Constituent Assembly: 15 December 1955	Ayu et al. (2020)

Source: Compiled from the sources listed.

The design mattered for what followed. A proportional system with a low barrier to entry allowed a wide range of political currents to be counted, but it also made a single-party majority very unlikely. In a country that had already seen seven cabinets come and go between 1950 and 1959 (Ruhdiara et al., 2022), the election could measure the nation's political divisions but could not, by itself, resolve them.

The National Verdict: Four Winners and No Majority

The national count confirmed that Indonesia was divided among several large political streams. Of 43,104,464 registered voters (Ayu et al., 2020), 37,785,299 cast valid votes for the DPR (Ruhdiara et al., 2022), which equals about 87.7 percent of the electorate [calc.]. This figure agrees with Feith's account that 91.54 percent of registered voters went to the polls and 87.65 percent cast a valid vote (Feith, 2007). Feith adds that many voters were already waiting at polling stations by seven in the morning, and that, after allowing for deaths between registration and polling, only about six percent of the

electorate stayed away (Feith, 2007). For a population voting nationally for the first time, these were remarkable figures. Table 3 presents the leading results.

Table 3. National Results of the DPR Election of 29 September 1955 (Leading Parties)

Party	Votes	% of valid votes	DPR seats
PNI	8,434,653	22.32	57
Masyumi	7,903,886	20.92	57
NU	6,955,141	18.41	45
PKI	6,179,914	16.36	39
Four leading parties [calc.]	29,473,594	78.01	198
All contestants	37,785,299	100.00	257

Source: Ruhdiara et al. (2022); totals for the four leading parties calculated by the authors. [calc.] = calculated by the authors from the source figures; all other figures are as reported in the source.

The four leading parties together won 78 percent [calc.] of the vote and 198 of 257 seats, yet no party came close to a majority. The Constituent Assembly vote in December repeated the pattern, with the PNI winning 119 seats, Masyumi 112, NU 91, and the PKI 80 of the 514 seats filled (Ruhdiara et al., 2022).

Those seats were not drawn evenly from the archipelago. The PKI won 35 of its 39 DPR seats in Java, the PNI 45 of its 57, and NU 37 of its 45, whereas fewer than half of Masyumi's 57 seats came from Java (Anwar et al., 2021). In other words, the national tie between the PNI and Masyumi concealed two very different geographies. The PNI, NU, and PKI were largely Javanese parties, while Masyumi was the most national of the four. That geography is the starting point for reading the election from the regions.

One Ballot, Many Indonesias: Central Java, Jakarta, and South Sulawesi

A comparison of three districts shows how differently the same ballot was read. In Central Java, the electorate of 10,120,962 registered voters was served by about 16,209 polling places (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). The DPR count there placed the PNI first with 3,025,973 votes, followed by the PKI with 2,298,914, NU with 1,747,848, and Masyumi with 854,664 (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). Campaigns were fought through rallies, films, parades, and party symbols, and they grew heated as the PNI and the PKI turned on Masyumi (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). The Islamic parties tried to limit their own rivalry: on 15 June 1955, the PSII, NU, Masyumi, and Perti agreed not to attack one another, although disputes continued (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). NU relied on its pesantren networks, and one gathering at Watucongol brought together about 150 ulama and some 10,000 people (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). Ahmad links these choices to the social map of the province, in which *priyayi* leaned toward the PNI, *santri* toward NU and Masyumi, and *abangan* toward the PKI and the PNI (T. A. Ahmad, 2016).

Jakarta followed a different logic. Of 791,046 ballots counted, 766,764 were valid, and Masyumi won the capital with 174,043 votes, ahead of the national winner, the PNI (Ayu et al., 2020). Masyumi relied on its own newspapers, on sermons delivered in

mosques, on mass rallies addressed by national leaders, and on door-to-door canvassing (Ayu et al., 2020). Cooperation with Muhammadiyah in health, recitation, and religious education programmes strengthened its base (Ayu et al., 2020). The capital's committee set a quota of 127,794 votes per seat, and only Masyumi and the PNI cleared it when seats were decided at an open meeting on 23 October 1955 (Ayu et al., 2020).

South/Southeast Sulawesi diverged even more sharply. Table 4 sets the three regions side by side.

Table 4. One Ballot, Three Regional Outcomes in the DPR Election of 1955

Aspect	Central Java	Jakarta	South/Southeast Sulawesi
Leading party (DPR votes)	PNI (3,025,973)	Masyumi (174,043)	Masyumi (446,255)
Second party	PKI (2,298,914)	PNI (closely behind)	NU (159,193)
PKI performance	Second place	Did not reach the seat quota	1.6% of votes; no DPR seat
Main campaign channels	Rallies, films, parades, party symbols, press	Party press, mosques, rallies, door-to-door canvassing	Islamic networks under DI/TII pressure
Security context	Heated but open contest	Dynamic capital-city contest	One of three "red zones" of election security

Source: T. A. Ahmad (2016); Ayu et al. (2020); Anwar et al. (2021); T. Ahmad (2014). All figures are as reported in the sources; none were calculated or estimated by the authors.

The table shows that the ballot was not a single national experience but several. The PKI, the second force in Central Java, was almost absent in South Sulawesi. Masyumi, a minor force in Central Java, won both the capital and the eastern district. These differences are the subject of the next two subsections.

Preparing the Vote in a Red Zone: South Sulawesi, 1953–1955

The South Sulawesi election cannot be understood without its calendar. The district committee of Daerah Pemilihan XII was chaired by D. A. Kairupa and included members from Masyumi, the People's Party of Indonesia (PKR), the PSII, Murba, and Parindra (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Below it, sub-district and village committees were formed to register voters; in Parepare, registration was organized through 18 sub-districts and 47 villages, each village committee having a chair and four members (Irdaniah et al., 2022). The district's electorate reached 1,630,963 registered voters, of whom 121,505 lived in the municipality of Makassar (Irdaniah et al., 2022).

Party competition developed in the same months as the insurgency intensified. The PKI set up its provincial committee for South/Southeast Sulawesi on 7 January 1954 and opened branches in Bantaeng, Parepare, Rantepao, and Palopo during that year (Anwar et al., 2021). Its general secretary, D. N. Aidit, visited Makassar in March 1955, and between 8 and 28 March PKI signs in Palopo were defaced (Anwar et al., 2021). An Anti-

Communist Front opened a branch in Jeneponto on 8 May 1955 (Anwar et al., 2021). The PKI nominated 21 candidates for the DPR and 31 for the Constituent Assembly in the district (Anwar et al., 2021). Table 5 arranges these events in order.

Table 5. Chronology of the 1955 Election in South/Southeast Sulawesi

Date	Event	Source
August 1953	Kahar Muzakkar proclaims a separate state as part of the DI/TII movement	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
7 January 1954	PKI provincial committee for South/Southeast Sulawesi established	Anwar et al. (2021)
1 May 1954	Planned start of voter registration	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
8–28 March 1955	PKI signs defaced in Palopo	Anwar et al. (2021)
8 May 1955	Anti-Communist Front branch opened in Jeneponto	Anwar et al. (2021)
12 September 1955	Armed forces operations begin to secure the vote	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
21 September 1955	Party signs destroyed in Parepare at night	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
29 September 1955	DPR polling day	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
10 October 1955	Village committee member shot dead in Parepare	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
19 November 1955	Chair of the Palia committee kidnapped	Irdaniah et al. (2022)
15 December 1955	Constituent Assembly polling day	Ayu et al. (2020)

Source: Compiled from the sources listed.

The chronology shows that the election in South Sulawesi was a process of more than two years rather than a single day. Registration, campaigning, and polling all took place while the state was contesting control of the interior with an armed movement, and the violence continued after the ballots were cast.

Voting under the Shadow of Rebellion: South Sulawesi

The DI/TII conflict in South Sulawesi ran from 1952 to 1965, and Kahar Muzakkar declared his separate state in August 1953 (Irdaniah et al., 2022). By the time election preparations began, then, much of the interior lay outside the reach of the civil administration. The Parepare case shows what this meant on the ground.

In Afdeeling Parepare, armed groups set up a parallel government in Tanete, burned the offices of the polling committees (PPS) in Lapasu and Suddo, and prevented polling places from being set up in Lompotengah (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Party signs were destroyed on the night of 21 September 1955, and armed forces operations began on 12 September to secure the vote (Irdaniah et al., 2022). The violence did not end with polling day. A PPS member, Hadi Abd Muin Mansyur, was shot dead on 10 October 1955, and the chair of the Palia committee, Andi Djidje, was kidnapped on 19 November and presumed killed (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Of the 47 village polling committees in the afdeeling, 12 could not work because no voter registration had been possible there (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Table 6 brings these figures together.

Table 6. The 1955 DPR Election in Afdeeling Parepare

Indicator	Figure	Status
Registered voters	177,287	Reported
Village polling committees (PPS) formed	47	Reported
PPS unable to work	12 (25.5% [calc.])	Reported
Active polling stations (TPS)	880	Reported
Valid votes	124,341	Reported
Valid votes as share of registered voters	70.1% [calc.]	Calculated
Leading parties (votes)	Masyumi 63,144; PSII 40,670; PKR 6,316; NU 5,627; PNI 4,853	Reported
PKI votes	2,945	Reported

Source: Irdaniah et al. (2022); percentages calculated by the authors. [calc.] = calculated by the authors from the figures reported by Irdaniah et al. (2022); all other figures are as reported in the source.

Source criticism exposes problems in these data that are worth stating openly. The registered electorate of Parepare is given as 174,850 on one page and as 177,287 on the next (Irdaniah et al., 2022). The party votes listed for Parepare add up to 130,162 [calc.], more than the 124,341 valid votes reported, and the study describes 124,341 of 177,287 as "about 72 percent," although the ratio is closer to 70 percent [calc.] (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Such inconsistencies are typical of counts compiled in wartime conditions from incomplete committee reports. They do not undermine the main picture, but they caution against treating any single regional figure as exact.

The district as a whole shows the same pattern of reduced participation, although here the evidence rests on an estimate. South and Southeast Sulawesi had 1,630,963 registered voters (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Masyumi's 446,255 DPR votes (Anwar et al., 2021) represented 41.16 percent of the district's vote according to T. Ahmad (2014), which implies a total of about 1.08 million valid votes [est.]. No source examined for this study reports this district total directly. On that estimate, only about two-thirds [est.] of the district's registered voters cast a valid ballot, compared with almost nine in ten nationally [calc.]. The estimate is consistent with the PKI's reported share: 17,831 votes equal 1.6 percent of 1.08 million, which matches the figure given by T. Ahmad (2014). Insecurity, in short, did not stop the election, but it was associated with markedly lower participation. For Parepare the link is partly documented, since 12 village committees could not operate because registration had been impossible there (Irdaniah et al., 2022). For the district as a whole, however, the data establish an association rather than a direct causal effect, because the shortfall may also reflect incomplete registration, the distance between villages and polling places, and gaps in the reported counts. Comparative research likewise finds that the relationship between electoral violence and turnout is conditional rather than uniform (Van Baalen, 2024).

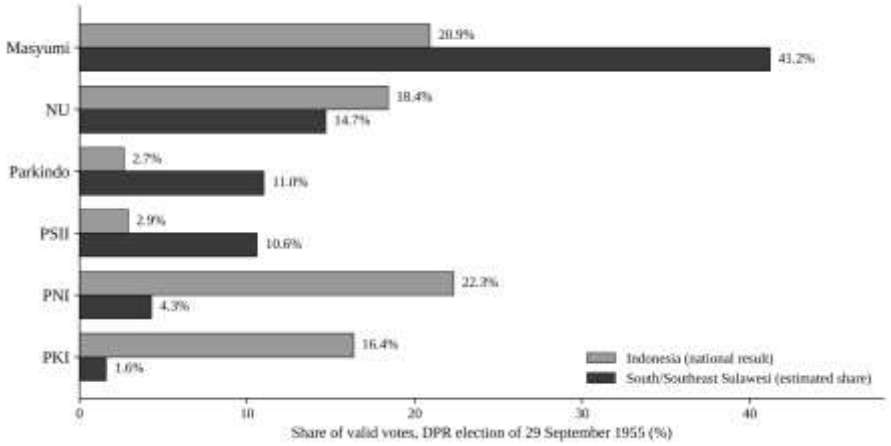


Figure 1. National and South/Southeast Sulawesi Vote Shares of Six Parties, DPR Election of 1955

Source: National shares from Ruhdiara et al. (2022); regional votes from Anwar et al. (2021), divided by the estimated district total derived from T. Ahmad (2014). The regional shares are therefore author estimates [est.], not official figures.

Why Masyumi Prevailed and the PKI Failed in South Sulawesi

Figure 1 shows how far the district departed from the national result. Masyumi's share was roughly twice its national figure, Parkindo and the Indonesian Islamic Union Party (PSII) each won about a tenth of the vote [est.], and the PNI and the PKI were marginal. In seats, Masyumi won five DPR seats, NU and Parkindo two each, and the PSII and the PNI one each, while the PKI won none (Anwar et al., 2021). In the Constituent Assembly vote, Masyumi took twelve seats and the PKI managed a single one (Anwar et al., 2021).

Several explanations work together. The first is the religious character of local society. T. Ahmad (2014) identifies South Sulawesi, with West Java, Aceh, and South Kalimantan, as a stronghold of Islamic parties, and Anwar et al. (2021) show that Masyumi campaigned against the PKI as anti-religious in a deeply religious culture. Parkindo's strong showing points to the same logic from another side: in a district with Christian minorities, religion shaped the vote in more than one direction.

The second explanation is organizational. The PKI founded its provincial committee only on 7 January 1954 and managed to build branches in just five of eight regencies before the vote (Anwar et al., 2021). It fielded candidates who had few roots in local society (Anwar et al., 2021).

The third explanation is the insurgency itself. Kahar Muzakkar rejected communism in his letters and framed his struggle in religious terms (Abdulkahar et al., 2022), and DI/TII agitation in the interior made it almost impossible for the PKI to move freely outside the towns (T. Ahmad, 2014). The rebellion therefore appears to have shaped the result in two directions at once. It coincided with lower participation, and it closed the countryside to the party that the rebels regarded as their ideological enemy.

These findings qualify the familiar reading of 1955 as a contest of *aliran*, or socio-religious streams. The *aliran* map of Central Java, with its *santri*, *abangan*, and *priyayi*, explains much of the Javanese result (T. A. Ahmad, 2016). Recent scholarship warns, however, that such categories lose their explanatory power when treated as fixed and historically stable identities (Abbas & Fauzi, 2026). South Sulawesi confirms the warning. Religion mattered there, but so did party organization, the reach of the state, and the presence of an armed movement. A national ballot was filtered through each of these local conditions.

Recent regional studies point in the same direction and show that the divergence of South Sulawesi was part of a wider pattern rather than an exception. In West Sumatra, Masyumi won about half of the regional vote while the PNI, the national winner, was marginal, and the mismatch between the regional and national results sharpened centre–region tension in the years before the PRRI rebellion (Israr et al., 2025). In East Java, by contrast, Masyumi won only 11.2 percent of the vote and ran a campaign focused on attacking the communists, a strategy that differed from its approach in other provinces (Wirayuda, 2024). Studies of the post-Suharto party system also show that the religious cleavage associated with aliran has not disappeared but has been reshaped by electoral rules and party competition, which cautions against reading regional results as the direct expression of fixed identities (Nurjaman, 2023). Read together with Feith's classic national account (Feith, 2007), these studies suggest that the strength of each party in 1955 depended on how national streams were organized, contested, and constrained in each region.

How do these findings stand against earlier work? They agree with Anwar et al. (2021) and T. Ahmad (2014) that the PKI failed in South Sulawesi for organizational, cultural, and security reasons. What the findings add to this earlier work is set out as the novelty of the study at the end of this section.

The comparison also has limits. The South Sulawesi participation figure is an estimate built from three published sources rather than a count found in a single document, and it should be tested against the original district tabulation. The Jakarta and Central Java data come from studies with their own aims, and the Jakarta study reports two different Masyumi totals, 167,707 in its abstract and 174,043 in its text (Ayu et al., 2020). Oral testimonies, which could show how ordinary voters experienced the threat of the DI/TII, were not collected for this study.

From Ballot Box to Deadlock: The Legacy of 1955

The election produced a parliament and a Constituent Assembly that mirrored the nation's divisions. The Assembly was later judged to have failed to produce a new constitution, and the President dissolved it by decree and restored the 1945 Constitution in July 1959, bringing liberal democracy to an end (Ruhdiara et al., 2022). Behind the deadlock lay a deeper question about the foundation of the state. Rochmat (2014) describes the Pancasila state as the result of a gentlemen's agreement among Muslim groups whose competing paradigms continued to struggle over its interpretation. The

1955 vote had counted those paradigms precisely, and an assembly elected on that count found no easy compromise. The arithmetic of the Assembly made compromise indispensable. A new constitution required the approval of at least two-thirds of the members present (Republik Indonesia, 1950, Pasal 137). If all 514 members attended, that meant 343 votes. Yet Masyumi and NU together held 203 seats and the PNI and the PKI together 199 (Ruhdiara et al., 2022), so neither camp, even with its smaller allies, could reach the threshold alone. The deadlock of 1959 was thus written into the result of 1955.

The memory of 1955 also gained meaning by contrast with what came later. Under the New Order, elections were held regularly, but the government favoured Golkar and opposition parties were left with little chance of winning; in Gorontalo, for example, the PDI never won any of five New Order elections (Mayang Rasti et al., 2024). New Order textbooks themselves described these elections as façades dominated by Golkar (Darmawan & Mulyana, 2020). Set beside that record, 1955 stands out as the one national election before 1999 in which the outcome was genuinely uncertain.

Implications for History Learning: Reading Election Data as Evidence

The findings suggest that 1955 should be taught not only as a national milestone but as a set of local experiences that students can investigate. Historical understanding is more than memorizing dates; it requires grasping meanings and causes (Setiawan et al., 2020). Research in the region has shown that controversial and evidence-based history learning helps students evaluate sources, compare perspectives, and build arguments (Halim & Bahri, 2026). Digital media can support these goals, as shown by gains in critical thinking among students who studied history through digital historical comics (Setyowati et al., 2023) and by the strong engagement reported for digital history modules designed around source evaluation (Mahyudin & Hermansyah, 2025).

The data assembled in this article lend themselves to such work. Figure 1, for instance, can be shown without its legend and students can be asked to guess which bars belong to the nation and which to their own province, before discussing why the two patterns differ so much. Table 7 sets out a learning sequence for Phase F that uses them.

Table 7. A Source-Based Learning Sequence on the 1955 Election

Step	Learning activity	Historical thinking trained
1. Situate	Read the summary of Law No. 7/1953 (Table 2) and the chronology (Table 5) and explain who could vote and compete	Historical context; concept of representation
2. Compare	Compare national results (Table 3) with Central Java, Jakarta, and South Sulawesi (Table 4, Figure 1)	Synchronic thinking; continuity and difference
3. Criticize	Examine the Parepare data (Table 6) and find the inconsistencies between pages	Source criticism; corroboration
4. Explain	Write an argument on why Masyumi won and the PKI failed in South Sulawesi	Causal reasoning; evidence-based writing

5. Reflect	Link the findings to the value of *maradeka* and to elections today	Historical awareness; democratic literacy

Source: Authors' design based on BSKAP (2024) and the findings of this study.

The third step deserves emphasis. When students discover that the Parepare figures do not add up, they learn that statistics are also historical sources, produced by people under particular conditions. This is the core of the source criticism that the curriculum expects students to practise (BSKAP, 2024).

The fifth step connects the topic with local values and with students' own lives. The value of *maradeka* in the *pappaseng* tradition has been proposed as content for local history learning in South Sulawesi (Bahri et al., 2023). Asking students in Makassar, Parepare, or Bone how their grandparents' generation voted under the threat of rebellion gives that value a concrete historical setting. It also responds to the call for history learning that instils historical awareness and national identity in an age of globalization (Putri et al., 2025).

The sequence can be adapted beyond South Sulawesi. Teachers in Central Java or Jakarta can replace the Parepare case with the regional data in Table 4, while teachers elsewhere can ask students to look for the 1955 results of their own district in local archives, libraries, or family memories. Assessment should reward the quality of the argument rather than the recall of figures: a strong answer uses at least two sources, notes where they disagree, and explains a regional result through more than one cause. In this way, the first general election becomes a laboratory for the habits that democratic citizens need, namely checking numbers, comparing claims, and asking who produced a piece of information and why.

Set against the earlier work compared above, the novelty of this study lies in two contributions. The first is a district-wide estimate of participation [est.], which gives an approximate numerical measure of how far participation fell in a district under insurgency, where earlier accounts relied mainly on anecdotes. Recent regional studies of the 1955 election concentrate on campaigns, results, and centre–region tensions (Israr et al., 2025; Wirayuda, 2024); an estimate of district-wide participation adds a dimension that these accounts leave in the background, and comparative research on electoral violence shows why it matters, since the link between violence and turnout varies with local conditions (Van Baalen, 2024). The second is a qualification of the classic national image. Feith (2007) describes a calm polling day on which voters queued from early morning; the Parepare evidence shows that, in a red zone, violence began before polling and continued for weeks after it (Irdaniah et al., 2022). Both pictures are true, but they describe different Indonesias. This qualification also fits recent work showing that Masyumi's fortunes and strategies varied sharply from one region to another (Israr et al., 2025; Wirayuda, 2024). By assembling scattered regional data into one critically checked comparison and turning it into the learning sequence above, the study shows how a national election can be read, and taught, through its regional evidence.

The study also has relevance beyond South Sulawesi and beyond Indonesia. For national electoral history, it shows that a single national result can conceal regional

outcomes shaped by different party networks, religious communities, and security conditions, so that a national election is better understood as many regional contests than as one uniform event. The same point has been made for other Indonesian regions (Israr et al., 2025; Wirayuda, 2024) and, in comparative political research, for the uneven relationship between electoral violence and participation (Van Baalen, 2024). For history education, election returns are a kind of source that exists in almost every country with a history of voting. Classroom research shows that students engage more deeply when sources relate to their own communities (Perrotta & Cross, 2024), that teachers use primary sources often but evaluate them less consistently unless source evaluation is built into the task (Soininen, 2022), and that instruction designed around historical thinking improves students' perceived learning (López-García, 2023). A sequence that asks students to compare national and local returns, find inconsistencies, and explain regional differences can therefore be transferred to other national contexts, where it can help students treat statistics as historical evidence and understand democracy as a lived and locally varied experience.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's first general election was one ballot read through many local Indonesias. Law No. 7/1953 created an inclusive and proportional system that admitted parties, organizations, and individuals, and nationally almost nine in ten registered voters cast a valid vote. The national result, a near tie among the PNI, Masyumi, NU, and the PKI, concealed sharply different regional outcomes. Central Java was dominated by the PNI and the PKI, Jakarta was won narrowly by Masyumi, and South/Southeast Sulawesi gave Masyumi about 41 percent of its vote while the PKI won only 1.6 percent and no DPR seat. In South Sulawesi the election took place under the DI/TII insurgency: polling committees were burned or could not work, officials were killed or kidnapped, and, by the authors' estimate, only about two-thirds of registered voters cast a valid ballot, a shortfall associated with the insurgency, although other factors may also have contributed. Religious culture, weak PKI organization, and the rebellion together explain the result. These findings show that national election history needs regional evidence, and that regional figures must themselves be read critically. For history learning, the comparative data offer a source-based route to the Phase F outcomes, training synchronic and causal thinking, source criticism, and democratic awareness rooted in local values such as *maradeka*. Beyond Indonesia, the same approach offers a model for reading national elections through regional evidence and for teaching election data as historical sources. Further research should consult the remaining registers of the South Sulawesi Provincial Archives and collect oral testimonies from surviving voters, and classroom studies should test the proposed learning sequence.

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