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# Does Religious Identity Moderate Economic Voting? Evidence from Indonesia

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## Abstract

Scholars have long suggested that economic voting is contingent on political factors, but how social identity contributes to such contingent economic voting has been overlooked. While the literature suggests the presence of direct function of religion on voting decisions, we are not sure about religion's other functions. By treating religion as a social identity, this article seeks to uncover a moderating function of religion on economic voting. It draws on an embedded exit poll survey in Indonesian gubernatorial and mayoral elections in 2020, covering 9,400 respondents. This paper finds that the self-identification of religious identity moderates economic perception in the voting decision. Although the findings show strong evidence of economic voting, they challenge previous studies arguing that religion is a weak predictor in a new democracy with a Muslim-majority population.

**Keywords**: Economic voting, religious voting, religious identity, election, Indonesia

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## Introduction

In the second round of the 2017 gubernatorial election in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta, a double-minority incumbent (a Christian-Chinese candidate) with a job approval rating of approximately 70% received only 42% of the aggregate vote share and was defeated by a right wing-backed Muslim challenger who garnered a 58% share of the votes.[2] Given that the incumbent lost to a challenger backed by Islamist groups, this case suggests religion might play an influential role in vote choice relative to the incumbent's performance. Departing from this case, how does religious identity relate to the effect of economic judgment on vote choice? Does religious identity moderate patterns of the economic voting? If so, in what ways does religious identity play a role in vote choice?

Most studies on religion's political influence primarily seek to discern whether religious voting exists and the extent of its influence.[3] Yet, these studies do not explicitly address whether religious voting has a moderating function; that is, a function that decreases the likelihood of performance-based voting. To fill that gap, this research aims not only to quantify the extent of religious voting, but more importantly, to investigate how religious identity moderates economic voting.

To achieve that purpose, this study relies primarily on data from an exit poll project that covered 9,400 Indonesian respondents across four gubernatorial and two mayoral elections held concurrently in December 2020. I argue that economic voting is contingent and certain forms of religious identity play a moderating role in economic voting decisions.

In developing the argument, this paper embarks on a first section that situates the scholarly debates about voting decision and economic

[2] As a vice governor elected in 2012, the incumbent came to gubernatorial seat as an acting governor in 2013 when his sitting governor, the Indonesian president Joko Widodo, run for 2014 presidential election. Mietzner, Muhtadi, and Halida (2018) discuss the details of the Jakarta gubernatorial election in 2017. To be sure, the influence of religion can also be found in past gubernatorial elections in Jakarta (Miichi 2014) and in other sub-national executive elections across the archipelago (see, for instance, Aspinall, Dettman, and Warburton 2011).

[3] See, for instance, Bréchon 2000; Esmer and Pettersson 2007; Raymond 2011; Botterman and Hooghe 2012; Langsæther 2019.

voting. The second section explores the relationship between religion and voting, theorizing that religious identity arguably plays a moderating role in economic voting. The subsequent section explains the data and methods dealing with individual-level analyses. Finally, I report and discuss the results.

## Contingent Economic Voting

In 1966, Key suggested that "[p]eople are not fooled as the electorate behaves about as rationally and responsibly as we should expect".[4] His pioneering work generated an array of studies that advocated economic voting theory: that voters reward (vote for) or punish (decline to vote for) an incumbent based on their judgment and evaluation over individual or general economic conditions, and that this forms one of the central concerns in voting decision.[5]

However, a growing concern in the literature of economic voting cast some doubts that people employ economic judgments and evaluations in their voting decisions, uninterrupted by any other factors. Leithner contends that "the influence of economic conditions upon the results of elections need be neither axiomatic nor automatic [...] as deterioration in economic conditions, for example, need not spell defeat for an incumbent or deliver victory for a challenger".[6] Other critiques also suggest that retrospective judgment suffers from 'myopic' voters who vote based merely on conditions approaching voting day and ignore the incumbent's past performance in the long run.[7] Thus, this paper follows the argument that economic voting is contingent, arguing that it is unlikely that electoral outcomes uninterruptedly stem solely from voters' perceptions of economic conditions.

The argument that economic voting is contingent stems from the

[4] Key 1966: p. 7.
[5] See, for instance, Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck and Paldam 2000; Plescia and Kritzinger 2017; Ward 2020.
[6] Leithner 1993: p. 371.
[7] Achen and Bartels 2017.

notion that economic voting varies across nations and contexts.[8] Duch and Stevenson, for instance, advocate a clear argument of varying economic voting across 19 countries under their study. Following Kohfeld, economic voting seems sensible, but it may not be universal.[9] Some voters may emphasize other considerations at the expense of attention to the economy, and, therefore, at the expense of economic self-interest.

We find other studies suggesting the effect of the political context in economic voting at the macro-level.[10] Anderson suggests that economic voting is highly contingent because of two moderating factors: first, the voters themselves, and second, the political context, both of which situate economic voting to be contingent.[11] Specifically, in their cross-national aggregate analyses of economic voting, Powell and Whitten find a "systemic incorporation of political factors"; i.e., the ideological image of the government, its electoral base, and the clarity of its political responsibility.[12] These factors, they argue, are essential to understanding the contingent nature of economic voting. Other than the electoral base of the incumbent government (whether minority, majority or multiparty government) and the context of political responsibility ("the degree to which they insulated incumbents from ordinary penalties of officeholding"), their proposition of the ideological image of the government is of interest within this current study.

Similarly, contingent economic voting is also present when micro-level approach is applied. By analyzing the influence of economic conditions upon the behavior of voters in Australian, Canadian, and New Zealand legislatures, Leither finds that economic voting is contingent upon political phenomena/institutions, including the stratum of the electorate, the point in time, and the type of party analyzed.[13] Meanwhile, Fearon provides a

[8] See, for example, Powell and Whitten 1993, Duch and Stevenson 2008 and Duch and Stevenson 2006.
[9] Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989.
[10] See, for instance, Bengtsson 2004; Anderson 2000.
[11] Anderson 2007.
[12] Powell and Whitten 1993.
[13] Leithner 1993.

micro-level argument in which he outlines a mixed case between pure sanctioning and pure selection, given that the voter's ability to monitor politicians is abysmal.[14] While sanctioning is an accountability mechanism in which voters are aware and recognize the incumbent performance, the selection is to choose a "good type" of candidate.[15] Type of candidate can be understood as any background or appeal other than performance, including religious identity. Following this argument, voters' voting decision stems from a mixture of sanctioning performance and selecting such a 'type'.

So, what are other characteristics in which voters moderate their economic voting decision? In this regard, Achen and Bartels suggest the notion that social identity is an inevitable driver in the voting decision.[16] By treating partisanship as social identity rather than ideology, they contend that "partisan identity shapes perceptions, not just of candidates and issues but also of simple facts".[17] For example, they acknowledge the role of religious identity in the case of Kennedy's presidential election and racial identity in the case of Southern shift to the Republican Party in the 1960s. Specifically, in the case of racial identity, Huckfeldt and Kohfeld argue that economic class is a sensible basis for the vote.[18] Still, class-based voting is disrupted by race, and especially by the deliberate act of political elites to distract voters from economics by getting them to focus on race instead. In the case of Republicans that take racial identity into account in their economic voting, Huckfeldt and Kohfeld find that such a substituting role occurs. Along this line, we may also ask whether religious identity plays a role as the moderator of rational-economic voting, i.e., a self-interest behavior. Meanwhile, Benjamin, Choi, and Fisher find that religious identity has a moderating role, although their study is not aimed at investigating voting behavior.[19]

[14] Fearon 1999.
[15] Fearon 1999: p. 56.
[16] Achen and Bartels 2017.
[17] Achen and Bartels 2017: p. 231.
[18] Huckfeldt and Kohfeld 1989.
[19] Benjamin, Choi and Fisher 2016.

Following these findings and growing concern over economic voting, particular factors might moderate economic vote choice. Religious identity may be one of the moderating factors. Therefore, we need to dive into how religious identity and religion more generally play a role in voter choice across democracies and what religious identity means.

## Religion and Voting

To some extent, scholars have argued that religion plays a role in political behavior, especially voting.[20] While various studies investigate the role of religious identity in a vote decision as a direct function, limited studies on the role of religious identity in voting address the second function of religious identity: its moderating role. A survey by Hirschl, Booth, and Glenna is one of these limited works. They find that the effect of religious identity on voter choice is contingent on location within the stratification order, especially race, rather than gender and social class. For instance, while "white support for the Republican Party is fractured by religious tradition, biblical authority, social class, and gender, Black support for the Democratic Party is equally strong across each of these categories".[21]

Furthermore, several previous studies investigate the role of religion in advanced industrial democracies which confine their findings of to what extent the religious voting presents[22] and in what group such religious voting occurred.[23] Broughton and Napel, for instance, reveal the persistence of religious voting in European countries, including Great Britain, Spain, Germany, Italy, and Scandinavian democracies.[24] In another example, Brechon observes strong religious voting among Catholics in France.[25] These studies derive from Western industrial democracies characterized by well-

[20] See McTague and Layman 2009; Grzymala-Busse 2012.
[21] Hirschl, Booth, and Glenna 2009: p. 940.
[22] See, Broughton and Napel 2000; Raymond 2011; Langsæther 2019.
[23] See, Kellstedt *et al.* 1994; Bréchon 2000.
[24] Broughton and Napel 2000.
[25] Bréchon 2000.

institutionalized party systems and Christian-majority populations.

Relying on vote choice or preference toward political parties in Western industrial democracies is reasonable, since political parties in such well-institutionalized party systems bear a consistent political stance on religious and moral issues. Party references, or identification, have been a strong predictor of mass political behavior in advanced industrial democracies.[26] For example, Langsæther finds that religion is empirically associated with party choice by examining survey data from 13 Western European countries.[27] Another study shows that voters associated with evangelical Protestantism and Catholicism are prone to vote for the Republican and Democratic candidates, respectively.[28]

Besides the setting of the well-institutionalized party system, studies of religious voting in Western industrial democracies predominantly are in Christian-majority populations. Accordingly, it is reasonable that many authors interrogate church attendance to explain religious voting in France and the United States.[29] Raymond, for instance, employs the frequency of attendance at religious services to measure the religious-secular cleavage as his explanatory variable.[30] Such studies refer to church visits as distinguishing between passive and active denomination members.[31]

Thus, one may ask how religious voting works in executive elections and in the weak party systems prevalent in new and developing democracies. Weak party system institutionalization across new democracies, resulting in minimal partisan identification ('party ID'), might give rise to other social identities as the influential predisposition in vote choice.[32] These social identities include ethnicity in many African

[26] See, Converse 1966; Cassel 1999; Bartels 2000.
[27] Langsæther 2019.
[28] Kellstedt *et al.* 1994.
[29] See Bréchon 2000 and Kellstedt *et al.* 1994.
[30] Raymond 2011: p. 128.
[31] Langsæther 2019.
[32] Basedau and Stroh 2008; Croissant and Völkel 2012; Mietzner 2013.

democracies,[33] and religion in South and Southeast Asian democracies.[34]

In the absence of strong partisanship, this study tries to reconcile other predispositions affecting vote decisions. This is not to say that other predispositions do not take a role. This study argues that when partisanship is not present, social identity plays its part. Hence, we need to discuss the role of religion in vote choice in such settings. Studies in Muslim-majority and developing democracies are limited in the literature of economic and religious voting.

Yet, in the case of Indonesia, one of the exemplary Muslim-majority democracies, studies reveal that the relationship between religion and voting is weak or even absent. By analyzing the Indonesian legislative and presidential elections of 1999 and 2004, some argue that party leaders and partisanship, instead of religion, explain voting behavior in Indonesia.[35] They conclude that "the Indonesian data do not lend support to the proposition that religion is an important influence on voting behavior".[36] Other find that preferences toward Islamic parties in Indonesia are found only under economic policy uncertainty.[37] A different study also conclude that there is no significant relationship between religious piety among Indonesian Muslims and their vote choice for political parties.[38] These are pioneering works investigating voting behavior in Indonesia, but nevertheless have limitations.

The limitations of the above works derive from how their variables approximate the role of religion and how they are measured. First, previous studies examine preferences toward generic Islamic parties rather than investigating preferences for specific candidates running for office. [39] Classified as a newly developing democracy, the weak party

[33] See, Eifert, Miguel, and Posner 2010; Ishiyama 2012; Elischer 2013; Hoffman and Long 2013.
[34] See, Bashir and Khalid 2020; Aspinall, Dettman, and Warburton 2011.
[35] Liddle and Mujani 2007.
[36] Liddle and Mujani 2007: p. 851.
[37] Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2012.
[38] Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2018.
[39] See Liddle and Mujani 2007; Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2018.

institutionalization in Indonesia generates a very weak party ID (about 10% or less).[40] This is because of the ambiguity and ambivalence of parties' platforms.[41] Thus, an alternative approach to identifying voting behavior other than parties – for example, candidates running for executive offices – might reveal a different story.

Secondly, the studies primarily measure religiosity or religious piety, and even mix the two concepts. Relying on religiosity or religious piety potentially misleads in examining religion-driven electoral outcomes. For instance, they blend individual religious practices, such as daily obligatory prayers and fasting, with collective religious practices, including communal religious meetings, as indicators of piety.[42] These explanatory variables of religiosity or piety might situate them to conclude the absence of religious voting (the role of religion in the voting decision) in Indonesia. Thus, we must agree on what religious identity really means and its relationship with religiosity/piety.

To overcome the limitations of previous studies, I contend that treating religion as a social identity – which is different from religiosity or piety, although still related – might generate a different result. In this regard, recent studies contend that religious identity matters. By employing a theory of prototypicality – i.e., leaders that best reflect and represent the identity of the group tend to be more trusted – Hudson and colleagues find that religious identity is the most important dimension of identities.[43] However, its influence varies and is context-specific. Although they do not directly examine voting behavior, their result promotes the importance of religious identity in political behavior. Furthermore, when Muslims are the minority, religious identity plays an influential role in driving religious voting, such as Muslim-Americans with weak party identification.[44]

[40] Mietzner 2013; Croissant and Völkel 2012.
[41] See Budi 2013; Budi 2020.
[42] Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2018: pp. 35–36.
[43] Hudson *et al.* 2020.
[44] Barreto and Bozonelos 2009.

## Religious Identity

Many scholars acknowledge that viewing religion as a social identity is theoretically reasonable. Not only has religion historically been one of the most important sources of social identity, but religion as social identity might also play a significant role in mass political behavior.[45] Several works support this argument, with religious identity having been found to strengthen perceptions that generate biases and even to shape other identities, such as gender identity.[46] In short, those works are representative of a much larger body of research showing that religion as a social identity plays a significant role in mass political behavior.

I define religious identity as the extent to which an individual defines their self-concept of being a member of a religious group and engages with religious practices and activities. By referring to Tajfel's definition of social identity and employing Abdelal et al's conceptualization of identity, religious identity implies content and contestation.[47] While content refers to an individual's meaning of a collective identity that precisely captures self-identification, contestation constitutes the agreement within a group that deals with an individual's group engagement and opinion.[48] To clarify, religiosity and religious identity are conceptually different. Still, they are empirically related as practicing and believing in a religious denomination – the prominent proxy of religiosity and piety – are signs of religious identity. Thus, measuring religious practices merely partially captures religious identity.

Related to the individuals' group engagement in social identity theory, the concept of religious engagement here is in line with arguments that "going to church, in many places, can be interpreted as a social rather than a religious commitment".[49] Livny also finds that attendance at

[45] Bloom, Arikan, and Courtemanche 2015; Peek 2005.
[46] Duck, Terry, and Hogg 1998; Hasan 2010.
[47] Tajfel 2010; Abdelal *et al.* 2006.
[48] See Abdelal *et al.* 2006: p. 19.
[49] Esmer and Pettersson 2007: p. 492.

collective prayers in the case of Turkey's Muslims, such as Friday prayers, tend to be social, rather than religious engagement, which indicates an Islamic group identity.[50] Therefore, the notion of church attendance resembles group religious activity, including collective prayers, ceremonials, and community activities, though, at the same time it expresses piety. As attending religious services fuels religious identity through group interaction and/or top-down political socialization from prayers, the degree of individual engagement in collective religious activities is consequential for voting behavior.

Moreover, a group concept – that is, the extent to which people perceive themselves as being a member of or affiliated with a particular religious group – also defines the degree of religious identity. Though some only use religious tradition (denomination) and church attendance to approximate the religious commitment as the dependent variable, they confess that "measures of religious affiliation [...] when available, produce stronger results".[51] In this regard, people might not attend religious practices, but they are also likely to have a feeling of being or not being a group member. Therefore, I propose that religious identity moderates economic voting. The extent to which an individual perceives and feels their religious identity affects how people incorporate economic perceptions into their voting decision.

Based on the conceptualization of religious identity and its role in voting decision, especially in moderating economic voting, I formulate the following hypothesis: *the impact of economic evaluations on voting decisions will decrease as a function of the strength of the voter's religious identity.* In this regard, voters who have a strong religious identity tend to disregard, to some extent, their positive sociotropic perception of the incumbent's economic performance. Voters with a weak religious identity will continue voting for an incumbent who they think performs well. Here I am not trying to examine types of religious backgrounds or denominations,

[50] Livny 2020: p. 106.
[51] Kellstedt *et al.* 1994: p. 309.

but it is about the strengths of religious identity in moderating voters' economic judgment. This study focuses on the extent to which religious identity can moderate economic perception.

## Data and Method

This study takes place in Indonesia, a relatively young democracy with a Muslim-majority population. By studying gubernatorial and mayoral elections, this research interrogates data at the provincial and municipal levels. Varieties of important contexts at the sub-national levels are beneficial for a cross-sectional study.[52] Incorporated into an exit poll project of Indonesian pollster Poltracking Indonesia, this study relies on the project that covered 9,400 Indonesian respondents across four gubernatorial and two mayoral elections held concurrently in December 2020. The exit poll takes place in four provinces (West Sumatera, Bengkulu, Central Kalimantan, and Central Sulawesi) and two municipalities (Medan and Surabaya). Cultivating exit poll data at the voting precincts conveys some advantages and drawbacks.[53] In the Indonesian context, the non-response rate is relatively low, at just 2% on average across six elections under study. I anticipate the missing data (values) through imputation, namely Multivariate Imputation via Chained Equations (MICE),[54] as reported in Appendix B.

Only Muslim respondents are analyzed across the four provinces and two cities, ranging from 70% to 99% of the total population. By sub-setting to Muslim respondents, this self-reported study analyzes 9,404 observations. Examining only Muslim respondents situate a comparative analysis between the strengths of religious identity, not the kinds of religious identity, and their voting decision. More importantly, all candidates across the six elections are also Muslims. Still, their religious appeal might differ from one to another, and this is an area where voters assess candidates.

[52] Caughey and Warshaw 2019.
[53] See Panagopoulos 2013.
[54] Rosenbaum and Briskman 2010; see also Shah *et al.* 2014.

Note that in Indonesian sub-national executive elections (*pemilihan kepala daerah* or *pilkada*), candidates for gubernatorial/mayoral seats run in pairs with candidates for the position of deputy.[55] Moreover, quantifying candidates' religious appeals is problematic as all candidates deliver campaigns related to religion such as visiting sermons or collective religious events, delivering messages during Islamic holidays, and showing practices of Islamic teachings in public. Therefore, this paper focuses on addressing how the voters act based on their personal judgments, rather than how the voters react based on how the candidates act.

## Measuring Economic Voting

Although literature on economic voting has employed aggregate-level macroeconomic measures, scholarship on individual-level economic voting involves debates about measurement, specifically between retrospective (the past) and prospective (the future) judgments, and between pocketbook (personal) and sociotropic (national/general) economic evaluations.[56] For retrospective scholars, any voter can know with certainty whether unemployment, inflation, growth or personal economic conditions and experiences have changed in the past year or two.[57]

Accordingly, the sociotropic approach asks whether the nation's economy or general economy is doing better or worse than it was a year or several years ago. I agree with the argument that voters are not necessarily well informed, since they simply "form impressions of how the economy performing".[58] This approach pre-empts the argument that most citizens are poorly informed and unsophisticated.[59]

In short, by using the term 'economic voting', this paper refers to how

[55] For detailed discussion, see Budi 2020.
[56] Kramer 1971; Kramer 1983; Soroka, Stecula, and Wlezien 2015.
[57] See, for instance, Fiorina 1981; Kinder and Kiewiet 1981; Conover and Feldman 1986; Mutz and Mondak 1997; and Healy, Persson, and Snowberg 2017.
[58] Kinder and Kiewiet 1981: p. 156.
[59] Lane 1966; Converse 2006; Bullock *et al.* 2013.

people incorporate retrospective economic judgments into their voting decision, rather than prospective economic evaluation. Additionally, in line with the literature, the current study also considers the sociotropic perception of general economic conditions rather than the pocketbook perception of individual economic conditions.

## Variables and Measures

The dependent variable is vote choice. The candidates and the codes vary in each data set, depending on the number of mayoral and gubernatorial candidates. Thus, I code this vote choice as a binary variable; i.e., 1 is a vote for incumbents and 0 is vote for other options, including a vote for the challengers, no preference, or no response.[60] Regarding sociotropic economic perception, I apply a five-point sociotropic measure, coded 1 as a much worse economic condition and 5 as a much better economic condition. The respondents were asked "How do you evaluate the economic condition and performance in your region during the last five years?" This is a standard measure employed in economic voting literature. In short, a statistically positive estimates of the sociotropic perception on the vote choice suggests that people are more likely to vote for incumbents when people perceive that the economy is better.

In terms of the strength of religious identity, I employ four variables based on five measures. First, I modify the most common measure on religious voting scholarship; i.e., the religious (collective) practice, mostly known as the 'church-attendance measure'. This *attendance* variable is a five-scale measure on collective religious participation that asks, "How often do you attend religious gatherings?", with the answers coded 1 as never and 5 as very often. Second, I apply an ordinal measure that gauges the

[60] I define incumbent as a sitting governors/mayors who run for reelection and are supported by their party. Thus, the incumbent does not refer to the sitting vice-governor/mayor who runs for the gubernatorial/mayoral seat when the sitting governor runs for reelection. But, when the sitting governor/mayor did not run for reelection and the vice runs for gubernatorial/mayoral seat, then I code the vice as incumbent due to the absence of the sitting governor or mayor.

importance of conformity between voters' and candidates' religious backgrounds. It is a rank-based variable for *voting conformity of religious identity*, coded 0 as the least rank if the respondents do not know or do not care about the candidate's religious background and 4 as the highest rank if the respondents are aware of the candidate's religious background and put it as the most important variable for their voting decision. Similarly, I measure how the voters take their religious *community preference* into account, coded 1 if they are aware of and want to follow the community's voting preference and 0 if not.

The last variable addresses the strength of religious *affiliation* and stems from an additive index between self-reported religious affiliation and its feeling thermometer. The former measure asks whether respondents report themselves as being aligned with major Islamic religious organizations or streams that are pivotal in Indonesian politics.[61] So, the measure of this self-reported religious affiliation is coded 1 as reported and 0 as not reported. The latter measure addresses a ten-point thermometer feeling about the voters' general religious identity for their reported affiliation, where 1 means very weak and 10 means very strong feeling of being a member or a believer of the religious stream or organization they have reported. In short, for the affiliation variable, I code 1 if a respondent reports their religious affiliation and has a feeling score above the mean of the feeling thermometer, and 0 otherwise.

As voters' demographic characteristics matter in voting decisions,[62] I control for demographic variables, including gender, age, education, and income. Gender is coded 0 for female and 1 for male. I code 1 as the lowest level for age, education, and income. Specifically, gender matters in Islamic teaching, especially for married couples where women are supposed to follow their husbands' preferences and decisions. The other three control variables are influential in economic perception as the extent of such variables affects

when the sitting governor runs for reelection. But, when the sitting governor/mayor did not run for reelection and the vice runs for gubernatorial/mayoral seat, then I code the vice as incumbent due to the absence of the sitting governor or mayor.

[62] See Hutchings and Jefferson 2017.

information exposures and political awareness. All the variables are reported in Table 1.

I apply a linear probability model that examines four variables of religious identity measures. By running a set of diagnosis of the estimators' performance through the DeclareDesign package in terms of their bias, root mean squared error (RMSE), power, and coverage, I find that the linear probability model using Ordinary Least Square (OLS) performs relatively as strongly as other estimators, including Logistic, Lin's Linear, and Matching-based models. Thus, the equation to test the hypothesis and estimate the variables is as follows:

$$Pr(Vote)_i = \alpha + \beta_1 Econ_i + \beta_2 ReligID_i - \beta_3 Econ * ReligID_i + \epsilon_i \quad (1)$$

where $Vote$ stands for a vote for the incumbent, $Econ$ is sociotropic perception, $ReligID$ is self-reported religious identity variables, and $\epsilon$ is the error term.

In this equation, we expect that the slope of the interaction term is negative, which means that religious identity reduces (moderates) the positive slope of the economic perception. In other words, when voters positively evaluate the economic performance based on their sociotropic perception $Econ$, their probability to vote for incumbent ($Vote$ = 1) is moderated by a negative value driven by religious identity $ReligID$.

## Results

This study confirms the theoretical account of economic voting (Table 3). The coefficients on the sociotropic economic perceptions variable across the four models are statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) with positive values. Note that the control variables of demographic covariates are also included in each model but are omitted in the table. In short, these positive relationships suggest that people who think the incumbent performs better – and specifically, to whom voters give credit for the economic condition in

their areas – then there is a higher probability that individuals will vote for the incumbent to some extent. More importantly, we see clear evidence of economic voting among individuals who do not score high on the religious identity measure. We also see evidence of economic voting among people who do score high on the religious identity variables, but it is attenuated. However, a closer look at Table 3 shows the interaction term is significant for two of the equations and not for the other two. Attendance to collective religious events and religious voting conformity are the variables of religious identity that are both statistically significant with $p < 0.05$. Religious attendance moderates the impact of sociotropic perceptions, as shown in the interaction term between the two, with a coefficient of -0.017. This finding suggests that Muslim individuals' attendance at collective religious activities is a stronger predictor, in terms of moderating positive perception of general economic condition, than their awareness of the candidate's religious background/affiliation. For instance, given their positive perception of incumbent performance, voters who frequently attend collective religious activities will have less probability to vote for the incumbent compared to voters who rarely or never attend such religious activities.

In terms of the moderating role of religious identity, the plots of the marginal effects of the interaction terms between sociotropic perceptions and all four variables of religious identity in Figure 1 shows clearer depiction of the moderating estimates of the religious identity. It shows that all the variables – i.e., the extent of *attendance* in religious activities, the level of *affiliation* with a religious group/stream, agreement with *community* voting preference, and voting *conformity* between voter's and candidate's religious background – have a clear negative effect. As outlined in the previous section, a negative effect indicates that religious identity moderates the impact of sociotropic perceptions on vote choice.

A similar mechanism also works for religious voting conformity, which has a moderating function with coefficient -0.007. People who are aware of candidates' religious backgrounds and reported that religious background is important for their voting decision are prone to reduce the

influence of their economic perception.

Meanwhile, we are uncertain with the two other variables of religious identity – religious affiliation and community preference – as shown in the interaction terms in model 2 for affiliation (-0.011) and model 3 for community preference (-0.015), are negative. These two variables also display the expected moderating effect but that the relationship is estimated with more uncertainty. We will discuss the uncertainty in the next section.

Some might argue that mayoral and gubernatorial elections might generate different results, given the fact that under Indonesia's governmental system, mayors have more space to exercise power and more flexible for policy initiatives than governors. To address this concern, I explore the results by examining whether the models in mayoral and gubernatorial elections differ. As shown in Table 4, the result suggests similar patterns of how economic voting works across the models and elections where the positive estimates of the sociotropic perception are statistically significant, mostly $p < 0.05$. We also find indicative moderating effect across the religious identity variables, shown by negative estimates of the interaction terms, both in mayoral and gubernatorial elections. Nevertheless, we only see certainty of the moderating effects of religious attendance (-0.034) of model 2 and identity conformity (-0.021) of model 4 in mayoral election.

Following Cinelli and Hazlett's sensitivity analysis of an extreme confounder frame- work (see Appendix A), these results can be considered robust.[63] The table in Appendix A shows that the robustness value (1%) is higher than partial $R^2$ for both Y~D (0%) and Y~Z (0.2%), which means that a confounder could not fully eliminate the point estimate. Substantively, the robustness value here also means that an unobserved confounder explaining at least 1% of the residual variance between the exploratory variable, either sociotropic perception or the religious identity variables, and the outcome variable (i.e., the vote choice) explain away the estimated effect. Thus,

[63] Cinelli and Hazlett 2020.

given this robustness, the discussion section below provides further analysis of the results.

## Discussion

This study captures more or less the same electoral settings as the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, introduced earlier as an opening case; that is, it captures sub-national executive elections, many of which are contested by only two candidate pairs. This means that the Jakarta case and other similar cases occurred not by chance, as religious identity moderates economic perception. Moreover, all the gubernatorial and mayoral elections under study were contested between all Muslim candidates, while the 2017 Jakarta election was between a non-Muslim and a Muslim candidate. Hence, we might assume that the moderating influence of religious identity on economic voting is likely higher in a setting where candidates with distinguishable religious identity are present.

This paper acknowledges the strong result of sociotropic perception in this study that economic voting operates in a context of a new democracy and Muslim majority country. The result underpins what Kinder and Kiewiet proposed decades ago about the relationship between people's general/national economic perceptions and vote choices. [64] Such a relationship passes through time and place. This finding is not new, as strong economic voting patterns have also found in similar contexts such as Turkey, with even stronger sociotropic economic voting patterns in Latin American democracies.[65] Additionally, in the case of Indonesia, the finding confirms previous studies, suggesting a strong empirical presence of rational-economic voting theory after two decades of electoral democracy.[66] Mujani and colleagues argue that Indonesian voters are critical democrats; i.e., people are eager to have a democratic system but are critical toward government performance.

[64] Kinder and Kiewiet 1981.
[65] Başlevent, Kirmanoğlu, and Şenatalar 2009; Lewis-Beck and Ratto 2013.
[66] See, for instance, Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi 2018.

Nevertheless, this paper provides evidence that economic voting is contingent and that religious identity plays an important role as a moderating function for economic voting. The result exhibits a theoretical account if we return to the concepts of religious identity stemming from social identity theory. People weigh the value of voting for candidates with shared religious identities more highly that the value of voting for candidates who have overseen good economic performance. Attendance at collective religious activities and voting conformity between voters' and candidates' religious backgrounds both approximate self-identification or self-concept; i.e., an individual's meaning of a collective identity. These two variables moderate economic perception in vote choice.

This finding advances previous studies arguing that religion is a weak predictor in Indonesia.[67] Such scholars state that the case of 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election, as mentioned in the beginning, "[has] more systematically revised the existing comparative and Indonesian literature on the relationship between religion and voting behavior".[68] The current study, nevertheless, contends that Jakarta case is not an anomaly. Explained by the moderating role of religious attendance and community preference for sociotropic perception in economic voting, religion **does** matter when it comes to determining Indonesian voting behavior.

Yet, the extent of religious affiliation and adherence of community preference as proxies of a group concept in social identity theory – i.e., the agreement within a group that deals with an individual's group engagement and opinion – fail to support such an agreement. Why do these models fail to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between the two variables and vote for the incumbent given the importance of two major Islamic organizations – the traditionalist Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the modernist Muhammadiyah – in Indonesian politics?[69] In this regard, I extend my analysis for the affiliation variable by fitting models of the dummy

[67] See Liddle and Mujani 2007; Mujani and Liddle 2010; Pepinsky, Liddle, and Mujani 2012; Mujani, Liddle, and Ambardi 2018.
[68] Mujani 2020: p. 420.
[69] See, for example, Bush 2009; Jung 2014.

variables of affiliation into three groups of affiliation. I seek to determine whether traditionalist (approximated by NU), modernist (estimated through Muhammadiyah), or other Islamic groups differ from each other.

In doing so, I recode the measure of self-reported affiliation as shown in the questionnaire in Appendix D to be three variables, coded 1 if they report the affiliation name and 0 if not/others, based on the categories of Islamic groups/streams in Indonesia: NU as the traditionalist group, Muhammadiyah as the modernist group, and other groups.[70] The result shows that all of the affiliations in each group indicate negative estimates, approximating that people who have strong religious affiliation tend to reduce their economic perception. However, we are still uncertain about these results, as the p-values are larger than any significance levels. Table 4 displays uncertainty on the effects of such affiliation categories though the coefficients of the interaction term are also negative, at -0.0003 for traditionalists, -0.001 for modernists, and -0.025 for other Islamic affiliation.

Note that economic voting works well across the groups indicated by significant results ($p < 0.01$) of the sociotropic perception's positive coefficients of 0.063. The insignificant results of the two group-concept variables open some possible answers. I suggest that, theoretically, intra-group positive sentiments measured in the two variables such as pride, loyalty, or adherence with own group might not be as strong as inter-group negative sentiments, like disagreement and hate toward other groups. However, these are not assessed in this study.

Some suggest that inter- or out-group negative sentiment indicates and fuels group identity for religious, national, or racial identities.[71] This possibility is also in line in the Indian context, where Muslims vote for Muslim candidates strategically; that is, voters vote for candidates when they see a chance of winning.[72] Methodologically, the insignificant results might stem

[70] Discussion about these Islamic groups/streams in Indonesian context, see, for example, Feith and Castles 2007; Machmudi 2008.
[71] See Jamal 2005; McClain *et al.* 2009; McClain *et al.* 2009; Citrin, Wong, and Duff 2001.
[72] Heath, Verniers, and Kumar 2015.

from social desirability bias. Respondents are hesitant to declare their religious affiliation and/or their feeling toward the affiliation during the data collection, which occurred at the polling stations and during election day.

Nevertheless, the moderating role of religious identity as a content, a concept that refers to self-identification in social identity theory,[73] that is estimated through religious attendance and religious voting conformity cannot be neglected in voting. This study suggests that for people who have a positive perception of the incumbent's economic performance, but who frequently attend collective religious activities, their voting decision is moderated and not purely based on economic conditions. This mechanism also occurs when people are aware of the incumbent's religious background and take it into account in determining for whom they will vote.

This paper also suggests that an individual-level study displayed in this study obviously depicts the extent of economic voting. Kinder and Kiweet and other scholars have been long advocated for aggregate data, as opposed to Fiorina's study and subsequent economic voting studies that employed individual-level. Therefore, in terms of methodological reflection, the individual-level study is still a promising approach to investigate economic voting across time and place.

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## Declaration of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

[73] Abdelal *et al.* 2006.

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## Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available on Harvard Dataverse at Budi, Arya, 2021, "Does Religious Identity Moderate Economic Voting? Evidence from Indonesia", https:// doi.org/ 10.7910/ DVN/FMWBGC, Harvard Dataverse, V1.

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## TABLES

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics of Individual-Level Variables*

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vote for Incumbent | 9,404 | 0.44 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Sociotropic Perception | 9,404 | 3.45 | 0.86 | 1 | 5 |
| Religious Attendance | 9,404 | 3.67 | 0.81 | 1 | 5 |
| Group Affiliation | 9,404 | 0.36 | 0.48 | 0 | 1 |
| Community Preference | 9,404 | 0.38 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Identity Conformity | 9,404 | 2.43 | 1.68 | 0 | 4 |
| Gender (Female/Male) | 9,404 | 0.52 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Age Category | 9,404 | 3.85 | 1.38 | 1 | 7 |
| Income | 9,404 | 2.25 | 1.11 | 1 | 5 |
| Education | 9,404 | 3.83 | 1.26 | 1 | 8 |

**Table 2.** *Linear Probability Model Across Religious Identity Variables* [a] *Vote for Incumbents*[b]

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sociotropic Perception | 0.127*** | 0.068*** | 0.069*** | 0.081*** |
| | (0.025) | (0.007) | (0.008) | (0.011) |
| Religious Attendance | 0.056** | | | |
| | (0.023) | | | |
| Group Affiliation | | 0.044 | | |
| | | (0.045) | | |
| Community Preference | | | 0.064 | |
| | | | (0.044) | |
| Identity Conformity | | | | 0.027** |
| | | | | (0.013) |
| Sociotropic:Attendance | −0.017** | | | |
| | (0.007) | | | |
| Sociotropic:Affiliation | | −0.011 | | |
| | | (0.012) | | |
| Sociotropic:Community | | | −0.015 | |
| | | | (0.012) | |
| Sociotropic:Conformity | | | | −0.007** |
| | | | | (0.004) |
| Constant | −0.104 | 0.090** | 0.082** | 0.038 |
| | (0.090) | (0.035) | (0.036) | (0.044) |
| N | 9404 | 9404 | 9404 | 9404 |

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

[a] Four demographic covariates (gender, education, income, age) are omitted.

[b] 1 = Vote for Incumbent; 0 = Otherwise

**Table 3.** *Linear Probability Model Based on Mayoral and Gubernatorial Election*[a]

| | Vote for Incumbent[b] | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mayoral | | | | | Gubernatorial | | |
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 | Model 8 |
| Sociotropic Perception | 0.150*** | 0.023* | 0.031** | 0.066*** | 0.109*** | 0.089*** | 0.090*** | 0.098*** |
| | (0.043) | (0.013) | (0.013) | (0.017) | (0.032) | (0.009) | (0.010) | (0.014) |
| Religious Attendance | 0.120*** | | | | 0.015 | | | |
| | (0.040) | | | | (0.029) | | | |
| Group Affiliation | | −0.020 | | | | 0.049 | | |
| | | (0.076) | | | | (0.056) | | |
| Community Preference | | | 0.101 | | | | 0.053 | |
| | | | (0.077) | | | | (0.053) | |
| Identity Conformity | | | | 0.101*** | | | | 0.007 |
| | | | | (0.021) | | | | (0.016) |
| Sociotropic:Attendance | −0.034*** | | | | −0.006 | | | |
| | (0.011) | | | | (0.008) | | | |
| Sociotropic:Affiliation | | −0.002 | | | | −0.009 | | |
| | | (0.021) | | | | (0.016) | | |
| Sociotropic:Community | | | −0.028 | | | | −0.011 | |
| | | | (0.021) | | | | (0.015) | |
| Sociotropic:Conformity | | | | −0.021*** | | | | −0.004 |
| | | | | (0.006) | | | | (0.004) |
| Constant | −0.094 | 0.354*** | 0.313*** | 0.133* | −0.067 | −0.019 | −0.024 | −0.031 |
| | (0.158) | (0.065) | (0.065) | (0.075) | (0.111) | (0.042) | (0.044) | (0.055) |
| N | 2863 | 2863 | 2863 | 2863 | 6541 | 6541 | 6541 | 6541 |

**Table 4.** *Linear Probability Model Based on Indonesian Religious Affiliation[a] Vote for Incumbent[b]*

| | M1 | M2 | M3 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sociotropic Perception | 0.063*** | 0.062*** | 0.063*** |
| | (0.011) | (0.007) | (0.006) |
| Traditionalists (NU) | −0.007 | | |
| | (0.046) | | |
| Modernists (Muh) | | −0.007 | |
| | | (0.050) | |
| Other Affiliations (Other) | | | 0.236* |
| | | | (0.135) |
| Sociotropic:NU | −0.0003 | | |
| | (0.013) | | |
| Sociotropic:Muh | | −0.001 | |
| | | (0.014) | |
| Sociotropic:Other | | | −0.025 |
| | | | (0.038) |
| Constant | 0.110** | 0.106*** | 0.101*** |
| | (0.046) | (0.034) | (0.032) |
| N | 9404 | 9404 | 9404 |

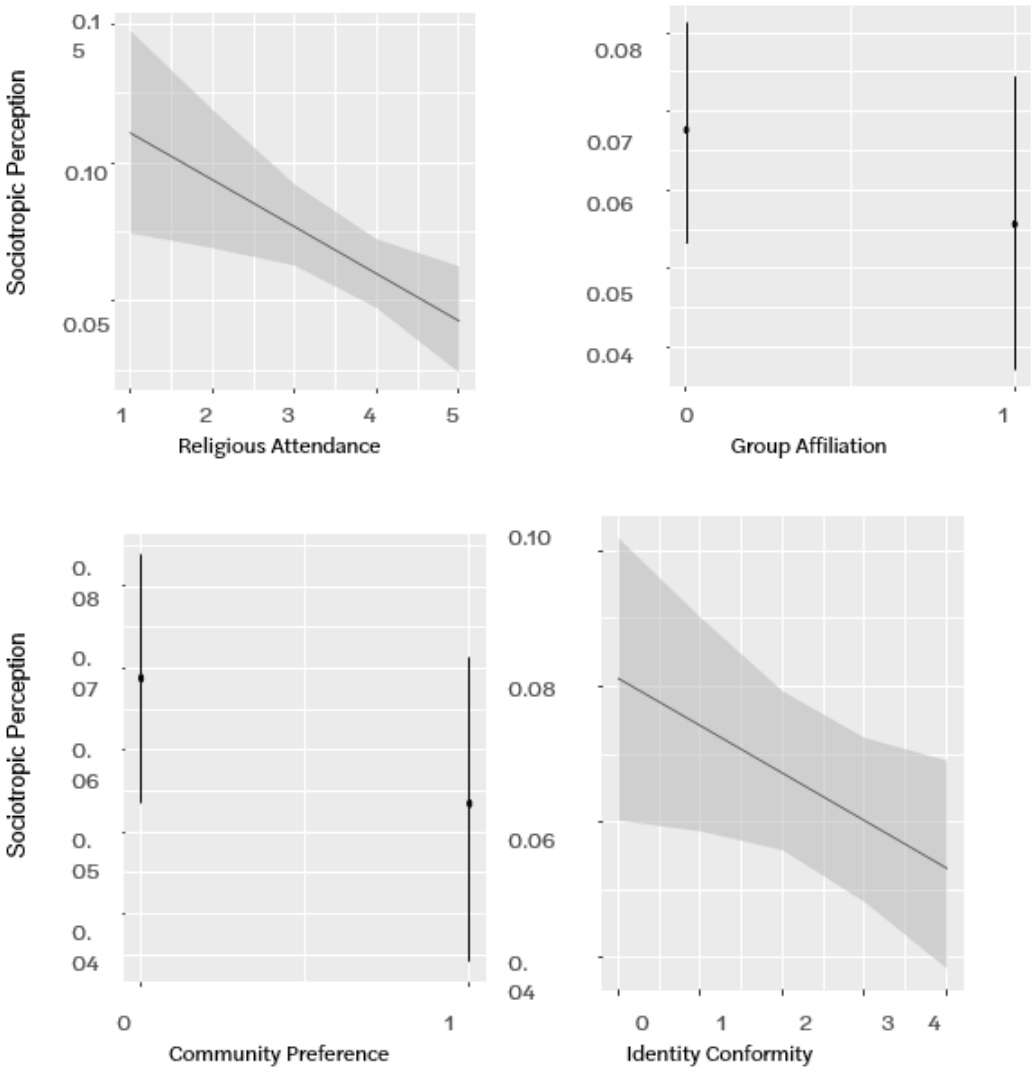
***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

[a] Four demographic covariates (gender, education, income, age) are omitted.

[b] 1 = Vote for Incumbent; 0 = Otherwise

## FIGURES

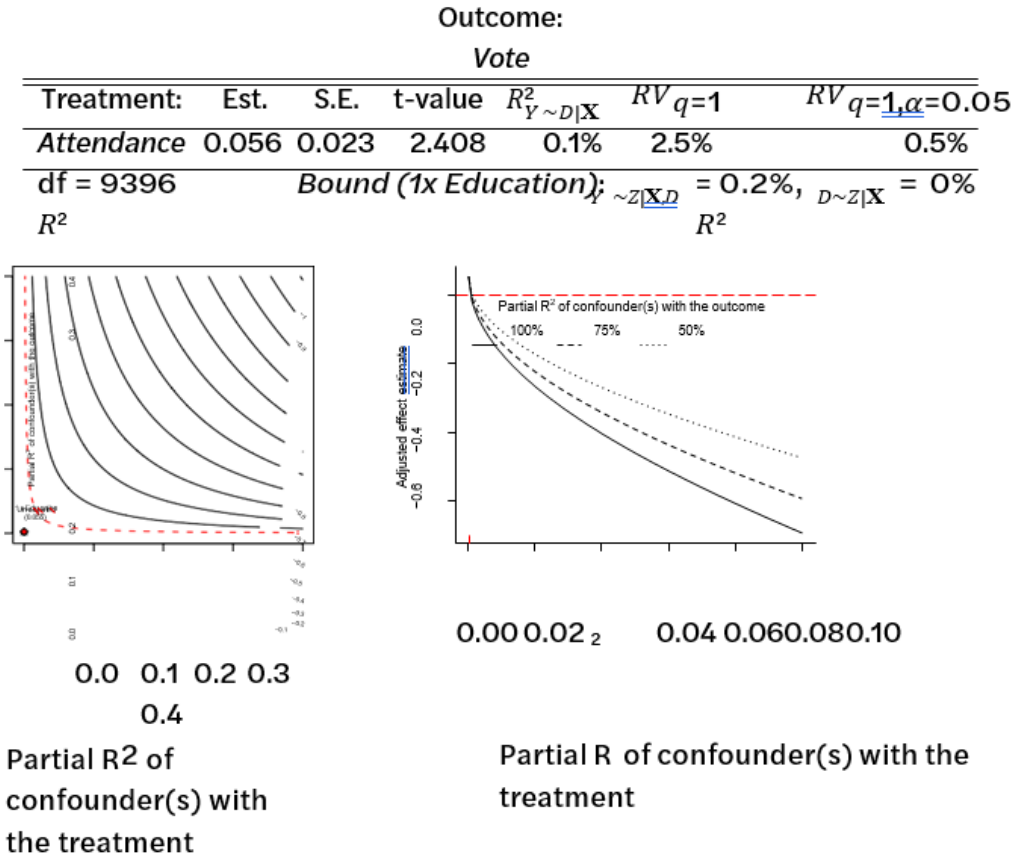
**Figure 1.** *Estimated Marginal Effects of Economic Perception by Level of Religious Identity and Context.*



# APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Robustness (Sensitivity Analysis)

***Figure 1.*** *Extreme Confounder Sensitivity Analysis Based on Omitted Variable Bias Framework (Cinelli and Hazlett, 2020)*




The table and graphs shown in Figure 2 are drawn from Cinelli and Hazlett's (2020) approach of omitted variable bias framework to seek the strength of potential confounders. Here I use education as an extreme confounder for simulation. Importantly, the footnote shows the strength of association that a confounder as strong as religious identity would have $R^2$ D~Z|X=0.3% and $R^2$ D~Z|X=0.2%. As the robustness value ($RV_{q=1}$) of 5% is

higher than either quantity, the result reveals that such a confounder could not fully eliminate the point estimate.

The Robustness Value suggests that unobserved confounders (orthogonal to the co- variates) that explain more than 5% of the residual variance of both the economic perception and the vote choice are strong enough to bring the point estimate to zero (a bias of 100% of the original estimate). Conversely, unobserved confounders that do not explain more than 5% of the residual variance of both the economic perception and the vote choice are not strong enough to bring the point estimate to zero.

## Appendix B: Data Before Imputation

These tables show the statistics before imputation. As reported in Table 5 we have some missing values in the dependent variable of vote choice (Vote for Incumbent), two explanatory variables, (Sociotropic Perception and Religious Attendance), and one control variable (income.) The results displayed in Table 7 are relatively the same as Table 2 presented in the paper. Furthermore, dealing with these missing values through Multivariate Imputation via Chained Equations or MICE is one of the available strategies to obtain better point estimates and test statistics.[74]

[74] See Shah (2014); Rosenbaum and Briskman (2010)

**Table 1.** *Descriptive Statistics of The Variables Before Imputation*

| Statistic | N | Mean | St. Dev. | Min | Max |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Vote for Incumbent | 6,653 | 0.43 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Sociotropic Perception | 8,783 | 3.45 | 0.86 | 1 | 5 |
| Religious Attendance | 8,512 | 3.69 | 0.80 | 1 | 5 |
| Group Affiliation | 9,404 | 0.36 | 0.48 | 0 | 1 |
| Community Preference | 9,403 | 0.38 | 0.49 | 0 | 1 |
| Identity Conformity | 9,404 | 2.43 | 1.68 | 0 | 4 |
| Gender (Female/Male) | 9,404 | 0.52 | 0.50 | 0 | 1 |
| Age Category | 9,404 | 3.85 | 1.38 | 1 | 7 |
| Income | 7,956 | 2.27 | 1.12 | 1 | 5 |
| Education | 9,401 | 3.83 | 1.26 | 1 | 8 |

**Table 2:** *Linear Probability Model Before Imputation[a] Vote for Incumbents[b]*

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sociotropic Perception | 0.130*** | 0.057*** | 0.068*** | 0.078*** |
| | (0.034) | (0.010) | (0.011) | (0.018) |
| Religious Attendance | 0.064** | | | |
| | (0.031) | | | |
| Group Affiliation | | 0.016 | | |
| | | (0.056) | | |
| Community Preference | | | 0.092* | |
| | | | (0.055) | |
| Identity Conformity | | | | 0.027 |
| | | | | (0.019) |
| Sociotropic:Attendance | −0.019** | | | |
| | (0.009) | | | |
| Sociotropic:Affiliation | | −0.003 | | |
| | | (0.016) | | |
| Sociotropic:Community | | | −0.025 | |
| | | | (0.015) | |
| Sociotropic:Conformity | | | | −0.007 |
| | | | | (0.006) |
| Constant | −0.141 | 0.097** | 0.061 | 0.024 |
| | (0.123) | (0.048) | (0.049) | (0.070) |
| N | 5472 | 5664 | 5663 | 5664 |

***p < .01; **p < .05; *p < .1

[a] Four demographic covariates are omitted
(Gender, Education, Income, Age)

[b] 1 = Vote for Incumbent; 0 = Others
(Vote for Challenger, No Preference, or No Answer)