

The Role of Political Competition and Government Size to Enhance Government Financial Transparency

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the influence of political competition and local government size on local government financial transparency in Indonesia. This study was conducted in 362 local governments in Indonesia. Local government financial transparency was measured through the disclosure of financial information at the planning, implementation, and reporting stages carried out on the official government websites. Political competition was proxied by the percentage of regional legislative members from the party supporting the regional head compared to the total number of council members in each district or city. The findings indicate that financial transparency is positively affected by political competition. Regions with higher political competition are found to disclose more financial information through their official websites, as increased competition leads to more stringent oversight. Furthermore, it is revealed that larger local governments disclose more financial information, indicating that governments with greater assets tend to maintain better transparency due to their access to adequate resources. Additionally, the demand for transparency is higher in larger governments. This study providing empirical evidence on the positive impact of political competition and local government size on financial transparency, highlighting the role of competitive governance and resource adequacy in fostering accountability through online financial disclosures in Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

Public transparency is essential in increasing citizens' trust in the Government (Han et al., 2024; Mahmood et al., 2020) and citizens' perceptions of Government (Hsu, 2024). Transparency is a fundamental component of good governance practice (Tai et al., 2024). It provides the public with the ability to access, monitor, and evaluate government performance effectively (Matheus & Janssen, 2020). Additionally, transparency guarantees that every decision made by the Government prioritizes the public interest (Wang et al., 2024). For this reason, transparency, especially in financial management, plays a crucial role in fostering trust and accountability.

In recent years, digital platforms, such as official government websites, have been utilized to enhance the transparency of public financial management (Krynytsia et al., 2024; Zindi, 2024). The

disclosure of financial information through these websites allows citizens to access reports, budgets, and fiscal policies easily (Chen et al., 2019; Moreno-Enguix et al., 2019). Furthermore, this approach promotes efficiency in the management of public funds. Despite these efforts, the lack of transparency in public services remains a serious issue that negatively impacts public trust and the effectiveness of governance. One common problem is the limited publication of financial reports and performance evaluations. When citizens have restricted access to these reports, they are unable to understand how public funds are allocated and how services are delivered. This situation often leads to speculation and rumors of corruption by government officials. It required commitment from the Government to enhance transparency. With stricter oversight, local governments will be more cautious in managing public funds and more accountable for every financial decision they make (Yamin et al., 2022). Involving the public in decision-making processes is also essential, as it provides a platform for citizens to express their opinions and contribute to improving transparency.

The factors influencing financial transparency in local governments (Roundy et al., 2023) continue to be a subject of debate. Several studies have identified various determinants of transparency, including political competition and government size. However, this study aims to explore the specific impact of political competition and local government size on financial transparency, using data from 2022. The research aims to answer two main questions: (1) Does political competition influence the financial transparency of local governments in Indonesia? (2) Does the size of local governments affect their financial transparency? The objectives of this research are: (1) To analyze the impact of political competition on the financial transparency of local governments in Indonesia, (2) To assess the effect of local government size on financial transparency in Indonesia.

Political competition at the regional level is often dominated by parties that have strong public support (Ang et al., 2024). These parties nominate candidates during elections to secure seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, DPRD) and carry out political agendas aligned with public aspirations. On the other hand, opposition parties, whose candidates did not win regional elections, serve as political challengers, ensuring checks and balances within local governance. The role of opposition parties is crucial, as they promote transparency and accountability while representing groups whose interests may not be directly supported by the ruling parties.

Political competition positively affects the transparency of provincial governments' financial reporting (Hong et al., 2024). Intense political competition attracts public awareness (Carelli, 2024), and encourages opposing parties to monitor government actions closely, resulting in more effective oversight by the DPRD. Political competition positively influences the practice of internet-based financial reporting among local governments. Governments in competitive political environments tend to make financial information easily accessible on their websites, reducing the cost of monitoring and enhancing public accountability (Kim, 2022). This practice fosters transparency, enabling citizens and stakeholders to actively evaluate government performance (Zimbalist, 2022). By providing timely and accurate financial data, local governments demonstrate their commitment to good governance, building public trust, and encouraging civic participation (Ariza Marin et al., 2021). Political competition thus acts as a catalyst for improved accountability and efficient public resource management.

Furthermore, the presence of a strong opposition party can also lead to increased scrutiny of government spending and financial decisions, which can help to prevent corruption and mismanagement of public funds. In a competitive political environment, governments are more likely to prioritize transparency and accountability, as they are aware that the opposition and the public will closely monitor their actions. This can lead to a more efficient allocation of resources, as governments are incentivized to make decisions that benefit the public interest rather than personal or partisan interests.

In addition, the use of technology can also play a crucial role in enhancing financial transparency in competitive political environments. Governments can leverage online platforms and digital tools to provide citizens with easy access to financial information, enabling them to track government spending and hold officials accountable. This can help build trust and confidence in

Government and promote a more participatory and inclusive approach to governance. By harnessing the power of technology and promoting transparency, governments can demonstrate their commitment to good governance and accountability and ultimately improve the lives of their citizens.

This research aims to further investigate these dynamics by examining whether political competition and the size of local governments significantly affect their financial transparency. The hypothesis tested in this study is as follows:

H1: Political competition has a positive effect on local government financial transparency.

The size of local governments, as measured by total assets and the complexity of organizational structures, also plays a significant role in determining financial transparency. Larger governments tend to have more resources, allowing them to improve the accessibility and disclosure of financial information. The size of local governments has a positive influence on transparency, as larger governments face greater demands from their constituents to provide information about the use of public resources. Additionally, larger governments tend to have a more educated and cosmopolitan population, which may request more detailed information, further driving transparency efforts.

Moreover, larger governments often have more complex organizational structures, which can lead to a greater need for transparency and accountability. As a result, these governments may be more likely to implement robust financial reporting systems and provide detailed information about their financial activities. This can include the publication of comprehensive financial reports, the use of online platforms to disclose financial information, and the implementation of internal controls to ensure the accuracy and reliability of financial data.

The relationship between government size and financial transparency is also influenced by the level of economic development and the availability of resources. In larger governments, there may be more resources available to invest in financial reporting systems and transparency initiatives, which can lead to improved financial transparency. Furthermore, larger governments may be more likely to attract external funding and investment, which can also drive the need for greater transparency and accountability. Overall, the size of local governments is an important factor in determining financial transparency, and larger governments tend to have a greater capacity to provide detailed and accurate financial information to their constituents.

In contrast, smaller local governments often face significant challenges in achieving financial transparency. With limited resources and a smaller tax base, these governments may struggle to invest in the necessary infrastructure and personnel to provide timely and accurate financial information. Furthermore, smaller governments may have a more limited capacity to respond to citizen requests for information, which can lead to a lack of transparency and accountability. However, it is worth noting that some smaller governments have successfully implemented innovative solutions to improve transparency, such as partnering with neighboring governments or leveraging technology to provide online access to financial information.

The level of decentralization and autonomy also influences the relationship between government size and financial transparency. In decentralized systems, local governments have more control over their finances and are more accountable to their constituents. This can lead to greater transparency, as local governments are more responsive to the needs and demands of their citizens (Carmeci et al., 2021). On the other hand, in centralized systems, local governments may have less autonomy and may be subject to more stringent reporting requirements, which can limit their ability to provide transparent financial information.

The size of local governments is an important factor in determining financial transparency. While larger governments tend to have more resources and a greater capacity for transparency (Shittu et al., 2020), smaller governments face significant challenges in achieving transparency. However, with innovative solutions and a commitment to accountability, even smaller governments can improve their transparency and provide citizens with the information they need to make informed decisions.

The positive relationship between government size and financial transparency aligns with previous studies. Local governments are subjected to higher public scrutiny (Escresa & Glova, 2024) and are, therefore, more likely to provide comprehensive financial reports. Governments with more assets are often required to disclose additional information, ensuring greater accountability (Quinn et al., 2023). Based on these theoretical insights, the second hypothesis proposed in this study is:

H2: Government size has a positive effect on local government financial transparency.

This study will analyze both political competition and local government size as independent variables to determine their impact on the financial transparency of local governments in Indonesia. The results will provide insights into how these factors affect the disclosure practices of local governments and offer practical recommendations for improving governance through enhanced transparency.

2. Methods

This study employs a quantitative research approach aimed at explaining the variables through the collection and analysis of data to determine their influence. The type of data used in this study is secondary data. The population of this research includes all local governments (districts/cities) in Indonesia in 2022, totaling 507 districts and cities. A sample of 362 local governments was selected, consisting of 289 districts and 73 cities. The sampling technique used in this study is non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. Based on this method, samples were selected according to the research objectives and predetermined criteria.

The criteria used for sample selection include: (1) Analysis of financial disclosure on the official websites of local governments, (2) Summary of the Audit Results (IHPS I) related to the Financial Statements of Local Governments (LKPD) for the year 2022, published on the official website of the Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK) at www.bpk.go.id. (3) Data on political competition were obtained from the official websites of the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Regional Election Commissions (KPUD), as well as from local government portals. Political competition data aligns with the election periods for regional heads in each district/city.

The dependent variable in this study is financial transparency, while the independent variables are political competition and government size. Financial transparency is evaluated through three stages:

- 1) Planning Stage: This includes the disclosure of documents such as government work plans, budget policies, priority programs, and financial plans of local government agencies.
- 2) Implementation Stage: This involves reports on revenue and expenditure realization, financing realization, budget amendments, and procurement plans.
- 3) Reporting and Accountability Stage: This stage includes cash flow reports, budget realization reports, balance sheets, financial notes, and reports from local-owned enterprises (BUMD), among others.

The total financial disclosure consists of 30 documents representing transparency across the three stages. This transparency measure is expressed as:

$$TPD = \frac{\sum \text{Number of Financial}}{30}$$

Political competition is measured using the formula from Hoffman (n.d.):

$$\text{Political Competition} = \frac{\sum \text{Seats of Non-Governing Political Parties}}{\sum \text{Total Seats in DPRD}}$$

The natural logarithm of total assets measures government size. The multiple linear regression analysis used in this study is expressed through the following equation:

$$TK = \beta_0 + \beta_1 KP + \beta_2 UP + e$$

Where:

- TK = Financial Transparency
- KP = Political Competition
- UP = Government size

3. Results

Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics provide a summary and overview of the research data, including key metrics such as the mean, standard deviation, variance, minimum and maximum values, and measures of skewness and kurtosis. The descriptive statistics for the variables in this study are presented in Table 1 below:

Tabel 1. Descriptive Statistics Results

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Political Competition	362	0.30	0.80	0.5809	0.13266
Government Size	362	28.30	30.28	28.8507	0.42338
Financial Transparency	362	0.00	0.90	0.3199	0.30704

Source: IBM SPSS Output, Version 29

The political competition variable has a mean value of 0.5809, indicating that, on average, political competition levels across the sampled regions are 58.09%. The highest political competition score of 0.80 (80%) is observed in 15 districts/cities, including Bener Meriah, Karo, Pagar Alam, Sungai Penuh, Kaur, Cilegon, South Tangerang, Kuningan, Ponorogo, Batu, Gunungkidul, Malaka, Kutai Timur, and Bontang. Meanwhile, the lowest political competition score of 0.30 (30%) is recorded in 5 regions: Pakpak Bharat, Natuna, Pasuruan, Hulu Sungai Selatan, and Pidie.

Tabel 2. Descriptive Statistics by Stages of Financial Disclosure

Stage	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Planning Stage	362	0.00	100.00	35.470	34.4956
Implementation Stage	362	0.00	100.00	26.6989	34.20648
Reporting Stage	362	0.00	82.00	32.4392	31.78308

Source: IBM SPSS Output, Version 29

The dependent variable in this study is financial transparency. Table 1 shows that the minimum score for financial transparency is 0.00, indicating that 92 districts/cities did not disclose any financial information. Conversely, the maximum score of 0.90 is recorded in 29 districts/cities, demonstrating high levels of financial disclosure. On average, financial transparency across the regions is 31.99%, suggesting that only a limited number of regions publish financial reports comprehensively during the planning, implementation, and reporting stages.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of financial disclosure across the three stages. In the planning stage, 31 districts/cities occupy the top position by disclosing all ten required documents. On the other hand, 111 districts/cities do not provide any planning documents. The mean score for planning stage disclosure is 35.47%.

For the implementation stage, 34 districts/cities fully disclose their financial activities, with a total of 9 documents. Meanwhile, 163 districts/cities do not publish any information at this stage. The mean score for implementation stage disclosure is 26.69%. In the reporting stage, 11 districts/cities disclose all 11 required documents, while 142 regions do not publish any financial reports. The mean score for reporting stage disclosure is 32.44%.

Overall, 44 districts/cities demonstrate excellent financial transparency with an average score of 0.90, including Lembata, Banjarmasin, and Sekadau. Regions like Garut and Central Maluku follow closely, with a score of 0.87. In contrast, 89 districts/cities report zero financial

transparency. Among the three stages, the planning stage has the highest disclosure rate at 35%, while the implementation stage exhibits the lowest disclosure rate at 26%.

Coefficient of Determination (R²)

The coefficient of determination (R²) is used to measure the proportion of variance in the dependent variable that the independent variables in the regression model can explain. The results of the R² test are presented in **Table 3** below:

Table 3. Coefficient of Determination (R²) Results

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.972	0.945	0.945	0.07213

Source: IBM SPSS Output, Version 29

The adjusted R² value of 0.945 indicates that 94.5% of the variation in financial transparency is explained by the independent variables, namely political competition and government size. This implies that these two factors significantly account for changes in financial transparency. Meanwhile, the remaining 5.5% of the variation is attributed to other factors not included in this study.

The high value of adjusted R² suggests that the model used in this research is well-fitted to explain the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. This also indicates that political competition and government size are strong predictors of financial transparency in local governments across Indonesia.

Simultaneous Significance Test (F-Test)

The F-test is used to determine whether the independent variables, taken together, have a significant effect on the dependent variable. The results of the F-test are presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4. F-Test Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	32.164	3	16.080	3090.794	<0.001
Residual	1.868	359	0.005		
Total	34.032	361			

Source: IBM SPSS Output, Version 29

The F-test results indicate that the significance value (Sig.) is less than 0.001, which is smaller than the alpha level of 0.05. This shows that the independent variables (political competition and government size) simultaneously have a significant effect on financial transparency. Thus, the regression model used in this study is considered fit, meaning that the model can explain the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable effectively.

Partial Significance Test (t-Test)

The t-test is used to determine the effect of each independent variable on the dependent variable, individually tested at a significance level of 0.025. If the probability value (Sig.) is less than 0.025, the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected, indicating a significant effect. The results of the t-test are presented in Table 5:

Table 5. t-Test Results

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	
(Constant)	-15.021	0.180	-23.603
Political Competition	0.628	0.021	8.399
Government Size	0.519	0.007	22.143

Source: IBM SPSS Output, Version 29

The political competition variable has a t-value of 8.399 with a significance value of less than 0.001. This indicates that political competition positively influences financial transparency. As political competition increases, financial transparency also improves by 0.628 units, assuming other variables remain constant. Therefore, H_1 is accepted, confirming that political competition significantly affects financial transparency.

Similarly, the government size variable has a t-value of 22.143 with a significance value of less than 0.001. This suggests that government size positively influences financial transparency. An increase in government size leads to a 0.519-unit increase in financial transparency, holding other variables constant. Hence, H_2 is also accepted, affirming that government size has a significant positive effect on financial transparency.

4. Discussion

The Effect of Political Competition on Financial Transparency in Local Governments

The results of this study confirm that political competition has a significant positive effect on the financial transparency of local governments in Indonesia. Electoral competition (Dawson, 2022) is very dilemmatic, where candidates make various efforts to benefit, including agency issues in terms of financial transparency (Birkhead, 2024; Ferreira et al., 2020). In regions with higher political competition, elected officials are under pressure to disclose financial information transparently (Rodríguez Bolívar et al., 2018). This occurs because non-governing political parties closely monitor government activities, ensuring that public funds are managed responsibly. Increased competition compels regional heads to implement transparent financial practices as part of their commitment to accountability.

Moreover, the dynamics of political competition encourage local governments to adopt more rigorous financial practices. As regional heads strive to maintain public trust, they are motivated to disclose comprehensive financial information. This not only aligns with their campaign promises but also serves as a strategic move to mitigate potential criticisms from opponents. The legitimacy hypothesis supports this notion, positing that local governments must adhere to acceptable standards of behavior to sustain their validity in the eyes of constituents. However, while political competition can enhance transparency, it also presents challenges. The dilemma arises when officials engage in "agency issues," where personal interests may conflict with public accountability. For instance, in their pursuit of re-election, officials might prioritize short-term gains over long-term financial health, leading to potential mismanagement of resources. This highlights the need for a balanced approach where electoral incentives align with ethical governance.

Opposition parties also play a crucial role by providing checks and balances against the ruling parties, advocating for transparency, and holding the Government accountable for financial decisions (Krah & Mertens, 2023). Although opposition parties do not possess executive power, they function as watchdogs, representing public interests that might otherwise be overlooked. Through active monitoring, they compel governments to reduce information asymmetry by publishing comprehensive financial reports.

Political competition positively affects the financial reporting practices of provincial governments. Intense political competition motivates governments to publish financial information to reduce agency conflicts between agents (governments) and principals (the public). By disclosing more information, governments minimize monitoring costs and gain public trust, thereby fulfilling their accountability obligations.

The Effect of Government Size on Financial Transparency in Local Governments

The findings also reveal that government size positively influences financial transparency (Nuryani & Firmansyah, 2020). Larger local governments, with more complex operations and substantial public resources, are subjected to greater public scrutiny. Consequently, they are more likely to disclose financial information to demonstrate responsible financial management. Governments with larger assets are expected to provide more comprehensive reports as constituents demand accountability for the use of public resources (Kettl, 2015). Larger governments typically serve more

diverse populations with higher literacy levels, further increasing the public's demand for transparency (Singhania, 2022). These findings align with previous research that larger governments are pressured to disclose more financial information due to public expectations.

Moreover, agency theory explains that larger governments face more significant challenges in managing complex financial operations, leading to higher risks of information asymmetry (Patel et al., 2023)(Patel et al., 2023). To address this, governments are encouraged to publish financial reports as a means of fostering public trust and reducing conflicts between agents and principals. Providing accessible financial reports allows citizens to monitor government performance and ensures that decision-making aligns with public interests. The publication of financial reports also enables citizens to evaluate the effectiveness of government programs and services, which can lead to more informed decision-making and improved resource allocation. Furthermore, transparent financial reporting can help to prevent corruption and mismanagement of public funds, as citizens and other stakeholders can scrutinize government spending and identify potential irregularities. In this sense, financial transparency is essential for promoting good governance and ensuring that public resources are used in a responsible and accountable manner.

In addition, the use of technology can facilitate the dissemination of financial information and enhance transparency. Governments can leverage online platforms and digital tools to provide citizens with easy access to financial reports, budgets, and other relevant information. This can help to bridge the information gap between citizens and Government and promote a more participatory and inclusive approach to governance. By embracing transparency and accountability, governments can build trust with their citizens and demonstrate their commitment to responsible and effective management of public resources.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine the influence of political competition and government size on the financial transparency of local governments in Indonesia. The findings indicate that political competition has a positive effect on financial transparency. Higher levels of political competition encourage local governments to disclose more financial information through official websites, driven by increased public and political scrutiny. Additionally, government size is shown to have a significant positive influence on financial transparency. Larger governments tend to disclose more financial information as they have the necessary resources to support disclosure activities. Furthermore, larger governments face greater demands for transparency from the public, reinforcing the need for open and accountable financial reporting. However, the study reveals that financial transparency remains relatively low across Indonesian local governments. Only 90% of the required 30 financial documents are published on average, with the highest transparency observed in the planning stage (35%) and the lowest in the implementation stage (26%). These findings emphasize the need for local governments to improve the quality and comprehensiveness of financial disclosures at every stage.

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