



Socioeconomic Status, Perceived Quality, And Public Evaluation of The School Zoning Policy: Evidence From A Mid-Sized City In Indonesia

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ABSTRAK

Sejak 2017 hingga digantikan Sistem Penerimaan Murid Baru (SPMB) pada 2025, Indonesia mengalokasikan kursi sekolah negeri terutama berdasarkan kedekatan tempat tinggal melalui skema zonasi. Evaluasi atas kebijakan ini nyaris seluruhnya bertumpu pada sudut pandang pemerintah, sementara penilaian warga kebanyakan luput diteliti. Studi ini menanyakan bagaimana masyarakat di sebuah kota menengah di Indonesia menilai manfaat zonasi dan apakah penilaian itu mengikuti posisi sosio-ekonomi rumah tangga. Berbekal survei bertahap terhadap 393 warga di tujuh kecamatan pada Mei 2024, kami menaksir model ordered logistic bertingkat dan, sebagai pelengkap, mendekomposisi selisih mean penilaian dengan metode Oaxaca–Blinder. Tak satu pun variabel sosio-ekonomi—pendapatan, pendidikan, usia, atau gender—memprediksi penilaian tersebut. Dua persepsi subjektif di tingkat lingkungan yang berperan: persepsi warga atas mutu sekolah dan keterjangkauannya, bukan ukuran objektifnya. Pada model ordinal tersesuaikan penuh (Model 3), makin tinggi persepsi mutu dan keterjangkauan, makin baik penilaian (OR = 3,23 dan 2,79; keduanya $p < 0,001$). Dekomposisi menempatkan selisih penilaian antara kelompok berpendapatan rendah dan tinggi pada angka yang dapat diabaikan (0,038 pada skala lima), sedangkan penilaian berbeda tajam menurut lokasi ($F = 7,16$; $p < 0,001$). Warga tampak menimbang zonasi berdasarkan apa yang tampak dan terjangkau di sekitarnya, bukan berdasarkan kelas sosialnya. Prediksi Policy Feedback Theory bahwa persepsi terstratifikasi menurut posisi sosial rupanya hanya berlaku bila polarisasi sosial cukup lebar—syarat yang jarang dipenuhi kota menengah. Secara praktis, membangun dukungan terhadap SPMB lebih bergantung pada membuat sekolah terdekat benar-benar lebih baik dan lebih murah ketimbang pada kampanye informasi.

Kata Kunci: dekomposisi Oaxaca–Blinder; kebijakan zonasi; ordered logit; persepsi masyarakat; status sosio-ekonomi

ABSTRACT

From 2017 until the New Student Admission System (SPMB) replaced it in 2025, Indonesia distributed public-school places largely by residential proximity under the zoning scheme. Evaluations of the policy have almost always been written from the administrative side, so how ordinary residents judged it has remained largely unmeasured. This study asks how the public in a mid-sized Indonesian city rated the benefit of zoning and whether that judgment tracked household socioeconomic position. Using a multistage survey of 393 residents across seven sub-districts fielded in May 2024, we fitted stepwise ordered logistic models and, as a complement, decomposed the mean-rating gap using the Oaxaca–Blinder method. None of the socioeconomic variables—income, education, age, or gender—predicted the rating. Two subjective, neighborhood-level perceptions did—residents’ own perceptions of school quality and affordability, not any objective measure of them. In the fully adjusted ordinal model (Model 3), higher perceived quality and higher perceived affordability each predicted a markedly more favorable rating (odds ratios of 3.23 and 2.79, respectively; both $p < 0.001$). The decomposition placed the evaluation gap between lower- and higher-income groups at a negligible 0.038 point on a five-point scale, whereas ratings varied sharply by location ($F = 7.16$; $p < 0.001$). Residents therefore seem to weigh zoning against what is visible and affordable in their immediate surroundings rather than against their class position. The Policy Feedback Theory prediction that perceptions stratify by social standing appears to hold only where social polarization is wide enough—a condition mid-sized cities seldom satisfy. In practice, winning public support for SPMB will depend more on making nearby schools genuinely better and cheaper than on communication campaigns.

Keywords: *community perception; Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition; ordered logit; school zoning policy; socioeconomic status*

INTRODUCTION

Several countries, from Japan to New Zealand, tie school admission to place of residence on the assumption that schooling children within their own neighborhood will level access (Stewart et al., 2021). Cross-national evaluations, however, keep arriving at the same caveat: the effects of such policies are never felt evenly across groups. In Trinidad and Tobago, Beuermann et al. (2023) found that parents judge schools by a range of criteria, and those criteria are bound up with their social background. In the Netherlands, Oosterbeek et al. (2021) showed that well-off families deftly exploit procedural loopholes to keep access to the schools they want. This pattern is exactly what Policy Feedback Theory anticipates (Mettler & SoRelle, 2023): once a policy is in force, it reshapes how citizens see it in uneven ways, depending on who reaps tangible benefits (resource effects) and who feels recognized or, instead, sidelined (interpretive effects).

In Indonesia, zonal admission (PPDB) was rolled out nationally in 2017 and revised repeatedly—from Ministerial Regulation No. 17/2017 through No. 1/2021—with shifting quotas across the zoning, affirmation, transfer, and achievement pathways (Nurfakihiswara et al., 2024). For seven years the debate never settled. Ombudsman oversight between 2021 and 2024 repeatedly uncovered forged domicile documents across many regions, while an uneven distribution of schools left some areas further behind (Nurul Chotimah et al., 2023). Elsewhere, though, zoning was credited with easing congestion at popular schools and reviving those that had struggled to attract enrolment (Susanto et al., 2024). When Ministerial Regulation No. 3/2025 took effect in February 2025 and replaced zoning with SPMB, the

zoning era formally closed—and that closure, paradoxically, opened a clearer window to appraise the policy, free of the short-term stakes that had previously clouded judgment.

The trouble is that almost every evaluation of zoning speaks from the government's chair: whether implementation ran smoothly, whether rules were obeyed, and what share of children entered through each pathway (Pramono et al., 2024; Setiawati & Rahaju, 2022; Musadad & Purwanta, 2023). Other, largely qualitative studies have used the Van Meter and Van Horn framework to map field-level obstacles (Hartawan & Kosasih, 2023). All of this is useful, yet it leaves one question untouched: how do residents themselves weigh the policy's benefit, and does that weighing differ by economic stratum? The question is more than a matter of satisfaction. Through the social construction of target populations, Schneider, Ingram, and deLeon (2023) explain that every policy quietly builds an image of the groups it touches, and that image colors how they judge it: those who feel deserving of help tend to evaluate favorably, while those who feel pushed aside do the opposite—even under identical rules.

At least three matters remain unresolved in the literature. First, the evaluation from the standpoint of residents as policy recipients has almost never been measured quantitatively; what exists is small-scale qualitative work or surveys that stop at description without modeling (Parameswara et al., 2022; Kurniawan et al., 2024). Second, no study has tested whether residents' evaluations differ by socioeconomic status using a model suited to ordinal data; many force Likert responses onto an interval scale and apply OLS, whereas ordered logistic regression is the more appropriate tool (Fullerton, 2021). Third, the Oaxaca–Blinder technique for decomposing gaps, now routine in health (Bazyar et al., 2023) and labor research (Li et al., 2023), has never been brought to bear on education policy in Indonesia. It answers what an ordinary difference test cannot: how much of an evaluation gap stems from differences in group characteristics, and how much from differences in experience of the same policy.

The study city—a mid-sized city in Indonesia—was chosen for two reasons. First, mid-sized cities of this kind represent the bulk of Indonesian cities yet are rarely studied; zoning research clusters in Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya (Pramono et al., 2024). Second, the data were gathered in May 2024, the final year of zoning before the shift to SPMB. The timing suits a retrospective evaluation: residents' memory of zoning was still fresh, while the decision to replace the policy was already final, so their answers were no longer shaped by short-term self-interest.

On that basis, this study pursues four aims: (1) to map how residents rate the benefit of zoning; (2) to identify which socioeconomic variables predict that rating through ordered logistic regression; (3) to decompose the evaluation gap between higher- and lower-status groups into explained and unexplained components using Oaxaca–Blinder; and (4) to examine how the evaluation of zoning relates to perceptions of educational quality and cost. The findings are intended as an evidence base for refining SPMB so that it responds more closely to the needs of diverse groups.

METHOD

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design in a mid-sized city in Indonesia. The study population comprised residents of the city who were familiar with basic and secondary education in their area. The sample was deliberately not limited to parents currently enrolling a child; it spanned the wider public, including prospective parents and family members who take part in schooling

decisions. Sampling proceeded in stages: seven sub-districts were selected so that every part of the city was represented, and within each sub-district respondents were drawn down to the neighborhood (RT/RW) level. Data collection in May 2024 yielded 393 respondents.

A structured questionnaire was administered through face-to-face interviews by trained enumerators. The first section recorded demographic and socioeconomic data: gender, age, occupation, education (five levels), monthly income (four categories), religion, ethnicity, and location. The second section contained five education-perception items on a 1–5 Likert scale (Very Poor to Very Good): (a) the benefit of the zoning policy, the study's main dependent variable; (b–c) the cost of primary and junior secondary education; and (d–e) the quality of primary and junior secondary education. These items capture residents' subjective perceptions rather than objective, administrative measures of school quality or cost; throughout this article, therefore, “quality” and “affordability” refer to perceived quality and perceived affordability. The five items showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.84$), with the quality and cost subscales at 0.89 and 0.82, respectively.

Analysis unfolded in three stages. The first presented descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations of the zoning rating against socioeconomic variables, and Spearman correlations among the perception items. The second stage fitted ordered logistic regressions in steps: Model 1 estimated each predictor separately; Model 2 entered all socioeconomic predictors together; Model 3 added perceived quality and cost to probe possible mediation; and Model 4 introduced sub-district fixed effects to capture between-area variation. The dependent variable was collapsed to three levels because the extreme categories were very sparsely filled. The proportional-odds assumption was checked, and collinearity was assessed via the variance inflation factor. These ordered logistic models, which respect the ordinal nature of the outcome, are the study's primary analysis.

The third stage applied an Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition (Fortin et al., 2011) as a complementary analysis rather than a substitute for the ordinal models. Because the Oaxaca–Blinder procedure is defined for a cardinal outcome, we treated the five-point zoning-benefit rating as an interval score and decomposed the difference in mean ratings between the lower-status (income categories 1–2) and higher-status (categories 3–4) groups, with the underlying group-specific equations estimated by ordinary least squares. The mean gap was partitioned into an explained component (attributable to differences in group characteristics) and an unexplained component (attributable to differences in coefficients). Treating the ordinal rating as cardinal is an approximation adopted solely to make the mean-gap decomposition tractable; its role here is to quantify and source the between-group gap in average ratings, complementing—not replacing—the ordered logistic estimates. All computation used Python 3 with the statsmodels library. Sub-district names are masked as District A–G to preserve the anonymity of the study site.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Respondent Characteristics

The survey reached 393 respondents across seven sub-districts. The gender split was even—200 women (50.9%) and 193 men (49.1%)—with a mean age of 41.3 years ($SD = 13.1$). Most respondents had completed senior secondary school (180; 45.8%), while only 24 (6.1%) held a higher-education

qualification. Income concentrated in the lower-middle band: 158 respondents (40.2%) earned between IDR 500,000 and 1.5 million and 121 (30.8%) between IDR 1.5 and 5 million, whereas only seven sat in the highest bracket. This composition is worth flagging early because it shapes interpretation: the sample is dominated by the lower-middle class, precisely the group that equalization policy most targets. Table 1 details the respondent profile.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics (N = 393)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Gender	Male	193	49.1
	Female	200	50.9
Education	No schooling/primary	100	25.4
	Junior secondary	84	21.4
	Senior secondary	180	45.8
	Higher education	24	6.1
Monthly income	< IDR 500k	67	17.0
	IDR 500k – 1.5m	158	40.2
	IDR 1.5m – 5m	121	30.8
	> IDR 5m	7	1.8
Age	M = 41.3; SD = 13.1	–	–

Note: Shortfalls from 100% reflect missing data on some variables.

2. Distribution of Perceptions

Residents judged zoning in a positive but measured key. The mean was 3.53 (SD = 0.67) on a five-point scale; 204 respondents (53.1%) chose “Good” and 105 (27.3%) “Fair.” Only four rated it “Very Good,” while 30 gave “Poor” or “Very Poor.” Ratings of educational cost and quality moved in a similar 3.5–3.7 range. Figure 1 shows the response distribution for the three main aspects; the mass sits in the positive categories, an early sign that residents accept zoning while holding some reservations.

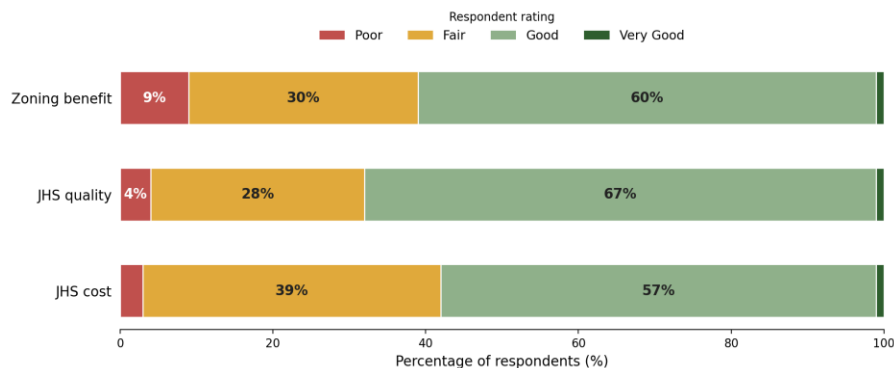


Figure 1. Distribution of Residents' Ratings of Zoning Benefit, Education Quality, and Cost

The interesting part emerges once ratings are broken down by income. Table 2 shows only small differences among the three lower bands. The below-IDR-500k group (M = 3.65) even rated slightly higher than the IDR 1.5–5 million group (M = 3.57). The striking case is the highest-income group, whose rating was far lower (M = 2.57), though its size (n = 7) is too small to interpret with confidence.

A chi-square test did detect a significant association with income ($\chi^2 = 14.20$; $df = 6$; $p = 0.028$), but the association is weak and driven largely by that small top cell.

Table 2. Mean Rating of Zoning Benefit by Income Group

Income Group	n	Mean	SD
< IDR 500k	65	3.65	0.69
IDR 500k – 1.5m	153	3.49	0.65
IDR 1.5m – 5m	118	3.57	0.65
> IDR 5m	7	2.57	0.98

Spearman correlations reinforce the picture. The zoning rating is not significantly related to income ($\rho = -0.072$; $p = 0.176$) or education ($\rho = -0.048$; $p = 0.349$), but is strongly related to perceived junior-secondary quality ($\rho = 0.496$; $p < 0.001$) and perceived junior-secondary cost ($\rho = 0.433$; $p < 0.001$). In short, residents rate zoning more by how they view the quality and affordability of nearby schools than by the thickness of their wallets.

3. Predictors of Perception: Ordered Logistic Regression

Four ordinal logit models were built in steps, with the dependent variable collapsed to three levels because its extremes were rarely used. Variance inflation factors revealed no troubling collinearity (all below 1.5). Table 3 summarizes the results.

Table 3. Ordered Logistic Regression of the Zoning-Benefit Rating (Odds Ratios)

Predictor	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Income	0.81	0.84	0.91	0.99
Education	0.98	1.03	1.03	0.97
Age	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Gender (female)	1.07	1.09	0.94	0.97
Perceived JHS quality	5.74***	—	3.23***	2.81***
Perceived JHS cost	5.38***	—	2.79***	2.20**
Sub-district fixed effects	—	—	—	Yes
Pseudo-R ² (McFadden)	—	0.003	0.147	0.189
N	—	343	335	332

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$. Model 1 reports univariate estimates. Odds ratios above 1 indicate a higher probability of a more favorable rating. Thresholds are not shown.

The four models tell a consistent, fairly emphatic story. Not one socioeconomic variable—income, education, age, or gender—significantly predicts the zoning rating. Model 2, containing only socioeconomic predictors, explains almost nothing (pseudo-R² = 0.003). Once perceived quality and cost enter in Model 3, explanatory power jumps to 0.147. In that model, residents who perceive junior-secondary quality as better are 3.23 times more likely to rate zoning beneficial, and those who perceive it as more affordable are 2.79 times more likely (both $p < 0.001$). Adding these perceptions leaves the socioeconomic coefficients unchanged and still non-significant, so there is no sign of mediation. Even

with sub-district fixed effects in Model 4, both perceptions hold firm (OR = 2.81 and 2.20). In brief, the evaluation of zoning rests on lived experience of quality and cost, not on social class.

4. Spatial Variation Across Sub-districts

Although a person's economic status carries no weight, where they live does. Analysis of variance found a significant difference in ratings across sub-districts ($F = 7.16$; $p < 0.001$). The range is wide, from 3.19 in District B, the lowest-rating area, to 3.96 in District D, the highest, as Figure 2 shows. The pattern persists in Model 4, with several sub-districts differing significantly from the reference. This makes intuitive sense: the perceived benefit of zoning depends on whether good schools sit within easy reach, and that availability genuinely varies from place to place. Where a sub-district has strong public schools nearby, zoning pays off; where such schools are scarce, its benefit thins. This geographic dimension would be missed entirely if the analysis looked only at individual traits.

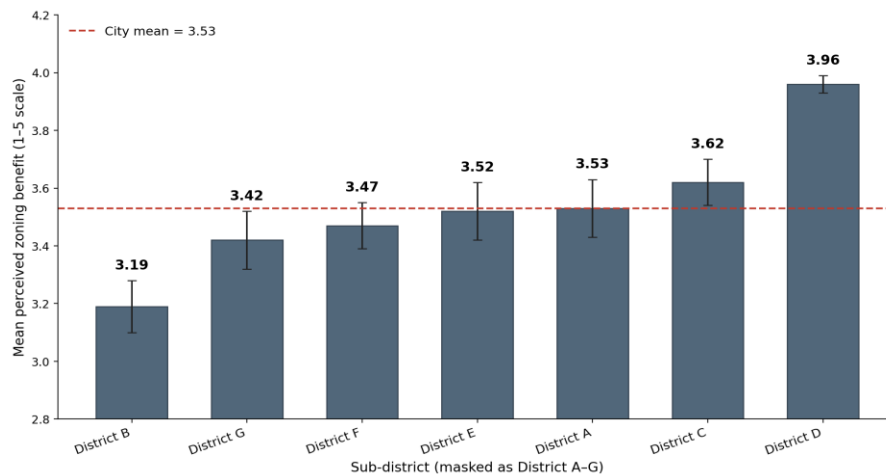


Figure 2. Mean Rating of Zoning Benefit by Sub-district (with standard errors)

5. Decomposing the Evaluation Gap: Oaxaca–Blinder

As a complement to the ordinal models, we decomposed the difference in mean ratings—treating the five-point scale as an interval score and estimating each group's equation by ordinary least squares—between lower-status ($n = 213$) and higher-status ($n = 122$) residents, to test directly whether an evaluation gap separates the two. The gap turned out to be very small. The lower group's mean ($M = 3.55$) barely differs from the higher group's ($M = 3.52$), a gap of just 0.038 point on a five-point scale. The decomposition splits this thin gap into 52.9% explained and 47.1% unexplained, with the largest contributor to the explained portion being perceived junior-secondary quality rather than a structural variable such as education. It is precisely this near-zero figure that matters, and because the raw mean gap being partitioned is so small, the conclusion does not hinge on the cardinality approximation. The initial expectation had been a real gulf between rich and poor—either because poorer residents feel confined to lower-quality nearby schools or because wealthier ones feel cut off from their preferred schools. The data bear out neither.

6. Discussion

The study's core findings weave into a single, coherent account: in the study city, how residents rate zoning is set by direct experience of school quality and cost, not by economic position. Perceived quality

and cost explain nearly half the model's variance, while individual economic status contributes nothing. Yet location still matters. This suggests that what shapes evaluation is not who a person is economically but where they live and what kind of schools are available there.

This challenges the standard prediction of Policy Feedback Theory. Mettler and SoRelle (2023) expect policies to stratify perception through resource and interpretive effects, so that groups in different social positions should evaluate differently. In the study city, that mechanism does not operate along the economic axis, but it does appear to operate along the spatial one. A plausible explanation lies in the city's social makeup: the sample is dominated by a relatively economically uniform lower-middle class, with just seven respondents in the highest-income bracket. When a society is not sharply divided by economic means, an equalization policy may indeed feel much the same to most of its residents. Stratified perception apparently requires a wide enough social gulf as a precondition, and that precondition is absent in a mid-sized city. Inequality does not vanish, however; it merely changes form, from a gap between classes to a gap between areas.

This reading gains force when read through the social construction of target populations (Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2023). Residents of the study city seem not to see themselves as split into those "helped" and those "harmed" by zoning. Rather than weighing their group's gains and losses, they judge the policy by what is plainly visible: whether the school near home is good and affordable. The logic of evaluation shifts from group interest to everyday experience. For policymakers, the implication is clear—improving the standing of an admission policy takes more than communication campaigns; it takes real gains in school quality and affordability, together with a more even spread of good schools across areas.

The anomaly of the highest-income group rating zoning lowest deserves attention, even if it cannot be read strongly given the small sample. Its direction matches Oosterbeek et al. (2021) in the Netherlands, where well-off families tend to be the most disadvantaged by a system that limits choice, since they had gained most from open competition for preferred schools. If the pattern is real, resistance to zoning may be concentrated among a small affluent minority rather than spread evenly. A follow-up study with a larger upper-income sample is needed to test it.

Methodologically, the study shows the value of pairing ordered logit with an Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition in evaluating education policy. The ordered logit preserves the ordinal outcome and identifies its predictors, while the decomposition—applied to the mean rating as a complement—shows not only whether a between-group gap exists but where it comes from. Here it is the very absence of a class gap that stands out, and that is visible only once the gap is decomposed. The result is also a caution against assuming, too quickly, that perceptions must stratify by class; an assumption common in the literature does not always hold in a mid-sized city.

Several limitations should be noted. First, the cross-sectional design captures a single moment, so the causal direction between perceived quality and policy evaluation cannot be established. Second, the sample's imbalance at the top limits any test of the conjecture about affluent resistance. Third, the ethnic and religious uniformity of respondents—almost all Sundanese and Muslim—means neither variable could be tested as a predictor. Fourth, the study is confined to one city, so equating it with larger cities that are more sharply stratified calls for caution. Fifth, the Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition treats the

ordinal rating as an interval score; because the mean gap it partitions is itself minute (0.038 point), the near-zero conclusion does not hinge on this assumption, though future work could adopt decomposition methods designed for ordinal or otherwise nonlinear outcomes. The single-city scope, in particular, opens a promising line of research: repeating the analysis in cities with differing levels of inequality to test whether stratified perception truly depends on the width of the social gulf.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how residents of a mid-sized Indonesian city viewed the benefit of zoning in the policy's final year, on the eve of the shift to SPMB. Contrary to the initial expectation, the evaluation of zoning is not stratified by socioeconomic status: income, education, age, and gender do not predict residents' ratings, while perceptions of educational quality and cost stand out as strong determinants. An Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition of the mean rating confirms that the evaluation gap between richer and poorer residents is practically nil. Ratings differ markedly across sub-districts, however, signaling that the inequality in evaluation is spatial rather than economic in character. Residents weigh zoning by what they experience—namely the quality and affordability of the schools around them.

Two implications follow. Theoretically, the Policy Feedback Theory prediction of stratified perception appears to depend on a sufficiently wide social gulf—a condition not always present in mid-sized cities—while the more relevant form of inequality there is between areas. Practically, building residents' support for an admission policy, including the SPMB now in force, will bear more fruit if it focuses on real improvements in school quality and affordability and on a more even distribution of good schools across areas, rather than on socialization alone. Future research should repeat this analysis in cities with varied levels of inequality, enlarge the representation of higher-income groups, and ideally gather data before and after the SPMB transition so that shifts in perception can be tracked over time.

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