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*Direct Democracy and Local Public Goods: Evidence from
a Field Experiment in Indonesia*

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Direct Democracy and Local Public Goods: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Indonesia

This article presents an experiment in which 49 Indonesian villages were randomly assigned to choose development projects through either representative-based meetings or direct election-based plebiscites. Plebiscites resulted in dramatically higher satisfaction among villagers, increased knowledge about the project, greater perceived benefits, and higher reported willingness to contribute. Changing the political mechanism had much smaller effects on the actual projects selected, with some evidence that plebiscites resulted in projects chosen by women being located in poorer areas. The results suggest that direct participation in political decision making can substantially increase satisfaction and legitimacy.

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