Sophist: Jurnal Sosial Politik, Kajian Islam dan Tafsir
Vol. 8, No. 3, 2026
Published by Fakultas Ushuluddin dan Studi Agama (FUSA), UIN Mataram
p-ISSN 2656-1220, e-ISSN 2745-8571, available online at https://sophist.or.id/index.php/js/id/index

SAME RULE, DIFFERENT FATES: SCHOOL ZONING, UNEQUAL SUPPLY, AND THE CASE FOR SUBSTANTIVE EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: Indonesia's school zoning policy assigns public school seats by residence, and the 2025 reform renamed it the domicile track without changing that logic. This article asks why a formally equal rule has not produced educational justice where school supply is uneven, and builds a test that can tell. Using doctrinal legal research and a stylised simulation, it reads the admission rule through Aristotle's proportionality, Rawls's difference principle with Sen's capability approach, and Radbruch's balance of justice, purposiveness and legal certainty. The documented record shows public seats covering only about 47 per cent of expected junior secondary applicants in Jakarta, 128 sub-districts in West Java with no public senior secondary school, manipulated residence documents in Makassar, and unfilled public seats in Bengkulu. The simulation shows one identical rule producing placement rates of 99, 80 and 35 per cent across three districts, converging at 79 per cent once seats are redistributed. The article concludes that a residence-based admission rule is substantively just only where nearby seats are adequate, published and monitored, with a duty to correct shortfalls resting on the authority that drew the zone.

Keywords: School Zoning Policy, Substantive Educational Justice, Domicile Track (Jalur Domisili), School Admission Regulation Indonesia, Philosophy of Law in Education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a constitutional right in Indonesia. Article 31(1) of the 1945 Constitution gives every citizen a right to education, and Article 31(2) requires citizens to complete basic education at the government's expense. Article 28H(2) adds a right to facilitation and special treatment in order to obtain equal opportunity and justice. The National Education System Law turns these commitments into duties: education is to be organised democratically, justly and without discrimination (Article 4(1)), every citizen has an equal right to quality education (Article 5(1)), and the government must guarantee quality services without discrimination (Article 11(1)) (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2003). An admission rule is therefore more than an administrative device. It decides who gets a seat in a public school, and it has to be defensible on grounds of justice as well as procedure.

School zoning (*zonasi*) entered national admission rules in 2017. Ministerial Regulation 51 of 2018 then required that at least 90 per cent of places in public schools go to children living within the school's zone (Sekretariat Kabinet, n.d.), and the minimum was lowered to 50 per cent for the 2020 admissions (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2019). Ministerial Regulation 1 of 2021 kept the zoning route. In February 2025 the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education replaced the old admission label (PPDB) with the New Student Admission System (SPMB), turned the zoning track into a domicile track (*jalur domisili*), and revoked the 2021 regulation (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025, art. 66). A change of that size after almost a decade raises a question this article takes seriously: was the problem the label, or something the new label leaves untouched?

Zoning is an allocation rule. It decides how existing seats are shared; it does not build a school, post a teacher or repair a classroom. Its fairness therefore depends on what it is applied to. Where several public schools lie within reach, a residence rule may spread places more evenly than selection by test score. Where none does, the same rule gives a child nothing to be placed in. Ombudsman RI tied recurring zoning complaints to uneven regional readiness and uneven school availability as early as 2019 (Fatimah, 2019), and the unevenness is still documented in 2024 and 2026 (Section 4.2).

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Research on zoning in Indonesia has grown, mostly in education policy. Sulistyosari et al. (2023) conclude that zoning may not have guaranteed equal access, because public seats fall short of applicants and formerly favoured schools struggle with a more varied intake. Susanto et al. (2024) report that poor children became more evenly spread across schools while their total number in public schools fell. Widiharjanti et al. (2026) find that rural and under-resourced schools gained pupils without matching staff or facilities. Bulkani et al. (2023), looking at one setting, found no significant difference in grades across admission paths, which is a useful warning against arguing that zoning harms learning. Latifah et al. (2024) read the policy through Rawls's justice as fairness. These studies describe access and implementation well. Few of them separate the rule from the supply it is applied to, and we found none that tests the 2025 domicile track against a stated standard of justice.

This article takes up that gap with two research questions. RQ1: why has a uniform residence-based admission rule not delivered educational justice where school supply is unequal? RQ2: how can theories of justice from legal philosophy be turned into a test that applies to both the zoning track and its domicile successor? Three contributions follow. The article builds a supply-sensitivity test from Aristotelian, Rawlsian and Radbruchian ideas. It applies the test to the 2025 regulation and to documented cases, separating failures of shortage, manipulation and mismatch. And it uses a small, fully reproducible simulation to show that identical rules can produce sharply different outcomes from supply geography alone, without any wrongdoing.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical framework. Section 3 sets out the method and its limits. Section 4 presents the findings and discussion: the legal design, the documented supply gaps, a reading through three theories of justice, comparative evidence, the domicile track, the simulation, and a reconstruction of the rule. Section 5 concludes.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Aristotle's account of distributive justice starts from the observation that justice is a kind of equality, but equality among persons who are alike in the relevant respect and in proportion to that respect (Aristotle, 1999, Book V). Identical shares for people in different positions are not equal treatment in this sense. Neither are unequal shares handed out by a criterion that has nothing to do with the good being distributed. Hart (2012) restates the point as the formal principle of justice: like cases should be treated alike and different cases differently. He adds that the principle stays empty until some criterion of relevant likeness and difference is supplied from elsewhere. For an admission rule the criterion is the whole question. Residence, distance, test scores and family income are all candidates, and each can be defended or attacked by reference to what admission is supposed to achieve.

Applied to zoning, the Aristotelian question is whether residence is a relevant criterion for sharing seats, given that the purpose of zoning is to spread access. Where every residential zone has comparable seats within reach, it plausibly is. Where it does not, children in different zones differ in a respect the rule ignores: the number of places they can actually compete for. In that sense, equal treatment can be unjust.

Rawls (1999, §§11–14) builds fair equality of opportunity and the difference principle into his two principles of justice. Positions must be open on fair terms, and social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they work to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged. Moved into admissions, the question changes from whether the rule is neutral to what it does to the children who are worst placed. Sen (2009) approaches the same problem from another direction. He argues that justice should be assessed by what people are actually able to do and to be, not by the rules or resources formally open to them, and he distrusts procedures that look fair while leaving real freedoms unequal. In education the capability view has been developed by Robeyns (2006) and by Walker and Unterhalter (2007). A rule that offers every child the same procedure, but gives a child in a

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school-poor zone a much narrower set of reachable schools, leaves that child with a smaller capability set.

Philosophers disagree about whether educational justice demands equality, adequacy or a mixture of the two (Anderson, 2007; Brighouse & Swift, 2008; Satz, 2008). The argument here does not need to settle that debate. It needs only a weaker claim: the effect of a rule on the children worst placed under it is part of what has to be justified.

Radbruch (2006a) names three values that law has to serve, justice, purposiveness and legal certainty, and accepts that they can pull apart. He gives legal certainty considerable weight, because a legal order that cannot be relied on serves nobody. In his later formula (Radbruch, 2006b), statutory law yields to justice only when the conflict becomes intolerable. We do not claim that zoning reaches that threshold; the formula is far too strong for a school-admission rule. The part worth keeping is the weaker idea that certainty and justice have to be weighed openly, and that a rule's objectivity does not settle whether it is just. Rahardjo (2005) gives the idea an Indonesian form in progressive law: law exists for human beings, not human beings for law, so a rule is to be judged by what it does to the people it governs.

Fredman (2016) supplies the equality-law counterpart. Her account of substantive equality asks whether a rule redresses disadvantage and brings about structural change, not only whether it treats people identically. Indonesian constitutional doctrine contains the same ingredient. Article 28H(2) promises facilitation and special treatment to reach equality and justice, and the Constitutional Court has treated equality and the prohibition of discrimination as foundational since its first decade (Eddyono, 2015).

The three sets of ideas combine into a working test with three questions. The first is about proportion: is the criterion the rule uses relevant to the rule's purpose in every zone where it is applied? The second is about position: what happens to the children in the worst-supplied zones, and do they keep a real opportunity or only a formal one? The third is about balance: does the certainty the rule provides outweigh its effects on those children, and is there a route for correction when it does not? From these questions we derive what we

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call the supply-sensitivity test. A residence-based admission rule is substantively just only to the extent that seats within reach are adequate, publicly known and monitored in every zone, and a duty to correct shortfalls attaches to the authority that draws the zone. The test is a normative proposal, not settled doctrine. It is stated so that the evidence in Section 4 can be read against something explicit.

3. METHOD

The study is doctrinal, or normative, legal research (Hutchinson & Duncan, 2012), the approach Indonesian legal scholarship calls *penelitian hukum normatif*. It combines a statutory approach, which reads the admission rules and the constitutional and statutory provisions behind them, with a conceptual approach, which draws the tests in Section 2 from legal philosophy. A third, illustrative element looks at documented cases of zoning in practice. The case material is used to see whether the pattern the theory predicts appears in the record. It is not a sample, and nothing in the article rests on a claim of representativeness.

The primary legal materials are the 1945 Constitution, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government, which divides education responsibilities between the central, provincial and district or city levels, and Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 on National Education Standards (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 1945, 2003, 2014, 2021). The admission rules are Ministerial Regulation 51 of 2018 (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2018), Ministerial Regulation 1 of 2021, now revoked (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2021), and Regulation 3 of 2025 of the Minister of Primary and Secondary Education on the SPMB (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). The regulations were read on the official legal database of the Audit Board (peraturan.bpk.go.id). The secondary materials are peer-reviewed studies, press releases and findings of Ombudsman RI and its regional offices, statements by regional education offices, and news reports that quote them.

Peer-reviewed sources were included only after their DOI or publisher record had been opened. Ombudsman releases and

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statements by education offices were treated as evidence of what officials found or said, not as independent measurement. News reports were used only where they carry an official figure or statement, and each figure is attributed to the report that carries it. One source on Malang is a single-author preprint that has not been peer reviewed (Hurain, 2026), and it is labelled as such. Claims that could not be traced to a source we were able to open were left out. For several cities, no national or sub-district count of seats was available, so the article says "documented in" a place instead of generalising.

Analysis was descriptive and prescriptive. The first step describes how the rule is designed and what the evidence shows about its operation. The second step reads that material through the three questions of the supply-sensitivity test. The third step proposes changes. A stylised simulation, described in Section 4.6, supports the second step. Its role is limited to showing that a particular pattern, equal rules with unequal outcomes, can arise from the geography of supply alone. The simulation uses a seeded random generator, and its code is available as an interactive viewer so that readers can change every parameter.

Four limits shape what the findings can bear. The study has no primary fieldwork. It has no national dataset on seats by sub-district, so it cannot say how widespread any pattern is. It cannot identify causal effects, because the sources describe outcomes without a comparison group. And complaint and news data show what was reported and printed, which is not the same as what happened. These limits are why the conclusions are framed as conditional claims about a rule and its supply, not as estimates of harm.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Across the sub-sections that follow, the documented record points in one direction: the admission rule is uniform, but the supply it is applied to is not. Jakarta's public junior secondary schools can seat only about 47 per cent of expected applicants (Section 4.2), West Java has 128 sub-districts with no public senior secondary school at all, Makassar families have altered

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residence documents to reach a school, and Bengkulu has public seats that go unfilled. Read against the three theories of justice developed in Section 2, these patterns show a rule that is formally equal yet substantively indifferent to where seats exist.

The comparison that matters is not between zoning and some other admission method, but between places with different supply. Where several public schools sit within reach, the same residence rule performs close to the Rawlsian and Aristotelian standards it is tested against; where supply is thin, it performs far below them, regardless of how the rule is written or enforced. The 2025 domicile track changes verification and labelling but leaves this supply-dependence intact, which is why the emphasis below falls on the sections that test the rule against actual seat counts (Section 4.2) and against a controlled simulation of supply (Section 4.6), rather than on the doctrinal description alone.

1. Uniform rule with delegated geography

Regulation 3 of 2025 was issued on 26 February 2025 and promulgated on 28 February 2025, and it is in force (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah, 2025). Article 6(2) sets four admission tracks: domicile, affirmation, achievement and transfer (*mutasi*). Article 30 fixes the shares of each track by school level, shown in Table 1. Article 17 requires that the family card (*Kartu Keluarga*, KK) used to prove residence was issued at least one year before registration, with narrow exceptions for the death of a parent, divorce and natural or social disaster. Article 37(2) forbids charging applicants. The principles in Articles 2 and 3 include justice and non-discrimination, and Article 2 promises fair opportunity to reach quality education near home.

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Table 1. Admission tracks and quotas under Regulation 3 of 2025 (percentage of school capacity)

Track	Primary (SD)	Junior secondary (SMP)	Senior secondary (SMA)
Domicile	at least 70	at least 40	at least 30
Affirmation	at least 15	at least 20	at least 30
Achievement	none	at least 25	at least 30
Transfer (*mutasi*)	at most 5	at most 5	at most 5

Note. Source: Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (2025), Article 30.

Two features of this design matter for the argument. The first is that the rule is uniform. A single quota table and a single residence test apply from the smallest district to Jakarta. The second is that the geography is delegated. Under Articles 24 to 27, regional governments plan the admission areas, weigh the distribution of schools and pupils against capacity, and choose between administrative areas and a radius. The regulation does not test whether a zone actually contains a seat for the children assigned to it. That question moves into regional implementing rules, which Ombudsman RI reported in 2025 were sometimes issued late or without a regional-head decree (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, 2025).

The quota history adds a nuance. The domicile minimums of 40 per cent for junior secondary and 30 per cent for senior secondary are lower than the 50 per cent zoning floor set in 2019 (Sekretariat Kabinet, 2019), so the new regulation leaves more room for achievement and affirmation. The domicile track is thus less dominant than zoning was, but it is no less uniform in the way that matters here.

Authority is also divided. Under the regional government law, senior secondary education sits with the province while primary and junior secondary education sit with the district or city. In Surakarta, the education office explained that this split limits what the city can do about senior secondary seats, and that senior secondary schools need at least 4,000 square metres of land (Sejati, 2024). A city can draw a

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zone for junior secondary schools, yet it cannot always create the seats that zone needs at the next level.

Courts have not filled the gap. The only constitutional review we found is Constitutional Court Decision 85/PUU-XXI/2023, delivered on 27 September 2023. According to press reports, the Court rejected a challenge to Article 11(1) of the National Education System Law and treated alleged discrimination in zoning as a problem of implementation, with one justice dissenting on standing (Tirto, 2023). We have not read the decision itself, so this reading is provisional. If it is accurate, the decision locates the injustice in practice rather than in the rule, which leaves the question of who is responsible for supply without a legal trigger.

2. Documented supply gaps and what they look like

Table 2 collects the evidence we could verify. Three patterns appear, and a fourth cuts across them. Shortage is the simplest. In Jakarta, the education office reported in 2024 that public junior secondary capacity was 71,093 seats against about 151,164 expected applicants, or 47.0 per cent, and that public senior secondary and vocational capacity covered 35.5 per cent of expected applicants (Republika, 2024). The comparable figure for senior secondary and vocational schools was 32.9 per cent in 2020 (Medcom, 2020). Private schools make up most of Jakarta's school stock: 72.8 per cent of junior secondary schools, 76.2 per cent of senior secondary schools and 87.2 per cent of vocational schools in 2022/23, according to national statistics reported by Katadata Databoks (2023). In 2026 the city supplied 245,980 seats in its admissions, of which 228,163 were in state schools, 10,109 in 103 free private schools and 7,708 in private schools under a joint admission scheme (CNN Indonesia, 2026). The free private programme costs Rp253.6 billion and was justified by the observation that public junior secondary schools can take only about 47 per cent of prospective students (Antara, 2026).

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Table 2. Documented supply conditions and admission problems

Place and year	Evidence reported	Pattern	Source
Jakarta, 2024	Public SMP capacity 71,093 for about 151,164 expected applicants (47.0%); public SMA/SMK capacity 35.5% of expected applicants (32.9% in 2020)	Shortage	Republika (2024); Medcom (2020)
Jakarta, 2026	245,980 seats: 228,163 state, 10,109 in 103 free private schools, 7,708 in joint-scheme private schools; Rp253.6 billion for the free private programme	State-funded patch	CNN Indonesia (2026); Antara (2026)
West Java, 2024	128 of 627 sub-districts without a public SMA, 16 of them without any school; statewide capacity about 103% of SMP graduates	Uneven spread	Antara (2024)
Surakarta, 2019 and 2024	Children from Pasar Kliwon placed in Mojolaban, Sukoharjo; SMA authority held by the province; SMA/SMK need at least 4,000 m2	Displacement	Bisnis.com (2019); Antara Jateng (2019); Sejati (2024)
Makassar, 2023	99 problematic records among 720 children admitted by zoning to four state SMA	Manipulation	detikSulsel (2023)
Yogyakarta (DIY), 2026	34 complaints about SPMB; three confirmed *numpang KK* cases at SMA level	Manipulation	Ombudsman Republik Indonesia Perwakilan DIY (2026)
Bengkulu City, 2024	13 public SMP short of pupils; SMPN 9 targeted 165 pupils and had 93 re-registrations	Under-use	Antara Bengkulu (2024)
National, 2025	SPMB 2025 findings: blank-spot areas, capacity not announced, KK and poverty certificates older than one year accepted, extra classes, *titipan* pupils, informal fees	Implementation gaps	Ombudsman Republik Indonesia (2025)

Note. SMP = junior secondary; SMA = senior secondary; SMK = vocational secondary; KK = family card. Numpang KK means registering on another family's card to obtain a closer address; titipan means pupils placed through personal recommendation.

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The second pattern is maldistribution. West Java's education office said that 128 of 627 sub-districts had no public senior secondary school, and 16 of those had no school of any kind, even though statewide capacity was about 103 per cent of junior secondary graduates (Antara, 2024). The aggregate looked adequate. The geography did not. A rule that treats the province as one pool would have found enough seats, while a rule tied to residence found none for children in the 128 sub-districts. The Surakarta mayor made a related complaint in 2019, that children from Pasar Kliwon were being placed in a school in Mojolaban, outside the city (Bisnis.com, 2019). The education minister responded that zoning had exposed regions where education had not yet been provided as a basic public service (Antara Jateng, 2019). That remark is one of the few places where the state itself describes the problem in the terms used here.

The third pattern is manipulation of the residence proof. Ombudsman South Sulawesi found 99 problematic records among 720 children admitted by zoning to four state senior secondary schools in Makassar, through letters from local officials, newly issued family cards and edited cards (detikSulsel, 2023). Under SPMB, the Yogyakarta office of the Ombudsman confirmed three *numpang KK* cases at senior secondary level in 2026 (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia Perwakilan DIY, 2026). We read this pattern as indirect evidence for the argument. When residence is the price of entry to a better-supplied school, families who can do so will buy the address, and the families who cannot will not. Manipulation is a consequence of a scarce good rationed by a proof that can be moved, and tighter verification treats the symptom.

The fourth pattern is the counter-case, and the article would be weaker without it. In Bengkulu City, 13 public junior secondary schools were short of pupils in 2024. One of them, SMPN 9, had targeted 165 pupils and had 93 re-registrations, and its principal tied the shortage to zoning and to parents' preference for private schools (Antara Bengkulu, 2024). Here seats exist but the children are elsewhere. A rule that leaves seats empty in one place and children without seats in another is hard to describe as efficient or just, and the Bengkulu case warns against assuming that every region has a shortage. A further case,

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Malang, is supported only by a single-author preprint, which reports that public senior secondary schools cluster in one central district and that zoning was laid over existing capacity (Hurain, 2026). It gives no figures, so we do not use it as evidence of scale.

The peer-reviewed studies are consistent with these patterns. Sulistyosari et al. (2023) and Susanto et al. (2024) describe seat shortages and the shrinking public presence of poor children, and Widiharjanti et al. (2026) describe rural schools receiving pupils without matching resources. Bulkani et al. (2023) found no difference in grades by admission path. Together these studies point the argument toward access and the distribution of opportunity, and away from any claim that zoning lowers learning. Two caveats apply. The Indonesian studies are qualitative or descriptive, and we found no causal study of zoning and no national count of sub-districts without a public school. The claims in this section are therefore claims about documented places, not about the country.

3. Reading the rule through three theories of justice

Table 3 sets the three questions from Section 2.4 against what the regulation provides and what the evidence shows.

Table 3. The supply-sensitivity test applied to zoning and the domicile track

Lens	Test question	What the rule provides	What the evidence shows
Aristotle and Hart	Is residence a relevant criterion in every zone?	One residence test and one quota table for all regions	Seats within reach vary from none to a surplus; the rule ignores that difference
Rawls and Sen	What happens to the worst-placed children, and is their opportunity real?	Affirmation quotas for qualifying applicants; fee ban	Children in school-poor zones pay private fees, travel, or move; families with means buy an address
Radbruch and Rahardjo	Does certainty outweigh effects, and is there a route for correction?	Objective criteria; regional discretion over zones; no supply trigger	Objectivity improves on score-based selection; correction depends on regional budgets and goodwill

Note. Authors' analysis.

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On proportion, residence is a sensible criterion when the aim is to spread access across neighbourhoods, and it is more objective than selection by test score, which favoured schools already favoured. The difficulty is not the criterion but the assumption beneath it, that each zone offers comparable seats. Where seats within reach run from none to a surplus, the same ruler measures different positions, and treating those positions identically is the failure Aristotle and Hart describe.

On position, the children worst placed are those who live where no public school is near, and the evidence shows how the rule moves the cost of adjustment onto their families. Some pay private fees, which is why Jakarta now pays them instead. Some travel. Some move or borrow an address, and the Makassar and Yogyakarta findings suggest that this route favours families with the means and contacts to use it. Affirmation quotas help individual applicants who qualify, but they add no seat where none exists. In Sen's terms, the child in a school-poor zone has the same procedural right and a narrower set of real options.

On balance, the objectivity of a residence rule is a real gain, and Radbruch's weight on legal certainty counts in its favour. The weighing changes when certainty is bought at the cost of the children who have no school to be placed in, and when the legal system offers no obvious route to correction. The Constitutional Court's apparent treatment of the problem as one of implementation (Tirto, 2023) is consistent with Rahardjo's warning. A rule can be valid, and its defenders can be right that the fault lies elsewhere, while the children still end up without a seat. We do not say the rule reaches Radbruch's threshold of intolerable injustice. We say that the rule's justice cannot be read off its text, because it depends on a supply the text neither measures nor guarantees.

4. Comparative evidence: the rule is not the whole story

International research supplies a mechanism and a caution. Catchment boundaries are capitalised into house prices (Black, 1999; Gibbons et al., 2013), so access to a good school is partly bought through the housing market. In England, children from poorer families

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were less likely to reach good schools than richer children even after controlling for street-level location (Burgess & Briggs, 2010), and differences in the schools that families choose reflect the schools they can reach more than differences in taste (Burgess et al., 2015). Indonesia has no comparable study of house-price capitalisation that we could find, so this chain of reasoning is an analogy and nothing more.

The same literature argues against blaming the residence rule alone. When Seoul moved away from fixed assignment, high-school sorting increased (Oh & Sohn, 2021). Korea's earlier residence-based equalisation policy is reported to have reduced between-school separation by family background (Byun et al., 2012). In Dutch cities, residential geography drives much of school segregation even under free parental choice (Boterman, 2019), and a German study of primary-school catchment areas asked whether they matter much for ethnic segregation (Makles & Schneider, 2015). Taken together, these studies suggest that dropping zones would not restore justice. A residence rule is not unjust in itself. It becomes unjust where supply is unequal and unmonitored, and where nothing obliges the authority that draws the zone to correct the shortfall. That is a conditional claim, and it is the one the evidence in this article can support.

5. The domicile track: continuity more than change

The 2025 regulation changes the label, some mechanics and some risks. The one-year KK rule is intended to reduce manipulation of residence documents. The fee ban and the transparency principles respond to complaints that admission had become a market. Regional governments keep the power to set admission areas, which leaves room for flexibility that suits local conditions and fits the proportional idea of justice. For senior secondary domicile seats, ranking begins with academic ability under Article 43(3), a term the regulation leaves undefined, according to a regional Ombudsman commentary (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, n.d.). That sits uneasily with a track that is meant to be about residence.

The regulation does not change the uniform rule over unequal supply. It still contains no test of whether a zone has seats within reach,

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and no duty attaching to a zone that fails such a test. The one-year KK requirement may also burden families who have recently moved for work or because of eviction, since the listed exceptions are narrow. The first admission cycles under the new regulation show the same issues as before. Ombudsman RI's report on SPMB 2025 recorded blank-spot areas, undisclosed capacity, older KK and poverty certificates still being accepted, extra classes, *titipan* pupils and informal fees (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, 2025). Yogyakarta confirmed *numpang KK* cases in 2026 (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia Perwakilan DIY, 2026). In Jakarta the response to a persistent seat gap was to pay private schools to take children (Antara, 2026; CNN Indonesia, 2026), which supports the point that supply, not the label, is the working variable.

We do not have a national evaluation of the 2026 admission cycle, and the sources we found are regional or are press releases. Statements about the current year should be read with that in mind. What can be said is narrower: the domicile track keeps the structure that made zoning problematic, and nothing in the regulation text addresses that structure.

6. An illustration: one rule, two supply geographies

To show how supply geography alone can produce unequal outcomes under one rule, we built a small simulation. The city is a strip of three square districts, A, B and C, each with 500 children placed at random. There are 15 schools of 80 seats each, so 1,200 seats for 1,500 children, which means a shortage of 20 per cent in total. In the first scenario the schools are distributed unequally, eight in A, five in B and two in C, giving 640, 400 and 160 seats. In the second scenario the same 15 schools are spread evenly, five per district, giving 400 seats in each. Children are in the same positions in both scenarios.

The admission rule is identical in both. Each child ranks the schools within a fixed eligibility radius by distance, and each school admits the closest applicants until its seats are full, with rejected children moving to their next choice (a deferred-acceptance procedure). A child with no school inside the radius, or who is crowded out by closer children, is left without a place. There is no manipulation, no private school, no preference for reputation and no difference in

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school quality. The radius is 0.40 district widths in the main run, and results were averaged over 500 random draws of child and school positions. Figure 1 shows one draw, and Table 4 gives the averages.

Under unequal supply, the same rule places 99.1 per cent of children in District A, 80.2 per cent in B and 35.1 per cent in C. When the same number of seats is spread evenly, placement is 79.2, 79.4 and 79.2 per cent, which is close to the 80 per cent ceiling set by the number of seats. Overall placement also rises, from 71.5 to 79.3 per cent, because most of District A's 140 surplus seats go unused while District C's children go without. The same pair appears in the record: shortage in Jakarta, unused seats in Bengkulu. The result holds when the radius changes. With a radius of 0.25, mean placement is 93.8, 72.8 and 33.3 per cent under unequal supply, and 71.6, 73.0 and 71.7 per cent after redistribution. With a radius of 0.55 the figures are 99.6, 82.1 and 35.1 per cent, and 79.7, 80.0 and 79.7 per cent.

The simulation has obvious limits. Children are spread evenly, schools are identical, there are no private schools and no preferences, and the districts are squares. It is not a model of Indonesian cities and should not be used to estimate real placement rates. Its purpose is narrower. It shows that a rule can be applied identically, without any wrongdoing, and still deliver sharply different outcomes, and that moving seats can reduce that gap without changing the rule at all. In effect, the difference between formal equality and substantive justice shows up as arithmetic.

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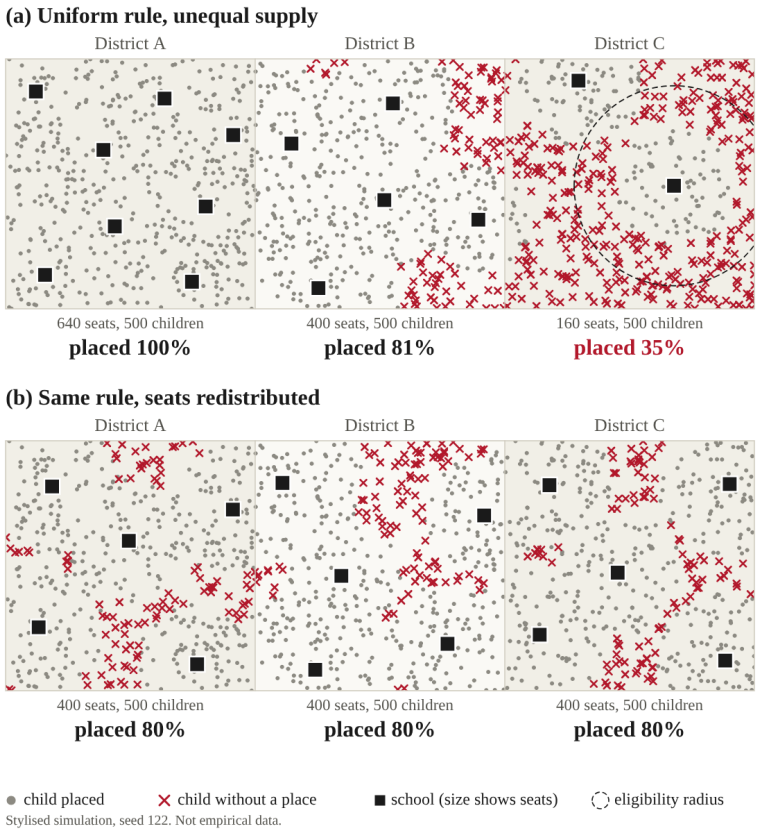


Figure 1. Stylised simulation of a uniform distance-priority admission rule under two supply geographies

Note. Seed 122, chosen because its results lie closest to the 500-draw averages. Grey dots are children placed in a school, red crosses are children without a place, black squares are schools sized by seats, and the dashed circle shows the eligibility radius. The simulation is illustrative and does not use empirical data. An interactive version is provided with the supplementary files.

Table 4. Simulated placement rates under one admission rule (percentage of children; mean and standard deviation over 500 draws)

District	Unequal supply: seats	Unequal supply: placed	Redistributed: seats	Redistributed: placed
A	640	99.1 (1.3)	400	79.2 (3.2)
B	400	80.2 (4.1)	400	79.4 (3.9)
C	160	35.1 (2.8)	400	79.2 (3.0)
All children	1,200	71.5	1,200	79.3

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Note. Eligibility radius 0.40 of a district width; 500 children per district; 80 seats per school. Standard deviations in parentheses.

7. Reconstructing the rule

The supply-sensitivity test suggests changes that attach to the zone and not only to the child. These are proposals by the authors, and each would need testing against local conditions.

First, a regional government should publish a seat-and-supply map, at sub-district level and covering public and eligible private schools, before it fixes the admission areas. Articles 24 to 27 of Regulation 3 of 2025 already ask regional governments to weigh distribution and capacity, and Ombudsman RI found that capacity was not always announced (Ombudsman Republik Indonesia, 2025). A published map would make that duty checkable. Second, the regulation could set a trigger. Where public seats within a zone fall below a stated share of the cohort, the regional government would owe one of several remedies: more public seats, public funding for private partner schools along the lines of Jakarta's free private school programme (Antara, 2026), a wider zone, or transport support. The duty would belong to the authority that draws the zone, which answers the third question in the test.

Third, where senior secondary education lies with the province and junior secondary with the district or city, the two levels should plan seats jointly. The Surakarta example shows how split authority limits what a city can do (Sejati, 2024). Fourth, affirmation should include a place-based element. Quotas for children from zones below the trigger would reach the children that status-based quotas miss. Fifth, verification should be proportionate. Exceptions to the one-year KK rule for documented relocation would spare families who moved for work or housing reasons, while published capacity and public admission lists would make manipulation easier to detect than document checks alone. Finally, a national dataset of seat coverage by sub-district would allow the causal studies that this article could not carry out.

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CONCLUSION

RQ1 asked why a uniform residence-based rule has not delivered educational justice where supply is unequal. The documented answer is that zoning is an allocation rule applied to whatever seats exist, and in the places where evidence is available the seats are short, badly distributed or unevenly used. Jakarta's public junior secondary schools can seat about 47 per cent of expected applicants. West Java has 128 sub-districts without a public senior secondary school. Families in Makassar and Yogyakarta have been found to move residence documents to reach a school. In Bengkulu, some public seats stand empty. The rule is equal on its face; the places it distributes are not.

RQ2 asked how theories of justice can be turned into a test. The supply-sensitivity test does this with three questions drawn from Aristotle and Hart, from Rawls and Sen, and from Radbruch and Rahardjo: is residence relevant in every zone, what happens to the worst-placed child, and does certainty outweigh effects without a route for correction. Applied to Regulation 3 of 2025, the test shows that the domicile track brings changes in transparency and verification but keeps the structure that made zoning problematic. A residence-based rule is substantively just only to the extent that seats within reach are adequate, published and monitored, and a duty to correct shortfalls attaches to the authority that draws the zone.

The study has limits that readers should keep in mind. Its evidence is documentary and regional, it has no national count of sub-districts without a public school, and its simulation is an illustration with simplified assumptions. It cannot say how widespread the patterns are or how much harm they cause. Future work can do three things. A fieldwork study in a province such as Bengkulu could combine school census data with seat counts to test whether the domicile track matches the actual distribution of schools. Causal evaluations could compare regions before and after changes in zone design or seat supply. And comparative legal studies could examine how other countries with residence-based assignment attach duties to supply. Until such work exists, the evidence supports a narrow but practical conclusion: a residence rule treats children equally only to the extent that the schools within their reach are equal, and a justice-minded admission system

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needs to measure that and be obliged to act on it. The practical implication for policymakers is immediate: a residence-based admission rule should not be adopted, or kept, without a parallel duty to monitor and correct seat supply within each zone.

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