



Participation of First-Time Voters in the 2024 Elections in Cirebon City

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the participation of first-time voters in the 2024 Elections in Cirebon City, where participation is considered suboptimal due to limited political understanding, apathy, and low trust in government institutions. Using a descriptive qualitative method with data collected through documentation, interviews, and direct observation, the research applies sociological, psychological, and rational choice theories by Dennis Kavanagh as its analytical framework. Findings show that first-time voter participation remains low, reflected in the still high number of invalid ballots, which indicates inadequate use of voting rights. The main factors influencing this condition include unequal socialization by the KPU, distrust toward political institutions, social media influence, and minimal political literacy. These results highlight the need for more targeted political education and effective outreach to improve youth participation in future elections.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that implements a democratic political system, and one form of democracy that has become a tradition in Indonesia is general elections. General elections, also known as "PEMILU," are one of the requirements often demanded by countries to establish a democratic government. Law Number 10 of 2008 concerning General Elections for Members of Regional Representative Councils. The implementation of general elections in Indonesia is regulated in Article 2 of Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning the General Election Law, which follows the principles of direct, public, free, and confidential elections, as well as upholding honesty and fairness. Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections. Every citizen between the ages of 17 and 21 or who has been married has the right to vote, provided they are registered in the Final Voters List (DPT) and are voting for the first time.

Their status is as students, university students, or young workers. Voters are both subjects and objects in political activities, including in the general election process. In other words, those who still need training to improve their potential and abilities in the future can participate in politics. As voters, individuals have specific goals they wish to achieve through their choice of a particular candidate. Therefore, it is important to understand voter behavior, especially the factors that influence how they vote. With sufficient experience in voter behavior, candidates and political parties will find it easier to develop strategies, determine approaches, and evaluate them.

Based on previous research by Wisnu Dani Prasetyo (2019) in the city of Surakarta, it was found that low voter turnout among first-time voters was due to a lack of political awareness and ineffective civic education. However, there has not been much research specifically discussing first-time voter participation in Cirebon City, even though the social, cultural, and educational characteristics of the people of Cirebon have their own uniqueness that can influence the political behavior of the younger generation. This gap is the research gap, namely the lack of empirical studies on first-time voter participation in Cirebon City. Furthermore, the urgency of this research lies in the importance of understanding how the political awareness and participation of the younger generation can be increased to strengthen the quality of local and national democracy. Therefore, this research is important to determine the level of first-time voter participation in the 2024 elections in Cirebon City, the factors that influence it, and the efforts that can be made to increase the political awareness of the younger generation.

The results of this study are expected to contribute scientifically to the development of political education and serve as evaluation material for the General Election Commission (KPU) and related institutions in increasing the participation of first-time voters in the future. First-time voters, especially students, are often actively involved in electing leaders in a region. Their behavior reflects the current level of democracy and also the future. Although the political situation in Indonesia is still unstable, first-time voters are still capable of being smart and critical voters in choosing leaders, because they can provide political insight and a democratic state that is truly running in accordance with the existing political infrastructure, as stated by (Suryana, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to determine how first-time voters in Cirebon City participate in the 2024 general election and everything that influences it. It is hoped that this study will provide benefits and scientific information for the development of politics and democracy through the implementation of elections in Cirebon City.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between political participation and democracy is closely related to the concepts of legitimacy and democracy. Political participation also includes political awareness and trust in the government. Legitimacy and democracy are closely related. Political participation, especially in a democracy, greatly determines the legitimacy of the government for the people. According to Firmansyah (Efriza, 2012: 480), voter behavior is defined as the efforts of candidates to persuade and influence all parties who are their main targets to support and ultimately vote for them. In this case, voters can be the general public or constituents. (NIKODEMUS, 2015)

According to Dennis Kavanagh (in Efriza, 2012: 482), his theory reveals three approaches to analyzing voter behavior in an election, namely:

1. Sociological Approach;
2. Psychological approach;
3. Rational approach.

Three main theories are used to understand the reasons behind voter absenteeism in general elections. First, sociological theory, which interprets voter disengagement as a result of their social conditions, such as religious background, education level, occupation, race, and other social factors. A person's decision to participate in an election can be influenced by considerations related to their type of work. Second, concepts from the field of psychology. How close a person is to a party or candidate competing in an election can have an impact on their decision to exercise their right to vote or not.

The closer a person is to a particular political party or candidate, the more likely they are to participate in the election. Third, the theory of rational economic-social choice explains that the decision not to vote is based on rational considerations, such as distrust of the system or political actors. This could be due to the belief that the election will not bring about positive change, or distrust of new leaders, and so on. According to Surbakti, assessing the voting behavior of citizens in general elections is a series of decision-making actions, such as whether to vote in an election or not.

Generally, voter behavior is a socio-political reality that is not influenced by external factors originating from the socialization of values in their environment. Meanwhile, internal factors originate from actions driven by rationality, which is formed through individual knowledge and experience. Various factors influence individuals in making political decisions. For example, it is not only based on political issues and policies, but there are also groups of voters who cast their votes for candidates who are considered to represent their religion or beliefs. On the other hand, some voters have different

considerations in determining the candidate they choose. Some voters choose certain candidates because they are considered to represent their social class, while others make their choice based on the candidate's personality.

In general, voting behavior is influenced by various key factors, such as the influence of political elites, understanding of the party system and social structure, the role of the mass media, and political orientation or affiliation.

1. Sociological Approach

This approach emphasizes that individual social characteristics, such as age (from old to young), gender (male or female), religion, and other social factors, play a role in shaping a person's voting behavior in elections.

2. Psychological Approach

Psychology is a field of study that examines human behavior and phenomena, which is why individuals influence the actions and activities of society. Politics is very similar to psychology because political science examines aspects of public behavior. This approach has been used in response to their complaints about the sociological approach. Systematically, the sociological approach is considered difficult to measure.

3. Rational Approach

Rational Choice Approach Previously, voters had two approaches in a space-time continuum, either implicitly or explicitly. In this regard, voters have two approaches in a space-time continuum, either implicitly or explicitly. If this approach assumes that voter actions are decisions made long before the campaign is launched, rather than decisions made at the time or after voting. Sociological characteristics, family background, cultural sector, togetherness through the socialization process, and life experiences are variables that individually influence your own political behavior.

METHODOLOGY

The city of Cirebon is preparing for the 2024 General Election, with a new group of voters ready to express their aspirations. Research examining the political participation of first-time voters in Cirebon reveals the reality on the ground through a qualitative approach. Investigations into political participation in legislative elections can be conducted using a qualitative approach. In qualitative methods, as explained by Moleong (2008), the data produced is descriptive in nature, in the form of written or spoken words from individuals who are the subjects of the investigation. This approach aims to capture the reality in the field directly through data collection techniques such as interviews, documentation, and observation.

Meanwhile, Whitney argues that descriptive investigation is an effort to find facts and provide appropriate interpretations in order to compile a systematic, factual, and accurate picture of the characteristics and relationships between the phenomena being studied. Qualitative investigation itself is based on a phenomenological paradigm, where objectivity is built through an understanding of specific situations relevant to the focus and objectives of the research. (Arniti, 2020) This study does not only seek cause-and-effect relationships, but also delves into the situation of political participation among young people in the city of Cirebon. Unlike quantitative research, which focuses

on numbers and statistics, this qualitative research is like a lens that captures reality in detail and rich in meaning. The main objective of this study is to provide an objective picture of the state of political participation among young people in Cirebon. The results obtained are not formulas or generalizations, but narratives that describe the experiences, motivations, and obstacles faced by young voters in the democratic process.

Qualitative data was collected through various methods, such as in-depth interviews with young voters, direct observation in the field, and analysis of relevant documents. The data was then carefully interpreted to produce a deep understanding of the phenomenon of political participation among young people in Cirebon. The research was conducted continuously, with data analysis continuing until saturation point was reached. This ensures that the research results truly reflect the reality in the field. More than just statistical data, this research is expected to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of youth political participation in Cirebon. The results can serve as a basis for various parties, such as the government, election organizers, and civil society organizations, to formulate appropriate policies and programs to increase the political participation of the younger generation in the future.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The political participation of first-time voters is a tangible manifestation of democracy, in which citizens have the opportunity to be directly involved in the general election process. Through this participation, the public plays an important role in determining the public officials who will lead the government and set policy directions. In general, political participation reflects an individual's desire to contribute to political life, whether through exercising their right to vote, involvement in organizations, discussing political issues, or participating in various social movements. This form of participation can also take the form of involvement in political parties or independent organizations, political education campaigns, dissemination of information, and community service in accordance with each individual's capacity. According to Firmansyah (Efriza, 2012; 480), individuals can participate directly in political activities through (1) a sociological approach, (2) a psychological approach, or (3) a rational approach. Due to the views mentioned above, this long-established participation has become a reality. It has succeeded in creating a democratic system where various individuals can contribute. The general public contributes peacefully and calmly to the political decision-making process

Sociological Approach

This sociological approach focuses more on voter behavior patterns that take into account the close relationship between voters and more dominant socio-structural aspects, which include religious status, economic status, ethnicity, and region of residence.

Psychological Approach

In the psychological approach, the main focus is on the process of individual identification with political parties, which influences their political attitudes and behavior. This identification then influences voters' attitudes in determining their choice of candidates and in responding to various political issues that arise. A person's attitude often reflects their personality, and this greatly influences how they participate in politics. Therefore, the psychological approach highlights three main elements in voter behavior, namely emotional attachment to political parties, attitudes or orientations towards certain issues, and perceptions or orientations towards competing candidates. A person tends to choose a particular party or figure because they are influenced by psychological factors that are formed through the socialization process they have experienced. These political choices reflect individual behavior, which is basically a reflection of their personality and helps determine their tendency to make political decisions.

Rational Approach

This approach views voting as the result of rational individual consideration, based on calculations of the potential benefits and losses. Findings related to this approach show that many first-time voters in the 2024 election based their choice on candidates by weighing the pros and cons. The indicators they used were based on information they obtained from the candidates' visions and missions. This means that they watched or listened to the candidates' debates on television and social media. The consideration of gains and losses is divided into collective gains and personal gains. These two forms of gain are closely intertwined and are used as material for consideration when voting for a candidate pair. This view emphasizes that true democracy requires open space for participation, as our democratic system is built on the basis of direct democracy, which allows the people to make political decisions directly without representation.

Based on data from the General Election Commission (KPU) of Cirebon City, first-time voters under the age of 17 are not yet eligible to vote in the 2024 elections. Meanwhile, the number of voters in the 17-20 age group reached 25,579 people, followed by 57,291 voters aged 21-30, 50,782 people aged 31-40 years old, 51,427 people aged 41-50 years old, 37,229 people aged 51-60 years old, 22,675 people aged 61-70 years old, and 10,398 people over 70 years old. Overall, the total number of Permanent Voter Lists (DPT) in Cirebon City is 252,385 voters. Meanwhile, the table data for first-time voters who have just voted in the 2024 Cirebon City general election for the 17-21 age category is as follows: KPU First-Time Voter Data Table 2024 in Cirebon City:

Table 1. DPT First-Time Voters KPU Cirebon City

No.	Subdistrict	Number of Districts	Number of Polling Stations	Age Category 17-21 Years Old		
				M	F	M + F
		22	1.026			
1.	Kejaksan	4	147	1.661	1.581	3.242
2.	Lemah Wungkuk	4	180	1.949	1.819	3.768
3.	Harjamukti	5	366	3.941	3.711	7.652
4.	Pekalipan	4	94	958	851	1.809
5.	Kesambi	5	239	2.520	2.417	4.397
Total				11.029	10.379	21.408

Overall, the total number of Permanent Voters (DPT) in Cirebon City for the 2024 elections is 252,385 voters. Of this total, there are 21,408 first-time voters who are exercising their right to vote for the first time and are between the ages of 17 and 21. Although they do not represent as large a percentage as other productive age groups, first-time voters play a strategic role because they are a new generation that is beginning to engage in the democratic process. The presence of first-time voters is important because it can reflect the political participation patterns of the younger generation and demonstrate the great potential for improving the quality of democracy through political education and raising awareness of participation from an early age. Thus, first-time voters are a group that needs special attention in efforts to increase political participation in the city of Cirebon.

Factors Hindering First-Time Voter Participation in the 2024 Elections

The results of this study show that voter participation in the 2024 elections in Cirebon City is considered suboptimal when viewed from the results of the election, as there are still a significant number of invalid votes, a lack of equitable socialization by the KPU, the influence of social media, apathy, and a lack of political understanding. First-time voters also lack knowledge about the background of the candidates they will vote for, such as their vision and mission and their track record. Social media also influences first-time voters because there is a lot of news on social media saying that the candidates are only seeking votes and do not keep their promises, so first-time voters believe and are influenced not to vote because it is a waste of time, and first-time voters prefer to stay at home and play on social media rather than having to leave the house to vote at the polling station.

Efforts Made to Increase Voter Turnout Among First-Time Voters in the 2024 Elections in Cirebon City

The results of the observation show that many participants experienced problems that prevented them from exercising their right to vote. One of these

problems was that many first-time voters did not research the background and track record of the candidates they were voting for. To increase the participation of first-time voters in the 2024 elections in Cirebon City, the KPU held socialization and education events at campuses, schools, universities, and community centers, as well as holding frequent and repeated events. The outreach took various forms, such as seminars, interviews, public discussions, jingle competitions, and mascot competitions. The KPU in Cirebon City has been actively conducting outreach on various social media platforms, such as Instagram and TikTok.

The KPU advises first-time voters to follow the official KPU Instagram and TikTok accounts. This is because the KPU disseminates real and relevant information on these social media platforms, rather than having to trust other social media accounts whose information is not real or relevant. To provide political education from an early age, they teach how to vote and introduce the ballot paper. This provides the knowledge and skills necessary for first-time voters to participate in elections.

This also increases motivation to contribute when individuals feel capable and ready. By providing political education from an early age, the Cirebon KPU equips first-time voters with the knowledge and skills that boost their confidence to participate. This is in line with Davis Keith's theory, which states that motivation to contribute is key to increasing participation. When first-time voters feel ready and understand the election process, they are more motivated to get involved (Lestari et al., 2023).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aims to provide an objective picture of political participation among first-time voters in Cirebon City and to reveal the factors that influence such participation. In the 2024 elections, young people, especially Generation Z and Millennials, will play an important role. The total number of registered voters in Cirebon City for the 2024 elections is 252,385. Of this number, there are 21,408 first-time voters (aged 17-21) who will be exercising their right to vote for the first time. Although small in percentage, this group of first-time voters has a strategic role because they are a new generation directly involved in the democratic process. Their presence is very important because it can show the pattern of political participation of the younger generation and has great potential to improve the quality of democracy through early political education. Therefore, first-time voters in Cirebon City are a group that needs special attention in efforts to increase political participation.

This study also notes the efforts of the Cirebon City KPU in overcoming barriers to first-time voter participation. The KPU uses social media, especially TikTok, to disseminate information effectively and attract the attention of first-time voters. The KPU also conducts outreach at universities and schools to provide early political education, which is expected to increase the readiness and motivation of first-time voters. This research provides valuable insights into the political participation of first-time voters in Cirebon City and can serve as a foundation for policies and programs to increase the political participation of the

younger generation in the future. The KPU's efforts to reach young voters through digital platforms and political education demonstrate effective adaptation to changing times and the needs of young voters.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future advanced research on first-time voter participation in Cirebon City should integrate mixed-methods analysis and digital behavioral tracking to explore the deeper psychological, sociocultural, and algorithmic determinants that shape youth political engagement. Beyond conventional survey-based approaches, future studies could incorporate sentiment analysis of TikTok and other social media contents, machine-learning models to predict participation likelihood, and ethnographic digital observations to capture how online political narratives influence voter readiness. Comparative studies across different cities and generational cohorts would also help identify contextual variables—such as local governance performance, peer-network influence, political socialization in educational institutions, and trust in electoral bodies—that interact to shape participation patterns. These advanced methodologies would allow a more comprehensive, data-driven understanding of how digital ecosystems, institutional outreach, and youth identity formation converge to influence the political participation of first-time voters, thereby strengthening the design of more targeted and adaptive electoral engagement strategies in Indonesia.

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