



Challenges of Inclusive Elections: Obstacles and Efforts to Protect the Voting Rights of the Meratus Dayak Indigenous Community

Muhammad Al Ghifari^{1*}, Galang Bayu Pradana², Yuan Laorens Paragaye³

Institut Pemerintahan Dalam Negeri

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Al Ghifari malghifari08082001@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive elections are the foundation of democracy that prioritizes the participation of all citizens, including indigenous peoples. This paper explores the challenges faced by the Dayak Meratus indigenous people, such as low literacy, limited access to information, geographical barriers, and minimal political representation, which hinder their participation in elections. Using a qualitative descriptive method based on literature studies, this study finds that these obstacles can be overcome through a local wisdom-based approach, strengthening communication infrastructure, and cross-sector collaboration between the government, NGOs, and indigenous communities. This approach not only increases political awareness but also guarantees the voting rights of indigenous peoples, thus creating inclusive and fair elections. This paper highlights the importance of adaptive strategies to ensure democracy is accessible to all elements of society, especially those in remote areas with limited education and information

INTRODUCTION

General elections (elections) are one of the main pillars in a democratic system that guarantees the rights of citizens to vote and be elected. However, in its implementation, elections often face various challenges, especially in reaching indigenous communities that have limited access to information and education. One group that faces significant challenges in this context is the Dayak Meratus indigenous community in South Kalimantan. As a community that is traditionally illiterate, limited reading and writing skills are a serious obstacle to understanding the election process and participating effectively in choosing leaders who represent their interests.

The Dayak Meratus indigenous community has a wealth of culture and traditions that have been passed down from generation to generation. However, limited access to formal education and remote geographic location make them vulnerable to marginalization in the political process. In the context of elections, ignorance about voting procedures, lack of understanding about candidates or political parties, and minimal information delivered in a language or manner that can be understood by this community often lead to low participation. This not only impacts their political rights, but also widens the gap in political representation of indigenous communities.

This challenge is made even more complex because the Dayak Meratus indigenous community generally relies on oral communication systems and local culture as a means of conveying information. Meanwhile, most election information is delivered through print or electronic media that do not reach their areas. The incompatibility between modern communication methods and indigenous traditions is one of the main factors that makes it difficult to deliver political information effectively. As a result, many of them feel insecure about exercising their right to vote or do not even know that they have that right.

In order to overcome these obstacles, the government and related parties have made various efforts to increase indigenous peoples' participation in elections. Political literacy programs, local volunteer training, and door-to-door campaigns are some of the initiatives that have been implemented. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is often limited by minimal budget, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of in-depth understanding of the unique needs of indigenous peoples. In addition, a top-down approach often ignores local wisdom that should be the basis for developing an inclusive strategy.

The importance of guaranteeing indigenous peoples' voting rights is not only related to legal or political aspects, but also concerns social and moral dimensions. Inclusive political participation reflects respect for diversity and equality in democracy. By providing better access to the Dayak Meratus indigenous people to understand and participate in elections, we not only protect their rights but also strengthen the legitimacy of the democratic system in Indonesia. Therefore, more innovative and inclusive solutions are needed to ensure that every citizen, without exception, can contribute to determining the future of the nation.

This journal aims to examine the obstacles faced by the Dayak Meratus indigenous community in the election and the efforts that have been made to overcome them. In addition, this study also attempts to provide an overview of

the importance of political literacy and voting rights for indigenous communities in similar situations. Thus, this journal is expected to be a reference for the government, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to formulate more inclusive policies and strategies in the implementation of the upcoming election.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Inclusive elections are a concept that emphasizes the participation of all elements of society without exception, including vulnerable groups such as indigenous communities. Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning Elections in Indonesia emphasizes the importance of elections that guarantee equal voting rights for every citizen. However, many challenges still occur, especially for indigenous communities who have limited access to education, information, and infrastructure (Suryani, 2020). In this context, the Dayak Meratus indigenous community is one of the groups that faces various structural and cultural obstacles. Limited reading and writing skills among indigenous communities are often caused by minimal access to formal education. According to UNESCO (2019), functional literacy is one of the main challenges in remote areas.

This is exacerbated by the delivery of election information which is often only available in text format or electronic media. A study by Wardhani (2021) shows that indigenous peoples find it easier to understand information delivered verbally or through visual media that is in accordance with local culture. In addition, the political representation of indigenous peoples is still relatively low. This is due to the lack of attention to their unique needs in the election process. A report by the KPU (2022) stated that areas with indigenous populations tend to have lower participation rates than other areas. One of the main causes is the lack of political campaigns specifically designed to reach this group.

Various efforts have been made to improve the political literacy of indigenous peoples. Non-formal education and training programs by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have helped several communities understand their rights and obligations in elections (Setiawan, 2018). However, its effectiveness is still limited by geographical and budget factors. Research by Aditama (2019) suggests that a local wisdom-based approach, such as using local languages and involving traditional leaders, can significantly increase political awareness.

In addition, the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation is one of the highlights in the literature. The government, NGOs, and local media have a strategic role in building political awareness of indigenous peoples. This approach can reduce the gap in political representation while increasing the legitimacy of the democratic system. Thus, the existing literature emphasizes the importance of an inclusive strategy that considers the specific needs of indigenous peoples such as the Dayak Meratus in the implementation of elections.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature study method to examine the challenges and efforts to protect the voting rights of the Dayak Meratus indigenous people in the election. The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to provide an in-depth picture of the phenomena that occurred, especially related to the constraints of political literacy, access to information, and representation of indigenous peoples in the election process. The data used comes from various secondary sources, such as scientific journals, official government reports, documents from the General Election Commission (KPU), and publications of relevant civil society organizations. This approach aims to analyze and understand the social, cultural, and political contexts that influence indigenous peoples' participation in elections.

The data collection process was carried out using literature review techniques that included searching, selecting, and analyzing relevant literature. Data analysis was carried out thematically to identify key patterns in the challenges faced by the Dayak Meratus indigenous community, including aspects of literacy and structural barriers. In addition, this study also explored various efforts that have been made by the government and related parties to increase the inclusiveness of elections. This approach allows researchers to provide literature-based recommendations that can be practically applied in supporting the political rights of indigenous peoples.

DISCUSSION

Constraints in Guaranteeing the Voting Rights of the Dayak Meratus Indigenous Community

Indigenous people's participation in elections faces interrelated structural and cultural challenges, especially among the Dayak Meratus community. One of the main obstacles is the low level of literacy among indigenous peoples. Ignorance of election procedures, lack of information about candidates and political parties, and limited access to formal education are significant obstacles. In this context, the Dayak Meratus community, most of whom are illiterate, rely on oral traditions as the main way to obtain information. Unfortunately, the campaign methods and election socialization used by the government and political parties are often not tailored to their needs, resulting in a low level of understanding of the election process.

In addition, geographical challenges exacerbate this condition. Most Dayak Meratus communities live in remote areas that are difficult to reach with modern transportation. This results in a lack of election officials to provide direct guidance on election procedures. Information media, such as television or the internet, are also difficult to access due to limited infrastructure. As a result, indigenous people often do not receive adequate information about voting times and locations, or even their right to participate in elections.

Another factor that is an obstacle is the lack of cultural support and trust in the political system. In many cases, indigenous people feel that elections are an outsider's business that is not relevant to their daily lives. This attitude is reinforced by past experiences where their needs and aspirations were often ignored by political leaders. Indigenous people's representation in government is also very minimal, resulting in apathy towards the election process.

The government's limited resources in reaching indigenous peoples also exacerbate this situation. Election socialization usually only focuses on urban areas or areas that are more easily accessible. In fact, the diversity of cultures and languages in Indonesia requires a more inclusive and adaptive approach. In many cases, no election materials are translated into local languages or delivered in a manner that is in accordance with the traditions of indigenous peoples. This makes indigenous peoples even more marginalized in the political process.

Inclusive Efforts to Increase Indigenous Peoples' Participation

Overcoming these challenges requires a holistic and inclusive approach. One step that can be taken is to strengthen the political literacy of indigenous peoples through non-formal education programs. This approach can be done by involving indigenous figures and local community leaders as facilitators. By using local languages and traditional communication methods, indigenous peoples can more easily understand the importance of elections and their right to vote. The involvement of indigenous figures can also help build public trust in the political system.

Another effort that can be made is to strengthen communication and transportation infrastructure in remote areas. The government can work with the private sector to provide better internet access and communication networks. In addition, the use of simple technology, such as local language video or audio, can be an effective tool for conveying election information. In this way, geographical and technological constraints can be minimized, so that information can be more easily accessed by indigenous communities.

Election organizers also need to develop a socialization strategy based on local wisdom. For example, election campaigns can be carried out in the form of traditional art performances or folklore that are familiar to indigenous peoples. This approach not only makes information easier to understand, but also shows respect for local culture. In addition, election materials need to be simplified so that they are more relevant and in accordance with the context of indigenous peoples' lives. The role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society organizations is also very important in encouraging inclusive elections. NGOs can function as a bridge between the government and indigenous peoples, helping to convey their aspirations and providing training for local volunteers.

These volunteers can later act as companions for indigenous peoples in understanding the election process and ensuring that their participation runs smoothly. No less important, the government must increase the involvement of indigenous peoples in the political decision-making process. One way is to provide space for indigenous peoples' representatives in government institutions. With better representation, the needs and aspirations of indigenous peoples can be better considered, thereby encouraging their trust in the political system. Finally, strengthening regulations is also needed to ensure inclusive elections.

For example, the government can establish regulations that require election organizers to provide materials and socialization in local languages. In addition, there needs to be adequate budget allocation to support inclusive

programs, especially those aimed at indigenous communities in remote areas. These efforts are expected to not only increase the participation of the Dayak Meratus indigenous community in the election, but also have a positive impact on other indigenous groups in Indonesia. By guaranteeing the political rights of all citizens, regardless of cultural or geographic background, Indonesia can realize a more inclusive and equitable democracy.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive elections are one of the pillars of democracy that guarantee the participation of all elements of society without discrimination, including indigenous communities such as the Dayak Meratus. However, significant challenges, such as low literacy, limited access to information, geographic barriers, and minimal political representation, remain major obstacles. To overcome this, a holistic approach based on local wisdom is needed, such as involving indigenous leaders, using traditional media, and strengthening communication infrastructure. In addition, collaboration between the government, NGOs, and local communities is essential to improving political literacy and building trust in the election system. Thus, the inclusiveness of the election not only guarantees the voting rights of the Dayak Meratus indigenous people, but also strengthens the legitimacy of democracy in Indonesia as a whole.

FURTHER STUDY

This study examines the factors that influence Dayak Meratus indigenous people participation in general elections, such as low literacy, limited access to information, geographical barriers, and minimal political representation, which hinder their participation in elections. However, there are several aspects that require further research such as, the role of social media affects voter preferences and turnout patterns, young voters who have unique characteristic and behavior patterns, external factors such as changes in foreign policy and geographical coverage to understand the differences between rural and urban areas or between provinces in the conduct of elections.

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