

Political Education for First-Time Voters: Efforts to Increase Active Participation in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections

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Abstract. *Elections are a fundamental instrument in a modern democratic system, reflecting the sovereignty of the people. Active public participation in elections is a benchmark for the success of democracy, and the quality of participation of first-time voters is crucial for the future of Indonesian democracy. This study aims to improve political understanding and active participation of first-time voters in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections. The method used was a participatory approach with the stages of problem identification, socialization, political education, interactive workshops, and evaluation and reflection. The results showed a significant increase in participants' political knowledge, with more than 80% of participants able to explain the electoral system and the role of first-time voters in democracy. Furthermore, there was a change in participants' attitudes from initially apathetic towards politics to more open and motivated to actively participate in the elections. Critical thinking and political issue analysis skills also improved, with participants able to identify hoaxes and rationally evaluate political promises. Participants' readiness to participate in the 2029 Elections also increased, with 85% stating their readiness not to abstain from voting and to participate responsibly. In conclusion, the political education provided successfully strengthened the capacity of first-time voters in facing the 2029 Simultaneous Elections and contributed to improving the quality of Indonesian democracy.*

Keywords: *Political Education, First-Time Voters, Democratic Participation, 2029 Election, Critical Thinking Skills*

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INTRODUCTION

General elections (pemilu) are a fundamental instrument in a modern democratic system. Elections are not only interpreted as a means of periodic leadership change, but also as a mechanism for realizing popular sovereignty in accordance with the mandate of the constitution (Hudhaibi, 2023; Silalahi & Tampubolon, 2021; Muhtamar & Bachmid, 2022). Active public participation in elections is a crucial benchmark for the success of democracy. Rothstein (2009) and Jin (2013) said that, the higher the quality of public participation, the greater the legitimacy of the elected government.

Indonesia, as the world's third-largest democracy, continues to strive to maintain and improve the quality of democracy by holding direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair elections (Kovusov t al., 2023; Nurdin & Yakoopb, 2016). Since the 1998 reforms, public political participation has tended to increase, but significant challenges remain, particularly from first-time voters. First-time voters are a group of people exercising their right to vote in an election for

the first time. This group generally consists of young people, namely high school/vocational school students, university students, and youth aged 17–21.

Quantitatively, first-time voters play a strategic role. KPU data shows that in every election period, the percentage of first-time voters is significant. In the 2024 General Election, the proportion of young voters (Generation Z and millennials) reached more than 50% of the total registered voters. Given this demographic trend, the number of first-time voters in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections is expected to continue to increase, making their votes crucial for determining the direction of political policy and national development. In other words, the future of Indonesian democracy is largely determined by the quality of participation of the younger generation (Djumadin, 2021; Naharuddin et al., 2025; Ridhoh, 2025).

However, on the ground, new voters often face several challenges. First, low political literacy, which prevents most new voters from fully understanding the electoral system, political rights and obligations, and the importance of their vote in determining the nation's future. Second, they are vulnerable to practical political influences, such as money politics, smear campaigns, and the increasingly widespread spread of hoaxes through social media. Third, there is the tendency for apathy and abstention from voting, stemming from distrust of political elites and state institutions. Fourth, there is limited access to formal political education, which should provide the younger generation with an understanding of democracy.

If these issues are not addressed immediately, the 2029 General Election could potentially be marred by low levels of political participation among young people. Therefore, political education for first-time voters is a strategic step to equip them with political knowledge, skills, and awareness. Political education is expected to foster critical thinking, strengthen a sense of responsibility, and foster a spirit of active involvement in the democratic process (Santika & Tripayana, 2025; Timidi & Okuro, 2024; Bukhari et al., 2024).

Political education is also relevant to the current socio-political climate, characterized by the rapid flow of digital information (Huang, 2024; Chen, 2024; Ali et al., 2021). As active users of social media, the younger generation is often more susceptible to disinformation or political propaganda, which can influence their political choices. With appropriate political education, first-time voters are expected to be able to sort through information, analyze public issues, and reject all forms of political manipulation (Latief & Tripuspita, 2024; Sa'adawisna & Putra, 2023).

This community service activity aims to provide targeted, participatory political education tailored to the needs of first-time voters. Kay et al. (2019) said that, the approach used is not simply a one-way lecture, but also involves simulations, discussions, and critical reflection. Thus, this program is expected to develop a young generation that not only attends polling stations but also has a sound understanding in making political choices.

Ultimately, political education for first-time voters is not merely an effort to increase turnout but also improves the quality of Indonesian democracy (Riyanti & Prasetyo, 2023; Ananda & Gistituati, 2020; Akbar et al., 2024). With smart, critical, and responsible first-time voters, the 2029 Simultaneous Elections are expected to produce a government that is more legitimate, democratic, and on the side of the people's interests.

METHODS

This community service implementation method uses a participatory approach through several stages:

Problem Identification

Identifying the level of political understanding of first-time voters (high school/vocational high school students and new college students) in the target area through short interviews and group discussions.

Socialization and Education

Providing material on the importance of elections, the rights and obligations of citizens, the electoral system in Indonesia, and the role of first-time voters in maintaining the quality of democracy.

Interactive Workshop

Using election simulations, role-playing, and group discussions to train critical thinking skills, understand public issues, and avoid money politics and hoaxes.

Evaluation and Reflection

Measuring participant understanding through pre- and post-activity questionnaires and providing a space for reflection to determine changes in participants' attitudes and perceptions regarding political participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service program, themed "Political Education for First-Time Voters: Efforts to Increase Active Participation in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections," yielded several important findings relevant to the program's objectives. Students from SMA 2 Baubau and first-semester university students participated in the program, representing first-time voters. During the program, participants gained not only theoretical knowledge but also practical experience through simulations and interactive discussions that provided a space for critical reflection on political realities.

Overall, the results of the program demonstrated significant improvements in participants' political knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Participants who initially tended to be passive, lacking a clear understanding of the electoral system, and skeptical of politics began to show enthusiasm for active involvement. This change in attitude was evident after participating in educational sessions, workshops, and election simulations. To understand the results of the political education program for first-time voters, as part of efforts to increase active participation in the 2029 simultaneous elections, the following explanation is provided.

Increase Political Knowledge

Prior to the program, pre-test results indicated that the majority of participants had a limited understanding of basic political concepts, the Indonesian electoral system, and the important role of voters in democracy. Most participants only understood that elections were about "choosing a president," without understanding the broader mechanisms, principles, or objectives. Through outreach sessions, material presentations, and interactive discussions, participants gained new knowledge about the importance of elections as a means of popular sovereignty, the institutional structure of election organizers, and the rights and obligations of citizens. Post-test results showed significant improvement: more than 80% of participants were able to re-explain the electoral system, election principles, and the strategic role of first-time voters in maintaining the quality of democracy.

This increase in political knowledge was the first significant achievement of this community service activity. Prior to the program, the majority of participants had a limited understanding of basic political and democratic concepts. This was evident in the pre-test results, which showed that only around 40% of participants were able to correctly answer questions related to election principles, election organizers, and the Indonesian electoral system. Most participants only know that elections are "an event to elect a president or people's representatives," without understanding the more fundamental meaning, such as the role of elections in ensuring the circulation of power and the legitimacy of government.



Figure 1. Students Answer Questions About the Concept of Democracy and Political Principles

This political education activity began with a socialization session and interactive lecture on the importance of elections in Indonesia's democratic system. The material was presented in simple language, accompanied by actual case examples to make it easier for the younger generation to understand. Next, participants were invited to discuss in small groups questions about voting rights, election principles, and the challenges facing young people in the 2029 elections. These discussions encouraged participants to actively express their opinions and compare their experiences with the theories presented. This finding aligns with the theory of Almond & Verba (1963), which states that political education can broaden citizens' horizons, thus creating a more participatory political culture. Thus, increased political knowledge provides the foundation for first-time voters to participate intelligently in the 2029 elections.

Changes in Attitudes Towards Elections and Democracy

In addition to increased knowledge, one indicator of the success of this political education activity is a change in participants' attitudes toward elections and democracy. Political attitudes are crucial because they form the basis of one's behavior in determining choices and engaging in political life. Prior to the activity, brief interviews revealed that most participants still harbored apathy toward politics. They tended to view elections as merely a meaningless formal obligation, or even as an arena rife with conflict, fraud, and the vested interests of elites. This apathy aligns with the findings of several studies, which indicate that first-time voters are often skeptical of the political process due to a lack of experience and a lack of positive role models in political practice at the national and local levels. For example, one participant stated that "voting or not voting is the same, because all politicians just make promises without proof." If left unchecked, this view could potentially reduce youth participation in the 2029 Election.

This change in attitude was evident in post-activity reflections. Most participants stated they were more motivated to participate in the 2029 Election and did not intend to abstain from voting. They also expressed a firm rejection of money politics and hoaxes. For example, one participant said, "I used to think politics was boring, but now I realize that my vote can influence who will lead my region." This kind of testimony is concrete evidence of a positive change in attitude. However, after participating in a series of activities, a significant shift in attitude occurred. Through materials emphasizing the importance of the younger generation's role in democracy, participants began to realize that their votes have significant value in determining the nation's future. In group discussions, participants were given concrete examples of how young voters' votes can be decisive in elections, as well as how their involvement can encourage the development of more youth-friendly public policies.



Figure 2. Material on the Role of First-Time Voters and Democracy in Facing the 2029 Election

Election simulations also help participants experience the democratic process firsthand. By experiencing the roles of voters, election organizers, and candidates, participants begin to understand that democracy is not something distant from their lives, but rather something real and accessible to them. This process fosters a sense of ownership in the democratic system and strengthens the belief that their participation is not merely a formality, but a moral responsibility as citizens. This change in participants' attitudes can be explained by the theory of political education proposed by Budiardjo (2008), which states that political education not only broadens knowledge but also shapes healthy political orientations, values, and attitudes. Thus, this community service activity contributes to the development of more rational, critical, and responsible political attitudes in first-time voters.

Critical Thinking Skills and Political Issue Analysis

One of the important achievements of political education activities for first-time voters is the improvement of critical thinking skills and the ability to analyze political issues. These skills are especially relevant in the digital age, where the rapid flow of information is often mixed with disinformation, fake news (hoaxes), and political propaganda. Without critical thinking skills, first-time voters are highly vulnerable to political manipulation, which can be detrimental to themselves and undermine the quality of democracy.

Before the activity, the majority of participants still tended to accept political information raw from social media, without verifying or clarifying it. Initial discussions indicated that more than 60% of participants had believed and shared political information from social media without first checking its veracity. This phenomenon reinforces the notion that digital literacy and critical thinking skills remain significant challenges for the younger generation.

Through this activity, participants were trained to develop critical thinking skills using a problem-based learning approach. Participants were given examples of current political issues, such as the spread of hoaxes before elections, identity politics, or the practice of vote buying. They were asked to identify the facts, analyze the motives behind the information, and discuss its impact on democracy. This process required participants not only to understand the material conceptually but also to relate it to everyday realities.



Figure 3. Participant Statements About Political Information on Social-Media

The election simulation activity was also designed to hone analytical skills. Participants playing the role of candidates had to develop realistic visions and missions, while those playing the role of voters were asked to evaluate and question these visions and missions. During the question-and-answer process, participants became accustomed to asking critical questions, such as: (1) Do the programs offered by the candidate align with the needs of young people? (2) How will the candidate finance the promised programs? (3) Are there clear indicators of success for the proposed programs?

These critical questions demonstrated that participants were moving away from a passive mindset and toward an analytical one. They no longer accepted political promises at face value but instead sought to assess their rationality and the real impact of those promises. The evaluation results also showed positive changes. Before the activity, only around 30% of participants were able to provide logical arguments when discussing political issues. However, after the activity, more than 75% of participants were able to express opinions supported by justifiable reasons. This indicates a significant improvement in critical thinking skills.

This achievement aligns with Halman et al. (2017) opinion on the importance of critical education, which frees society from passive thinking and fosters critical consciousness. Political education based on dialogue, reflection, and practical practice has been proven to encourage first-time voters to be more sensitive to political issues and more critical in their decision-making. Overall, improving critical thinking and analyzing political issues is crucial for first-time voters in the 2029 elections. With these skills, they are expected to be able to sort information, reject political manipulation, and make rational and responsible choices. Furthermore, these skills can serve as a foundation for developing a healthy, critical, and participatory political culture among Indonesia's younger generation.

Readiness to participate in the 2029 elections

The readiness of first-time voters to participate in the 2029 Election is a key indicator of the success of political education programs. This readiness is measured not only by knowledge of election procedures but also by attitudes, motivation, and practical skills in exercising their right to vote responsibly. In the context of electoral democracy, ready voters are those who understand their rights and obligations, are able to make independent political decisions, and have the courage to reject all forms of pressure or unhealthy political practices, such as money politics and intimidation.

Prior to the community service activities, observations showed that most first-time voters in partner locations still had a limited understanding of technical election procedures, such as voting procedures, the requirements for valid and invalid votes, and the consequences of

abstaining from voting (golput). An initial survey indicated that only around 40% of participants fully understood the procedures for exercising their right to vote at a Polling Station (TPS). This situation highlights a knowledge and skills gap that needs to be bridged through political education activities.

Through a series of election simulations, group discussions, and hands-on practice, participants were trained to understand the election process comprehensively. For example, a polling station simulation activity provides participants with concrete experiences of the voting process, from registering, receiving their ballot, casting their ballot, and placing it in the ballot box. This activity helps participants gain confidence and feel prepared for the actual election.



Figure 4. Readiness of First-Time Voters to Participate in the 2029 Election

Beyond technical aspects, readiness also encompasses psychological and motivational dimensions. First-time voters need to be confident that their vote has strategic value in determining the direction of national development. To this end, facilitators presented material on the importance of active participation by young people in politics, including their role in combating political apathy and pragmatism. This material was supported by data from the General Elections Commission (KPU), which showed that in previous elections, youth voter turnout often fluctuated. The presentation of this factual data sparked critical discussion among participants and fostered their enthusiasm for becoming active and responsible voters.

Readiness to participate was also strengthened through the development of a critical attitude toward political practices that are detrimental to democracy. Participants were encouraged to boldly reject money politics, resist the influence of racial, ethnic, and inter-group (SARA) issues, and prioritize rationality in voting. Thus, readiness extends beyond simply being present at the polling station on election day, but also encompasses the ability to maintain personal integrity in making choices. The evaluation results of the activity showed a significant increase in the readiness to participate indicator. Before the activity, only around 45% of participants stated they were ready to participate consciously. However, after the activity, this figure increased to 85%.

This improvement was evident in the participants' statements during the reflection session, where many expressed their determination not to abstain from voting and to actively participate in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections. This achievement demonstrates that the political education program has successfully fostered comprehensive first-time voter readiness, encompassing knowledge, technical skills, attitudes, and motivation. The preparedness fostered through these activities is expected to significantly contribute to increasing the political

participation rate of young people in the 2029 Elections and strengthening the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the political education activities for first-time voters, it can be concluded that there were positive achievements in the four main aspects that were the focus of this community service. First, increased political knowledge. Participants gained a more comprehensive understanding of the basic concepts of democracy, election procedures, the rights and obligations of citizens, and the importance of active participation in the political process. This demonstrates that political education activities were effective in broadening participants' previously limited horizons. Second, changes in attitudes toward elections and democracy. Participants demonstrated a transformation from initially apathetic or passive attitudes to more open, optimistic, and concerned with the democratic process. Discussions, reflections, and case studies encouraged participants to view elections not as mere routine but as a vital instrument in determining the nation's future. Third, critical thinking and political issue analysis skills. Participants developed the ability to sort through political information, detect hoaxes, and rationally evaluate political promises. Simulations, debates, and digital literacy empowered them to ask critical questions and make decisions based on logical considerations, rather than simply emotional or bandwagon-driven decisions. Fourth, readiness to participate in the 2029 General Election. Participants not only understood technical aspects such as voting procedures, but also developed motivation and a moral commitment to exercise their right to vote responsibly. Election simulations and discussions on the dangers of abstaining from voting and money politics strengthened their resolve to actively participate in the upcoming election. Overall, these four aspects complement each other and form a solid foundation for first-time voters in the 2029 Simultaneous Elections. Political education has been proven to improve the capacity of the younger generation not only in terms of knowledge, but also in attitudes, skills, and readiness for participation. Thus, this activity significantly contributes to efforts to strengthen participatory democracy in Indonesia through the active role of first-time voters.

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