

Public Participation in Elections

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ABSTRACT

In every election, community participation is an interesting thing to study and discuss, the history of the long journey of elections from 2004 to 2024 elections is a form of evidence of the ups and downs of community participation, this is due to many factors and it is the duty of election organizers to evaluate this. This research was conducted to examine and want to know how the urgency of community participation in elections and how the strategies of election organizers in strengthening community participation using library research, namely research material obtained from library materials related to the object under study. The urgency of community participation in elections can have a significant impact on the stability of democracy, this is based on the fact that a country that adheres to a democratic system is obliged to involve its people, with low participation rates resulting in unhealthy democratic stability, besides the urgency of community participation in elections can guarantee legitimacy in the government order. So to maintain the stability of democracy and the legitimacy of the government requires the role of election administrators, namely the KPU and Bawaslu, the movements that can be carried out by the KPU are conducting political education, socialising elections and providing assistance to disability elections, while the movement that can be carried out by Bawaslu is to provide space for the community to participate in election supervision in order to achieve participation and peaceful and honest elections.

Keywords: Participation, Community, Election, KPU, Bawaslu.

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Received: 05-04-2025

Revised: 15-06-2025

Accepted: 20-06-2025

Published: 30-06-2025



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1. INTRODUCTION

General elections are activities carried out to choose leaders with the aim of continuing the baton of national leadership. In Indonesia, general elections are held once every five years by granting voting rights to the people to determine their choice in electing new leaders. According to Law Number 7 of 2017, general elections are a means of exercising the people's sovereignty to elect members of the House of Representatives, members of the Regional Representative Council, the President and Vice President, and members of Regional Legislative Councils. These elections are conducted directly, publicly, freely, confidentially, honestly, and fairly in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Presiden Republik Indonesia, 2017). This is carried out as a manifestation of democracy in Indonesia. General elections serve as a means of the people's sovereignty. Viewed from the goals and functions of elections, they represent a pathway or mechanism for choosing a leader to achieve a democratic transition of leadership, which involves the entire society in making their individual choices.

From a definitional perspective, public participation in elections refers to activities carried out by individuals or groups to actively engage in political life, either by directly or indirectly

participating in the election of leaders, as well as being involved in influencing existing policies (Warganegara, 2019). The involvement of society as an actor in elections has a significant impact on the democratic order of a country, as the logic and system of democracy demand public participation in every aspect of election implementation.

The 2024 general election serves as evidence that Indonesia still grants its citizens the freedom to choose their own leaders. However, such freedom does not guarantee that all citizens will participate in the electoral process. There is an important role played by election organizers, who are responsible for encouraging public participation. When comparing the 2024 election to the 2019 election, there is a noticeable decline in public participation. Referring to the vote recapitulation by the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI), public participation in the 2019 election reached 81.97%, while in the 2024 election it was 81.78%. Based on this data, it can be concluded that public participation in the 2024 election decreased by 0.19% compared to the 2019 election. (Nababan, 2024).

The act of voting (electoral participation) within an electoral system is a fundamental feature and hallmark of a democratic state. However, participation without guidance or support from election organizers is a problematic notion, as such unguided participation may lead to apathy or the neglect of voting rights. Therefore, this study finds it important to examine the urgency of public participation and to explore the strategies employed by election organizers to strengthen public engagement in the electoral process.

2. METHODS

The research method used in this study is library research, which involves collecting materials from literature-based sources. The researcher gathers relevant data related to the research problem by referring to data sources such as books, scientific journals, and news articles. The nature of this research is descriptive, meaning it provides a detailed overview, objectively describes and classifies the data under study, and interprets that data accordingly.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Urgency of Public Participation in Elections

General elections are one of the essential elements of a democratic system, allowing the people to choose their representatives in government. Public participation in elections is not only a right, but also a moral obligation to ensure a representative and accountable government.

By definition, public participation in politics is an activity consciously carried out by individuals in specific engagements. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), political participation is an activity voluntarily undertaken by the public with the aim of electing new leaders and being involved in the formation of public policy. Meanwhile, according to Sidney Verba and Norman H. Nie, political participation is an activity in the form of a movement intended to influence an individual's choice in the process of electing new leadership. (Mujani et al., 2012), Referring to what Verba and Nie stated, the purpose of political participation is very general—limited merely to influencing other people's choices. To this day, there has been no clear classification regarding the ways in which such influence is exerted over others' choices (Rivandi, 2018).

In such a broad movement of participation, it is necessary to define clear boundaries regarding what is meant by public participation in elections (political participation). Saiful Mujani and colleagues, in their book titled "Kuasa Rakyat" (The Power of the People), state that public participation in elections is limited to only two forms of action: first, participation in voting, and second, involvement in campaign activities (Mujani et al., 2012). Participation in elections actually has a broad meaning, but in this context, what is meant by public participation

is specifically the act of casting one's vote at the polling station (TPS) to choose a particular candidate.

During the 2024 election period, public participation manifested in two forms: offline participation (citizens) and online participation (netizens). Both forms played significant roles in the election, although they operated in two different dimensions. Offline participation refers to people's direct involvement on the ground, actively engaging with the community to support a particular candidate pair (campaigning) and exercising their right to vote at polling stations. On the other hand, online participation refers to public engagement through digital media platforms used to support the candidate of their choice. These platforms also served as tools for political education. The media used included Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and others.

Based on data provided by the General Elections Commission (KPU), which is accessible through various media sources, it can be concluded that public participation is measured by the extent to which people vote for candidate pairs at polling stations. Therefore, media cannot be used as a benchmark for measuring public participation, as executive and legislative elections are not conducted online. As such, media-based participation merely contributes to the electoral atmosphere through campaigning but cannot be considered a valid indicator of actual public participation in elections. Election organizers play a crucial role in promoting awareness so that the public not only participates through social media campaigns but also exercises their voting rights during the election.

Considering the roles and efforts carried out by election organizers to encourage public participation, it can be concluded that participation in elections is of great importance and must be given serious attention. Therefore, the purposes and urgency of public participation in elections include the following:

a. Strengthening democratic stability

The concept of democracy is a major idea that has brought significant changes to the global political landscape. By definition, democracy is a term derived from the Greek words *demos* and *kratos/cratein*. *Demos* means "the people," while *kratos/cratein* means "government" or "rule." Therefore, democracy can be defined as a form of government by the people, of the people, and for the people—in other words, the people are the holders of power.

In a country that adopts a democratic system, it is crucial to consider the extent to which the state involves its citizens in the process of holding general elections. In a democracy, elections play a vital role in shaping the future. Besides being a constitutional mandate, elections also serve to strengthen democratic stability (Abustan, 2022). The influence of democratic stability through public participation can be measured by how many people are actively involved in the process. In a democratic country, participation signifies that sovereignty and freedom lie in the hands of the people. Therefore, low voter turnout or reduced public participation in elections is considered detrimental to the health of a democracy (Lestari et al., 2023).

In the context of democratic stability, it can be understood that the state grants the widest possible freedom to its citizens—one of which is the freedom to vote in choosing new leaders. In a democracy, the freedom to choose is given because the people are the true holders of power, while the elected leaders (such as the president, members of parliament, and others) are merely executors of the authority entrusted to them by the people (Kusmanto, 2014). Therefore, through the electoral process, it is public participation that determines the direction of a nation.

b. Ensuring governmental legitimacy

In addition to strengthening democratic stability, another important goal of public participation in politics is to ensure good governmental legitimacy. This is based on the votes cast during elections for new leaders, who are expected to fulfill the needs of the people as a consequence of the position they hold. Every citizen, in making their choice, should ideally have a specific purpose, thus political participation is seen as a form of public evaluation and control over newly elected leaders (Liando, 2016).

The implementation of elections every five years, as outlined in the constitution, represents a collective effort to choose new leaders with the aim of improving

governmental legitimacy and achieving a new, better order than before. This goal can be realized through public awareness, as during election periods, citizens are expected to vote and make informed choices by selecting candidates who have the capacity to advance their regions (B. Tjenrang, 2020). For example, if the public wishes to improve the governance of their region at the regency level, they must exercise their voting rights by electing members of the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) and the Regional Representative Council (DPD) at the polling stations. The same principle applies at the provincial and national levels.

Ensuring governmental legitimacy during the election period is highly effective, as it aligns with the fundamental purpose of elections, which is to provide a means for the people to form effective governance in their respective regions. Accordingly, all elected officials—President, Members of the House of Representatives (DPR-RI), Regional Representatives Council (DPD-RI), and local legislative bodies (DPRD and DPD)—as holders of governmental legitimacy mandated by the people, have a vital duty and responsibility to safeguard the interests of the public. Any policy that does not align with the needs of the people must be open to criticism, as this is inherent in a democratic system where power ultimately lies in the hands of the people (B. Tjenrang, 2020).

The Role of Election Organizers in Strengthening Public Participation

The general elections, held once every five years, assign a crucial responsibility to the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (BAWASLU) as the official organizers of the elections. Their most important task is to strengthen and raise public awareness to encourage participation in the electoral process. In addition to their general duties, the following are the specific roles and responsibilities of the KPU and BAWASLU in strengthening public participation:

a. General Election Commission (KPU)

The success of an activity can be measured by the extent of public involvement, and the same applies to elections. The success of an election is closely linked to the level of political awareness among the people. Looking at election data from 2004 to 2024, public participation rates have fluctuated. For example, the voter turnout in the 2004 presidential election was 79.96%. In the 2009 presidential election, participation dropped to 74.81%. In 2014, it declined further to 69.78%. However, in the 2019 presidential election, there was a significant increase, with public participation reaching 81.97% (Sadya, 2022). Subsequently, in the 2024 presidential election, there was a slight decrease in voter turnout, reaching 81.78%. Although the decline was not significant, it still serves as a point of evaluation for election organizers.

The elections from 2004 to 2024 serve as evidence that public participation during election periods remains vulnerable to decline. Low voter turnout in elections may be caused by public apathy, where individuals feel it is more worthwhile to carry on with their daily activities—which have a direct impact on their lives—rather than participate in politics, which they perceive as having no immediate effect (Putri, 2016). This becomes the primary responsibility of the KPU as the election organizer, which is tasked with providing political education to the public.

In an effort to prevent a decline in public participation in future elections, the KPU, as the election organizer, must provide effective measures to achieve high voter turnout. These efforts include:

1) Political education or political literacy

Political literacy is a collective or individual awareness exercised by the public to achieve an understanding of political developments or tendencies to influence others or oneself. Awareness of political literacy should be the responsibility of election organizers and political parties in conducting public outreach and education (Putri, 2017).

In promoting political literacy among the public, there are two key target groups that must be considered: communities in remote or hard-to-reach areas and first-time voters. Efforts to build political literacy in society should go beyond mere socialization;

they must focus on providing understanding and guidance to help people realize the importance of casting their votes in elections.

For first-time voters, the task of election organizers is to provide education through an emotional approach to young people aged 17–21. The KPU, as the election organizer, must raise political awareness among first-time voters and offer them space and channels to become actively involved in civic engagement, with the aim of bringing a fresh perspective to democracy in Indonesia.

Understanding political awareness among first-time voters has the potential to mobilize millennials and Gen Z to engage in participatory actions within their communities. When the younger generation is given space to express and act, the sphere of their influence can bring transformative change and fresh dynamics to the political system, ultimately increasing public participation in elections. A survey conducted by Arya Fernandes and colleagues indicates that young people tend to be actively involved in various organizations: 21.6% of youth are engaged in youth organizations, 16.8% participate in community-based organizations, and 14.1% are involved in student and university organizations. This level of engagement suggests that, with proper exposure to political literacy, comprehensive understanding, and inclusive platforms, young people can play a significant role in shaping democratic processes and enhancing voter turnout in future elections. (Fernandes et al., 2023).

2) Political Socialization

Socialization is essentially an activity carried out with the aim of fostering understanding of the subject being communicated. The General Elections Commission (KPU) holds the responsibility for overseeing all pre- and post-election programs, one of which is public outreach. In this context, the socialization efforts conducted by the KPU are specifically aimed at encouraging the public to exercise their right to vote. Such voter education initiatives should be comprehensive and reach all segments of society. To achieve broader awareness and understanding of the importance of voting and the electoral process at polling stations, the KPU may collaborate with village officials and educational institutions to ensure effective dissemination of information (M. P. Putri, 2016).

3) Facilitation and Assistance in Exercising Voting Rights

After conducting political education and public outreach, one of the most crucial responsibilities of the KPU is to provide assistance in exercising voting rights. In this context, assistance refers specifically to support for persons with disabilities. To enhance electoral awareness and inclusion for the disabled community, the KPU has undertaken initiatives by launching a movement known as Disability-Inclusive Elections (Pemilu Ramah Disabilitas) (Audanta, 2024).

While the KPU has initiated programs to support persons with disabilities, in practice, efforts to increase the electoral participation of people with disabilities have not yet been fully realized. According to a survey conducted by Sasana Inklusif dan Gerakan Advokasi Difabel (SIGAB) Indonesia, the YAKKUM Rehabilitation Center (PRYAKKUM), and FORMASI Disabilitas during the 2024 election, 44.9% of voters with disabilities were recorded as regular voters, only 35.7% were registered as voters with disabilities, and 19.4% were unaware of their voting status. This indicates a gap in implementation and highlights the KPU's responsibility to ensure the full realization of voting rights for persons with disabilities (Arnoldus, 2024).

After ensuring the voting rights of persons with disabilities, the next crucial step for the KPU is to provide adequate support and assistance to them. This is based on the principle that elections must provide equal opportunities and access for all citizens, regardless of social class, to participate in the democratic process, particularly in exercising their right to vote at polling stations. Providing equal voting rights and assistance to persons with disabilities is a fundamental aspect of upholding the basic rights of all citizens. This aligns with Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, which affirms that individuals with disabilities have equal legal standing and human rights as other citizens of Indonesia (Akmal, 2019).

b. Election Supervisory Body (BAWASLU)

The Election Supervisory Body (Badan Pengawas Pemilu or Bawaslu) is an institution established to oversee the implementation of both general and regional elections. Bawaslu's primary responsibility is to monitor the electoral process and follow up on reports of electoral violations or fraud. Institutionally, Bawaslu was initially formed under Law No. 12 of 2003 as an ad hoc electoral supervisory body, functionally independent and not structurally bound to the General Elections Commission (KPU). This institution was later strengthened with the establishment of a permanent election supervisory body under the name Bawaslu, as mandated by Law No. 22 of 2007 on Election Organizers. This was further reinforced by the issuance of Law No. 15 of 2011 on Election Organizers. Recognizing the need for electoral oversight at the regional level, Provincial Election Supervisory Boards (Bawaslu Provinsi) were subsequently established to ensure more localized and effective monitoring (Ramlan Surbakti dan Hari Fitrianto, 2015).

One of Bawaslu's main responsibilities, as stipulated in Law No. 15 of 2011, is to oversee the entire electoral process with the aim of ensuring peaceful and fair elections. However, this task is not easily fulfilled, especially given the increasing prevalence of electoral malpractices, such as vote buying (money politics) by certain groups. While such practices may, to some extent, increase public turnout at polling stations, they also pose a significant threat to political participation in other segments of society. This is because money politics can foster public distrust in the integrity and fairness of the electoral process, ultimately leading to decreased political engagement (Tegar Bhakti Ramadhan, 2024).

To achieve fair and credible elections, collaboration between Bawaslu and the public is considered essential. The vast geographical coverage of the country poses a challenge for Bawaslu in monitoring all forms of electoral violations effectively. Cooperation between Bawaslu and the community in electoral oversight can significantly contribute to increased public participation. One of the key initiatives Bawaslu can undertake to enhance voter engagement is by fostering public trust through the establishment of Bawaslu volunteers, allowing citizens to play an active role in election monitoring (Winarto et al., 2022).

Therefore, Bawaslu plays a crucial role in increasing public participation in elections. As previously discussed, participation is not limited to casting a vote at polling stations, but also includes active involvement in election-related activities, which are recognized as forms of civic engagement in the electoral process. Engaging the public in election monitoring not only enhances voter participation but also serves as a form of political education. Moreover, it can help reduce—and potentially eliminate—fraudulent practices such as money politics driven by power-seeking ambitions.

The KPU and Bawaslu are institutions established to achieve institutional objectives and ensure effective elections. The effectiveness of an election can be measured by the level of public participation. Referring to the concept introduced by Klijn, Koppenjan, and Termeer known as Network Governance, one strategic approach suggested to help institutions achieve their goals is called Game Management. This strategy involves long-term collaboration with other institutions to realize shared objectives (Padilah & Irwansyah, 2024).

Collaboration in the electoral process can be carried out with various institutions, such as law enforcement agencies to help maintain political stability, educational institutions (including universities and schools) as partners in public outreach efforts, and political parties.

The presence of political parties during election periods is a fundamental element of democracy, serving as a platform to remind the public of the importance of exercising and advocating for their voting rights during elections (Kusmanto, 2014).

4. CONCLUSION

Public participation in elections is a movement carried out by individuals or groups with the aim of selecting new leaders. Today, public participation is observed in two forms: offline (citizen) and online (netizen) movements, each having its own distinct impact. On the other hand, the need for public participation holds significant urgency, including strengthening democratic stability and ensuring the legitimacy of effective governance.

Public participation in an election is a fundamental aspect of a democratic state, providing citizens the right to choose their leaders. However, to ensure active engagement, electoral organizers must initiate efforts to maintain and enhance this participation. The responsibility for fostering public participation lies with the KPU and Bawaslu. The KPU's role is to strengthen public involvement by implementing political education, election socialization, and providing assistance to persons with disabilities, all aimed at preventing declines in voter turnout. Meanwhile, Bawaslu's responsibility includes empowering the public to participate actively in election monitoring, for example, by facilitating the involvement of election volunteers.

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