

Community Education and General Elections: Strategies to Enhance Political Awareness Based on Technology & Community Participation Levels in Gorontalo Province

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ABSTRACT

Community participation serves as a measure of success in conducting general elections, thus political participation must be optimized through building and developing political awareness among the populace through various efforts, including education and political advocacy based on information technology. This study aims to design a strategy to enhance technology-based political awareness and community participation levels in Gorontalo Province. The method employed in this study is qualitative, with data analysis utilizing the Miles and Huberman model. The study findings reveal that community political participation in local elections in Gorontalo Province has reached a satisfactory level, although there is still room for improvement. Community education on politics with a technology-based approach is also crucial, especially in addressing digital divides. By involving technology, political education can become more accessible to the populace. It is hoped that political participation will increase, voters will be better educated, and local democracy will become stronger. Communities engaged in politics have greater potential to influence policies, monitor the government, and uphold accountability. Technology-based political education is a progressive step

towards achieving the goal of community awareness and participation in general elections.

Keywords: Community Education, Elections, Awareness, Participation.

INTRODUCTION

General elections serve as the means of implementing the people's sovereignty, conducted directly, openly, freely, secretly, fairly, and honestly in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The national conduct of elections every 5 (five) years in Indonesia has been implemented since 1955, yet these electoral processes have not fully succeeded in producing mature democratic values both qualitatively and quantitatively. The political transition through the general elections of 2004, regulated under Law number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Governance, gave birth to direct general elections to elect legislative members, the president, and vice president, simultaneously held throughout the archipelago.

The simultaneous conduct of general elections in 2004 marks a new historical milestone in Indonesia's political civilization and democratic resurgence, simultaneously representing a proud achievement.

Indonesia's democratic journey underwent transformation once again a year later, in 2005, with the direct election of regional heads by the public. Through direct elections of governors, regents, and mayors, the government aims to realize democratic principles as the cornerstone of democracy, such as popular sovereignty, government based on the consent of the governed, majority rule, minority rights, guarantees of human rights, free and fair elections, equality before the law, due process of law, constitutional government limitations, pluralism, social, economic, and political values, values of tolerance, pragmatism, cooperation, and consensus, in the life of the nation and state.

Bawono (2008) discusses the meaning of political participation "By political participation we mean activity by private citizens designed to influence decision making. Participation may be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous sustained or sporadic, peaceful or violent, illegal or illegal, effective or ineffective". Political participation is the engagement of citizens acting as individuals, aimed at influencing government decision-making. Participation can be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous, peaceful or violent, effective or ineffective. This aligns with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution Chapter X regarding citizens in Article 28, "The freedom to associate and assemble, express thoughts verbally and in writing, and so forth are regulated by law."

The enhancement of political participation should involve all stakeholders, including through community education and political advocacy. Community Education and

General Elections are highly relevant topics in the context of Gorontalo Province. Gorontalo Province is one of the relatively new and small provinces in Indonesia, located in the northern part of Sulawesi Island. In recent years, the province has witnessed significant economic growth and infrastructure development. However, there are significant challenges in increasing political awareness and community participation in general elections (elections) and local elections (local elections).

The government, as the executor of the people's sovereignty, and all relevant stakeholders such as the General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Panwas), along with all institutions, are expected to conduct evaluations and facilitate the implementation of local elections effectively. This is to enhance the quality of political participation of voters. The electorate's right to vote should no longer be influenced or affected by factors that have historically undermined and damaged democracy, such as: interventions and intimidations by certain parties towards the populace, job mutations for civil servants, money politics (dawn attacks), credit-based politics nearing elections, the exploitation of issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and societal groups (SARA), mass mobilization, tense public order and security situations, as well as unprofessional conduct from organizers and stakeholders who tend to favor specific contestants.

Below is a table presenting data on electoral and local election participation, along with other political data in Gorontalo Province:

Tabel 1. Overview of Electoral and Political Data in Gorontalo Province

No	Performance Indicators	Year			
		2019	2020	2021	Average
1	Percentage Increase in Understanding of National Unity, Ideology, and National Integration.	95.50	69.44	96.66	87.20
2	Percentage of Community Political Participation in General Elections (PEMILU) and Local Elections (PEMILUKADA).	88.76	86.48	86.48	87.24
3	Presentation of Conflict Potential Resolved.	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
4	Achievement of Action Plan for Handling Social Conflicts.	71.66	64.33	91.76	75.92
5	Percentage of Strengthened NGOs and Social Organizations (LSM dan Ormas).	100.00	35.00	82.97	72.66
Average		91.18	71.05	91.57	84.60

Source: LAKIP (Laporan Kinerja Instansi Pemerintah) or Performance Report of the Provincial Office of National Unity and Politics of Gorontalo, 2023.

One of the main issues that needs to be addressed is the low level of participation in general elections (pemilu) and local elections (pemilukada) in Gorontalo Province. According to the latest data from the Provincial Office of National Unity and Politics (Kesbangpol) of Gorontalo Province, the participation rate is only 86.48%, indicating that a significant portion of the population in Gorontalo Province is not actively engaged in the democratic process. This is a serious issue because citizen participation in general elections and local elections is crucial for a strong democratic system.

Another problem that needs to be addressed is the lack of political awareness among the people of Gorontalo Province. Many residents may not have adequate understanding of the importance of participation in the political process and its impact on community development. This may also be due to insufficient access to information about candidates, platforms, and issues related to elections and local elections.

METHODS

This study was conducted at the Provincial Government of Gorontalo with the target audience being electoral stakeholders and the community. The study employed a qualitative research approach with data analysis using the Miles and Huberman model. This research method provides an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation, focusing on understanding and interpreting meaning, as well as its relationship with the social context. With this approach, the research can yield rich findings that are beneficial for developing better strategies to enhance political participation and community awareness in Gorontalo Province.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The political participation of the community in the regional general elections in Gorontalo Province is considered to be relatively good, with the majority of the

populace exercising their voting rights, especially in general elections and regional head elections. Community participation does not occur spontaneously; rather, it is influenced by various factors, both internal, stemming from the community itself, and external, originating from organizational factors. The interplay between these factors contributes to making the community rational voters in determining their choices in regional general elections. In 2024, efforts will be made to optimize community political participation to exceed 90%.

The knowledge level of the people in Gorontalo Province varies, as political education has not fully reached the community, especially among first-time voters. Individuals with low political knowledge tend to become non-conventional voters, engaging in activities such as demonstrations, blockades, and other undesirable actions during general elections. Therefore, education to enhance voter knowledge is crucial moving forward. The linkage between community knowledge and participation, as articulated by Almond and Verba (2014), elucidates that political knowledge falls within cognitive orientation, while the actors and their performances are within affective orientation. Additionally, political knowledge serves as the foundation for an individual's political behavior, explicable through behavior theory. The public's trust in the government can be derived from their assessment of political actors, thus influencing political participation. This can be observed through the interaction between political actors and the community, the relationship between political actors and the community, the performance of political actors, the quality of political actors, and the political behavior of political actors.

The political awareness of the community in Gorontalo Province remains relatively poor due to the relatively low level of participation. The relationship between the political awareness of the community and participation, as articulated by Ritzer in Hidayat (2016: 568), states that "the

political participation of a citizen is closely related to their political awareness." Political awareness constitutes political social facts consisting of social structures and social institutions that are the object of study in the social facts paradigm, as well as something that occurs in human thought in the form of a creative response to external stimuli or stimulation. Thus, political awareness can be interpreted as a behavioral paradigm in responding to social and political events.

The form and condition of community participation in the regional elections for regional heads in Gorontalo Province align with the statement by Pierce and Newstrom (2016: 34), which highlights four important elements of a participatory program: authority, information, rewards, and knowledge. Community involvement in development extends beyond mere suggestions and opinions to include the utilization of their energy and other potentials possessed by each community member. Participation here is defined as a process whereby individuals and groups express community interests or contribute their energy and other resources to institutions or systems that govern community life. Community involvement in all development processes can occur either through the government's role in empowering communities or through the cooperation between the government and communities, thus fostering a synergistic relationship.

The suboptimal political participation of the community and the inadequate political awareness must be enhanced through community education. Community education plays a crucial role in general elections linked to policy change (Le & Nguyen, 2021; Jarrar, 2019; Talaohu, 2022; Ollii, et al., 2018). The following are some of the primary roles of community education in this context:

1. Information Dissemination

Community education assists in providing accurate and objective information about candidates, political

parties, and important issues to be decided in general elections. This allows voters to make decisions based on a good understanding of various candidates and political platforms.

2. Enhancing Political Awareness

Through community education, individuals can better understand the political process and the importance of participation in general elections. This can encourage more citizens to engage in the election process and enhance political awareness in society.

3. Encouraging Voter Participation

Community education can help address low voter participation by providing a better understanding of the importance of voting rights and their impact on the policies to be implemented. This can increase participation rates in general elections.

4. Policy Understanding

Community education helps voters understand various policies proposed by candidates or political parties. This enables voters to make choices based on a better understanding of the implications of these policies on society.

5. Promoting Open Discussion

Community education can also encourage open and healthy discussions about political issues. This can help address polarization and allow voters to hear various perspectives before making decisions.

6. Combating Disinformation

In the digital information age, misinformation and fake news can be serious problems in general elections. Community education can help voters become more critical of inaccurate information sources and train them to assess the reliability of the information they receive.

7. Facilitating Active Participation

Community education is not just about providing information but also about facilitating active participation in politics. This can include training in the election process, how to become a

volunteer, or even how to become a candidate.

Effective community education can strengthen the foundation of democracy by ensuring that voters have sufficient knowledge to make informed decisions and actively participate in general elections. This is particularly important when elections are related to policy changes that can directly impact society's livelihoods.

Enhancing technology-based political awareness and community participation in general elections can be crucial steps in strengthening local democracy (Archellie et al., 2020; Murtisari et al., 2022; Tilome et al., 2020; Aneta et al., 2021). Here are the strategies and detailed explanations:

1. Formation of Political Community Education Team

The first step is to form a specialized team comprising individuals competent in politics, technology, and education. This team will serve as the driving force behind the implementation of strategies to optimize community political awareness and participation.

2. Technology Education for the Community

Conducting regular workshops and training sessions on technology accessible to the community across Gorontalo province. This includes basic training on internet usage, social media, and politically relevant applications. Subsequently, creating online educational materials accessible through websites or e-learning platforms, allowing residents to learn at their own pace.

3. Political Awareness Campaigns

Conducting positive awareness campaigns about the importance of political participation and its impact on Gorontalo society. This can be done through social media, local newspapers, radio, and community events. Additionally, creating political education materials such as short videos or infographics to be shared via social media and local news channels.

4. Partnership with Schools and Universities

Collaborating with schools and universities in Gorontalo to integrate political and technological education into community curricula. This may include seminars, workshops, or collaborative projects focusing on politics and technology. Encouraging students to become agents of change in enhancing political awareness and community participation through social projects and campaigns within the community.

5. Utilizing Interactive Applications and Websites

Developing mobile applications or websites providing information on general elections, candidates, and local political issues. These applications can also provide step-by-step guides on how to vote. Creating interactive platforms allowing residents to participate in political discussions, online voting, and provide feedback to community leaders.

6. Election Monitoring and Online Reporting

Collaborating with election monitoring institutions to develop an online election monitoring system accessible to the public. This will enable residents to follow general elections in real-time and encourage them to report election violations or fraud through a secure and anonymous online platform.

7. Facilitating Community Activities and Open Discussions

Encouraging the establishment of community groups focusing on local politics and technology. Residents can hold regular meetings, open discussions, and idea exchanges. Additionally, organizing open discussion forums with candidates and political leaders to allow residents to ask questions and gain a better understanding of community visions and programs.

8. Continuous Evaluation and Feedback

Continuously analyzing the impact of these strategies through surveys, social media monitoring, and election participation monitoring. This allows for measuring success and making necessary improvements.

9. Strengthening Funding and Resources Availability

Seeking funding from sources such as the provincial government, donors, non-profit organizations, and private sectors concerned with local democracy development.

This strategy will enable the people of Gorontalo Province to better understand the role of politics, access relevant information, and feel more engaged in the electoral process. With this approach, political awareness and community participation can significantly increase. A strong democracy requires active participation from the community. Through political education, communities can grasp the importance of their role in the political process. Political education helps ensure that accurate and balanced political information is accessible to all citizens, enabling them to make informed decisions. In the digital age, understanding technology is crucial. Through technology-based political education, we can bridge the digital divide and ensure that all citizens can use technology tools for political purposes.

With greater community participation, elections become more representative of the people's will. This strengthens the legitimacy of governance and reduces the risk of political conflict. Politically educated communities are more likely to oversee elections, monitor the actions of elected officials, and protest when necessary. This is a crucial step in maintaining accountability. Political education helps communities not only understand the political process but also actively participate in political campaigns, social campaigns, and political movements, all of which are essential components of a healthy democracy. Technology-based political education helps shape a generation of smarter and more critical voters, capable of making sound decisions based on facts and proper analysis.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it was found that community political participation in local elections in Gorontalo Province has reached a fairly good level, although there is

still room for improvement. Internal and external factors, such as political knowledge and political awareness, influence community participation. To optimize political participation and increase political awareness, strategies based on political and technological education can be adopted. Political education can play a key role in improving community political participation and awareness. This involves delivering accurate information, enhancing understanding of the political process, encouraging voter participation, and helping voters understand policy implications. Additionally, political education can help combat misinformation and facilitate active participation in politics.

A technology-based approach is also important, especially in addressing the digital divide. By involving technology, political education can be more easily accessed by the public. This includes training in internet usage, social media, and political applications, as well as developing interactive platforms for political discussions and election monitoring. The proposed strategies also include political awareness campaigns, partnerships with educational institutions, online election monitoring, and the establishment of political communities. All of these aim to enhance political participation and awareness among the Gorontalo community. It is hoped that political participation will increase, voters will be more educated, and local democracy will become stronger. Communities involved in politics have greater potential to influence policies, monitor governments, and maintain accountability. Technology-based political education is a progressive step towards achieving the goal of community awareness and participation in elections.

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