



## Behavior And Culture of Novice Voters in Regional Leader Elections

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**Abstract.** This research aims to explore the behavioral patterns and political culture of novice voters in determining their preferences in the 2024 Regional Leader Election (Pilkada). Novice voters are interesting subject to study because they are an important target for candidates in winning votes. Using qualitative research methods supported by relevant literature and data analysis carried out descriptively using cognitive response theory. This research provides insight into how rationality and social context shape voter behavior. The research results show the enthusiasm of students at SMAN 1 Sindang, Indramayu Regency in participating in the general election. As voters, they show opportunistic political behavior which is characterized by a tendency to change and choose to follow their parents' choice, and they focus more on practical considerations such as giving money and candidate's background. However, they will still participate in casting their votes for the candidate they like. In hope is that, the novice voters will become more involved in political activities while managing time for their education and political participation.

**Keyword:** Novice voters, 2024 regional leader elections, cognitive responses, behavior and political culture.

### INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Simultaneous Regional Leader Elections is an important democratic process in Indonesia, scheduled to take place on 27 November 2024. This activity involves the simultaneous election of regional leaders at the provincial, district and city levels throughout Indonesia. This regional leader election is part of a series of elections regulated based on Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning Regional Leader Elections and clarified in PKPU Number 2 of 2024, which regulates the stages and implementation schedule. The Regional Leader Election start from preparation, such as setting the budget and drafting regulations, to updating voter data. Candidate registration is scheduled for August 2024, followed by campaigning from September 25 to November 23, 2024. After

that, a lull period took place before voting day. This regional leader election aims to ensure that regional leaders are elected democratically. The challenges faced include monitoring the practice of money politics, increasing voter participation, and implementing fair campaigns. This process is also expected to strengthen the accountability of leaders to the people.

Free general elections are one of the main requirements for a country to be called a state of law. Elections are regulated in Article 22E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which stipulates that elections are an important mechanism in the process of state administration and government formation. Elections are not only to elect the President and Vice President, but also to elect members of the House of Representatives (DPR), Regional Representative Council (DPD), and Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). The implementation of the Regional Leader Election (Pilkada) is an important part of the life of the Indonesian state in the reform era. The implementation of the Regional Leader Elections as a form of election is an implementation of a democratic system that is direct and reflects the sovereignty of the people. According to Marijan (2010), "one of the main prerequisites in realizing democratic elections is political participation."

The cognitive response theory was developed by Anthony Greenwald which focuses on the mental processes of individuals when receiving information. In the context of voter behavior, this theory explains how voters process campaign messages and decide on political choices based on cognitive judgments, emotions, and personal experiences. Voters are not only passive in receiving information, but actively analyze and evaluate political messages. A relevant indicator in this theory, voters consider the credibility of a candidate based on evidence obtained from campaign sources or the media. The opinions of family, friends, and social groups shape the way voters process information. Emotional reactions to a particular candidate or issue contribute to the final decision. The voter combines new information with previous knowledge to generate conclusions relevant to their preferences.

In the modern world, social media is an important catalyst in shaping the cognitive response of voters. Fast and often emotional information significantly affects voters' perceptions and decisions. Recent research by Neequaye (2022) highlights the role of

digital media in reinforcing voter initial bias, while Vrij (2015) discusses the importance of message credibility to influence voter attitudes. Thus, this theory is relevant in analyzing the cultural patterns of voters, especially in the Regional leader Elections or general elections, where voters are influenced by intense political messages and diverse sources of information. An effective campaign strategy utilizes this theory to shape voters' perceptions and preferences to the maximum.

Simultaneous regional leader elections are designed as a national political means towards real democracy and not just procedural. The 2024 Regional Leader Election is a national political agenda to hold simultaneous elections in various regions, including in Indramayu Regency. Indramayu Regency, as one of the regions that will carry out the Regional Leader Elections, has an important role in providing services to the community and becoming a forum for the people to participate in political and government activities. With the existing government structure, Indramayu Regency is expected to reflect democratic life in society. One form of democracy implementation in Indramayu Regency is the election of regional heads who are directly elected by the local community.

Subekti (2010) stated that political behavior is an interaction between the government and society, both at the level of government institutions and within groups or individuals of society, which includes the process of making, implementing, and enforcing political decisions. Voter behavior can be grouped into several categories, including novice voters, which is interesting to study because of their significant numbers, making them an important target for candidates in gaining votes.

In Indonesia, the difference in voter culture is very visible between novice voters and more mature or experienced voters, especially in terms of political orientation and mindset. Novice voters tend to be influenced by the candidate's figure or popularity and views from the immediate environment, instead of conducting an in-depth analysis of the candidate's program or policy (Asfar, 2006). In addition, social media plays an important role in shaping voter culture among novice voters in Indonesia. Novice voters are more susceptible to being influenced by trends on social media, the opinions of people around them, as well as emotional factors, such as the influence of family or friends (Setiawan, 2020). This voter culture based on social and emotional preferences is often oriented towards short-term gains, which can negatively impact the quality of democracy.

According to Law No. 10 of 2008 concerning General Elections for Members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representative Council, and Regional People's Representative Council in Chapter IV article 19 paragraphs 1 and 2, as well as article 20, also refers to article 198 paragraph (1) of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 7 of 2017, "Voters are Indonesian citizens who are 17 years old or older on voting day, married, or have been married and have the right to vote." Based on this rule, voters are citizens who are at least 17 years old or older, or have been married, who have the right to vote but have not previously met the requirements as voters.

Students often dominate every national election agenda or Regional Leader Election as a novice voter. Based on the author's observations, novice voters in Indramayu Regency showed enthusiasm in participating in the general election, as seen in the previous Regional Leader Elections. Many of them consider the Regional Leader Elections as a form of their political participation by voting for the candidates they like. Based on this phenomenon, the author's purpose of research is to explore behavioral patterns, factors that affect voter behavior and the political culture of novice voters in determining their preferences in the 2024 Regional Leader Election (Pilkada).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

First, a study by Nugroho (2019) entitled Political Participation of Novice Voters in the Regional Leader Elections in Central Java, this research highlights the political participation of novice voters in the Regional Leader Elections in several districts in Central Java, observing factors that influence their decisions, such as family influence, peer environment, and information from social media. The results show that novice voters are often influenced by family and information on social media in making political decisions. This shows the importance of the role of political education in building a more mature understanding for novice voters.

The second research by Kartini (2020) with the title of Political Education for Novice Voters in the Regional Leader Election, Kartini examines political education efforts for novice voters in high school during the Regional Leader Elections in Yogyakarta. This research focuses on the effectiveness of political socialization programs carried out by schools, such as public discussions, seminars, and election simulations.

The findings show that political education in schools is able to increase students' political awareness, make them more critical of the candidates and programs offered, and more actively participate in the Regional Leader Elections.

Third, a study by Wijaya (2021) entitled *The Influence of Social Media on the Behavior of Novice Voters in the Regional Leader Election in Surabaya*, Wijaya observed the impact of social media on the political behavior of novice voters in Surabaya. He found that novice voters are heavily influenced by campaigns and discussions on social media, especially when it comes to candidate popularity. Although there is a positive impact of easy access to information, this study also notes negative influences, such as the spread of hoaxes and bias in the political opinions of novice voters.

Fourth, a study by Pratama (2018) entitled *The Influence of Civic Education on the Political Awareness of Novice Voters in Bandung*, This study reviews how civic education in Bandung schools affects the political awareness of students as novice voters. Using the survey method, Pratama found that citizenship lessons that included material on rights and obligations as voters played a very important role in increasing students' political awareness and making them more prepared to participate in elections or regional leader elections.

Fifth, in a study by Suryana (2022) titled *Analysis of Political Behavior of Novice Voters in Bogor Regency*, Suryana examines the behavior of novice voters in the Bogor Regency Regional Leader Elections. The study found that although most novice voters showed interest in getting involved in the Regional Leader Elections, they still tended to be hesitant in making political choices due to a lack of political understanding and distrust of existing candidates. Social environmental factors and political education through educational institutions have proven to have an important influence on their attitudes and political decisions.

The novelty in the author's research is that the author examines the behavior and culture of novice voters in the election of regional heads to students. Novice voters in regional head elections have characteristics and behaviors that are often influenced by various unique factors related to their age and experience.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

The author uses observation, interview and documentation techniques as a means to collect the data. By using the data collection techniques mentioned, qualitative approach is suitable for this research. The location of this research was carried out at SMAN 1 Sindang, Indramayu Regency, with the criteria of informants, namely novice voters. The data used in this study is divided into two types, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through direct interviews with novice voters at SMA 1 Sindang. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained through literature reviews that included books, documents, and previous research results.

In qualitative research, data analysis based on the Miles and Huberman model includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification drawn. Data reduction aims to filter important information from raw data to be more focused and relevant to research objectives. To ensure the validity of the data, triangulation methods are used, including source triangulation (comparing data from various sources) and triangulation methods (using various data collection techniques, such as interviews and observations). Moleong (2015) and Patton also emphasized the importance of a combination of perspectives and tools to check the validity of findings in qualitative research. This technique is very relevant for research on voter behavior and culture in the Regional Leader Elections, where data collection requires a participatory approach, in-depth analysis of the social context, and data validation through various viewpoints.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Behavior Patterns of Novice Voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections**

Novice voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections in Indramayu Regency show behavioral patterns that are influenced by various social and cognitive factors. Based on cognitive theory, the decision-making process of novice voters is more influenced by external factors and easily digestible information, such as popularity and candidate figures. Voters tend to use *the peripheral route* in their decision-making, where they prefer to follow the candidate's image or social influence rather than analyzing in-dept policies.

Cognitive Indicators:

1. Pemilih pemula menunjukkan pengenalan informasi yang terbatas terkait calon kepala daerah. Mereka lebih sering bergantung pada informasi yang didapatkan dari media sosial atau rekomendasi keluarga, bukan dari sumber yang lebih kredibel atau analitis.
2. Novice voters are greatly influenced by the opinions of family and friends. They tend to choose candidates based on the advice or influence of those closest to them, which shows that the social aspect greatly dominates their decision-making.
3. Novice voters are less likely to conduct an in-depth analysis of the candidate's vision or mission, focusing more on external factors such as the candidate's image or policies that seem to be directly beneficial novice voters are less likely to conduct an in-depth analysis of the candidate's vision or mission, focusing more on external factors such as the candidate's image or policies that seem to be directly beneficial.

### **Voter Culture in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections**

Voter culture in Indramayu Regency shows a tendency to prioritize social and transactional factors rather than policy-based decisions. Many novice voters prefer candidates based on personal proximity or family influence, which also shows how local culture influences the selection process. Voters in this context prefer a "voter culture" oriented towards social relationships, as expressed by Bourdieu in habitus theory, which suggests that the social habits accepted in society will influence individual political decisions.

Indicative Indicators:

1. Family and Community Involvement that in the end, many novice voters decide their choice based on what their parents or other family members choose. This signifies the importance of social group influence in decision-making.
2. Transactional considerations make novice voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections also tend to be influenced by the practice of money politics. They are more easily influenced by the short-term incentives offered by the candidate's successful team, rather than focusing on the candidate's long-term vision.

### **Family Influence and Social Environment**

The influence of family on the political behavior of novice voters is very significant. Many novice voters prefer to follow the choices of their parents or families, because they feel that families have a better experience in choosing leaders. It is also in line with social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals tend to imitate the behavior or decisions of figures they perceive as more experienced or have social authority.

Cognitive Indicators:

1. Novice voters who have parental influence are more likely to follow their parents' choices without considering other factors, which indicates limitations in the processing of more rational and analytical information.
2. In many cases, novice voters prefer to follow their social or group flow rather than making independent decisions based on an understanding of the candidate.

### **Implications for the Quality of Democracy**

Based on the results of the study, the behavior of novice voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections shows that the quality of democracy can be affected by the low level of political education and the influence of a more pragmatic voter culture. For example, the use of money politics that is quite dominant shows a tendency to vote based on short-term personal or economic interests. This suggests that voter behavior patterns that prioritize social and transactional considerations can reduce the effectiveness of democracy and participation based on the candidate's policies and visions.

The behavior of novice voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections is more driven by social and cognitive factors, such as the influence of family, candidate image, and social media, rather than analytical considerations of the candidate's policies and vision. This shows that novice voters use peripheral routes more often in their decision-making. In addition, the influence of money politics and transactional also plays a role in their election process. To improve the quality of democracy, it is important to strengthen political education and socialization more effectively so that voters can make more rational decisions based on candidate policies.

### **CONCLUSION**

The behavior and culture of novice voters in the 2024 Regional Leader Elections in Indramayu Regency shows a significant influence from cognitive and indicative factors.

Novice voters tend to use the peripheral route in decision-making, where external factors such as the candidate's image, family influence, and social media opinions become dominant. Their understanding of the candidate's vision, mission, and policies is still limited, so they often rely on the recommendations of their families or the nearest social environment.

The evolving voter culture reflects transactional patterns, where short-term incentives, such as the practice of money politics, influence voters' decisions more than in-depth evaluations of candidates. In addition, social culture and interpersonal relationships, as explained in Bourdieu's habitus theory, also reinforce political decisions based on conformity rather than rationality.

The implication for the quality of democracy is a decrease in political participation based on critical analysis, which can reduce the quality of elections. To improve this situation, comprehensive political education and intensive socialization are needed so that novice voters are able to make more rational decisions, based on a deep understanding of the candidate's policies and programs. Thus, improving the quality of democracy depends on efforts to shift voter culture from transactional and social orientation to a more rational and critical orientation.

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