

# Low Voter Turnout in Kepulauan Riau Province Gubernatorial Election

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**Abstract**—The purpose of this study is to examine the factors behind the large number of absentees among voters in regional elections (Pilkada) in Riau Islands province, Indonesia. Since 2005, people have their right to vote for their own local leader that was previously selected by the parliament to become a candidate. However, this democratic reform was not accompanied by voters' enthusiasm to cast their vote. In 2015, the Election Education Network for the People found that there were still more than 50% voters who did not use their rights to elect their governor candidate in Batam. Lower voter turnout was affected by Golput (Golongan Putih) or non-voting which was driven by various reasons, but the most popular causes were protests against misconducts in the implementation of elections, loss of expectation to and trust in candidates, and loss of trust in the political system. For this paper, we conducted a quantitative survey to 400 respondents of those who did not cast their vote during the gubernatorial election of Kepulauan Riau Province in 2015. This paper examines non-voting behavior using psychological and rational choice approaches, particularly on three main variables that may have provided the motive behind the non-voting behavior of the eligible voters, i.e. candidate orientation, issue orientation, and media orientation. It argues that despite the fact that the voters know the two candidates running for governor office as both were incumbents (governor and vice-governor were both run for the governor office), the voters chose to not to cast their votes for several reasons; i.e. the lack of accessible information about the vision of the candidates, and the lack of clarity of programs offered by the candidates.

**Keywords**—*election; voting-behavior; turnout; psychological approach; rational choice approach*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy ensures the freedom for active participation by citizens in a free, honest and fair election. Andrew Heywood said that election is the core of the political process and functions as a manifestation of democracy [1]. Public participation in elections makes a good image of democracy, and on the contrary, a massive absence of the voters makes a message of distrust toward the election.

In Indonesia, eligible voters who do not participate in an election is called *Golput* (short for *Golongan Putih*, or white group), which is a manifestation of non-voting behaviour. This term was used by the opposition in the New Order to refer to the non-voting behaviour in their persuasion to get people to not cast their vote as a protest against New Order's

manipulated and repressed elections. Since New Order era (1966-1998), abstentions of voters showed the dominance of Suharto's authoritarian power by using ABRI (Armed Forces of Republic of Indonesia) and Golkar party as the machine that kept their political power by mobilizing the voters, while at the same time avoided competition with any opposition. The term 'Golput' was coined by Arief Budiman in 1971 who suggested abstentions to the public [2]. This action was a reaction to the coercion and manipulation by the state apparatus in mobilizing people to vote and winning elections. Budiman campaigned to the eligible voters to not choose any candidate when they vote. Moreover, this social movement happens in many cities in order to get their justice in the politics. Arbi Sanit asserts that Golput is a cultural movement to create a safe society movement [3].

In the later development after the so-called '*Reformasi*' movement, Indonesian transition to democracy since 1998, when the freedom was actually assured the voter participation has been declining. The lowest number of participations occurred in the 2014 presidential election, where there was 'only' 70 percent voters participated. The decline was notable especially if compared to the traditional above 90% during the New Order and early years of democracy.

The declining participation rates was particularly occurred at the regional level elections. For instance, the phenomena happened in Batam City with voter attendance for the Governor of Riau Islands Province election in 2015 reached only 48.8 percent. Even though, the two pairs of candidates had experienced as the incumbent, they were unable to keep voters trust and gained bigger votes in that five-years democracy event. The KPUD (Regional General Elections Commission) of gubernatorial election in Riau Islands Province for 2015 - 2020 reported that the attendance rate was less than 50% from the total number of eligible voters of 653,912 (KPU RI). Jeffry Paige mentioned that if political awareness and trust in the government are low then political participation tends to be apathetic. It will give same impact if political awareness is very low but trust in the government is very high [4]. Therefore, as we discussed above, this research is important to identify the reason why there was low participation of voters in the election when the candidates were incumbents. Furthermore, this study will look to the case of Batam City where the area is heterogeneous by testing the psychological and rational choice approach.

## II. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

### A. Psychological and Rational Choice Approach in Low Voters Phenomena

Voters' participation in an election can be affected by various contributing factors. There is no single factor that can determine the level of absence of voter based on behaviour, and behaviour is something that is hard to be modelled due to the unpredictability or potential errors in the estimation. Nevertheless, in this analysis, we use two analytical tools that are usually used by behavioural voting researchers: (1) psychological approach and (2) rational choice approach.

The first approach, psychological approach, originates from The Michigan Model. Campbell et al. suggests that partisanship led to the high commitment of loyalty and support to the party [5]. Roth simplified the factors that influence voter decisions in elections through *trias determinant*: party ID, candidate orientation, and issues orientation [6]. These orientations are in accordance with the idea of *funnel of causality* [7], a concept used to link internal factors (socioeconomics, values, behaviour, psychological), and external (issues, candidates, election campaigns, political conditions, economics, and the influence of the community) on partisanship. However, these factors just supplementary which absorbed by political parties and not truly affected to drag the voters by the party system. Even though party identification is core tools to catch votes but it recently the role of political parties that all seem ideal before, facing a decline in belief, according to Denver [8] and later Bannon [9], because of the increasing political awareness based on education, the media use by the voters ahead of the election, increases scepticism towards the dominion party in government, and natural change of ideology. In the condition of the Governor Election in Batam City, only two out of three psychological approaches can be used: issue orientation and candidate orientation, which tend to show a more significant influence on the behaviour of non-voting.

In regard to issue orientation, 'Golput' issues generally was proposed as the impact of voter dissatisfaction, or the manifestation of protest from voters when the candidate is in the position of determining policy. In this case, the desire to find alternative candidates, even for the opponent has no impact, but at least it will become alternative choices besides incumbents [10].

The candidate orientation, when voters are not interested in the party, will be an attraction to gain sympathy from the people who rely on popularity and electability. To illustrate, candidates with experiences tend to collect more electoral support than newcomer candidates. The experience is important, because it signals the voters that candidates understand local needs and the contexts of local values and virtues [11,12]. Thus, the leadership impact is part of the personal characteristics of the candidate [13]. When voters find good personal qualities in the candidates' character, it is most likely that the candidates will win votes. There are four characteristics of personal traits assessed by society: (a) leadership, (b) competence, (c) integrity, and (d) empathy [13-

15]. Emphasizes that candidates who have leadership qualities will have a bigger chance to win the elections [16].

The second approach, Rational Choice, places voters as actors who calculate the costs and benefits of their personal or individual actions [17]. Voters in this approach see public leaders as public goods, which must benefit all members of society regardless of their individual contributions. When someone makes a choice, it turns out their capital spent, including physical activity or time and material capital. Then the assumption of rationality leads them to conduct more objective research on political parties or people who will be selected through the information media. The more often he uses media during election times, the more information he gets, including issues, programs, or the running candidates' figures [18]. From those of information they are likely to formulate alternative choices from the existing candidates. Media Information has taken a large role in validating candidates by involving editorials that can affect its users [19]. Through negative information, it can generate cynicism and distrust into the circle of eligible voters. For example, when the news presents incumbent information related to social problems that have not been resolved during his previous position, voters will conclude of whether they are satisfied or not, and then considering his/her vote for the next period of election [16].

## III. METHOD

### A. Data Collections

The data in this study used 17 questions. Samples criteria are the eligible voters who did not attend to the poll station in 2015 for Governor Election in Batam city. There are 400 eligible voter respondents who have national identification card (E-KTP) or other identification which can be officially used in 2015 election. The location of the survey includes five out of twelve sub-districts with less than 50% voter attendance. By using random sampling in quantitative method, we distribute evenly the questionnaire in the survey locations. Gender wise, we have 205 female and 195 male respondents answered the questionnaire for this research. The data in this study was analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics are used to see the distribution of the variables and this analysis is conducted by using SPSS program.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Description Lower Voters Usage Frequency of Candidate, Issues, and Media Information Variable

This study is conducted in February – April 2019 in Batam City with 400 samples. There are 48.75% males. The ethnic is heterogeneous, in which 25.5% are Javanese. 81.6 % of respondents have high school degree. The result can be seen in TABLE I.

**TABLE I. SAMPLE SUMMARY STATISTICS**

Categorical variable	N	Share (%)
<b>Person:</b>		
Male	195	48.75
Female	205	51.25
<b>Ethnic:</b>		
Javanese	102	25.5
Betawi	11	2.8
Sundanese	29	7.2
Tionghoa	5	1.3
Batak	57	14.2
Malay	80	20
Minangkabau	35	8.8
Others	81	20.3
<b>Age categories</b>		
Under 17 years old(married/divorced)	9	2.3
17 – 25 years old	115	28.7
26 – 34 years old	126	31.5
35 – 43 years old	88	22
44 – 52 years old	52	13
53 – 61 years old	10	2.5
<b>Education categories</b>		
Never	1	0.3
Elementary school	14	3.5
Junior high school	69	17.3
Senior high school/vocational school	257	64.3
University degree	59	14.8
<b>Household income (in IDR per month)</b>		
No Income	148	37
Less than IDR 1 M	35	8.8
IDR 1 M – 3.5 M	148	37
More than 3.5 M	69	17

The location becomes the main object studying to see low voting cases in Batam City base on psychological and rational choices approach, which limits only for five of twelve sub-districts areas, as can be seen TABLE II. Village and sub-districts were chosen based on citizen attendance rates to polling stations with the highest number of absences. They are Nongsa, Batu Aji, Batam Kota, Batu Ampar, Lubuk Baja.

**TABLE II. VOTING RESULTS FOR EACH DISTRICT IN BATAM CITY**

No	Sub-District	Valid – Invalid Vote Amount	Number of Absentees	% Absence
1	Batam Kota	45.534	52.064	53.30%
2	Batu Aji	33.722	43.48	56.30%
3	Batu Ampar	19.792	23.227	54%
4	Belakang Padang	9.317	7.031	43%
5	Bengkong	32.677	35.777	50.70%
6	Bulang	5.026	2.669	34.70%
7	Galang	7.916	3.219	28.90%
8	Lubuk Baja	22.349	33.512	60%
9	Nongsa	20.137	21.209	51.30%
10	Sagulung	57.665	54.737	48.70%
11	Sei Beduk	24.552	20.7	45.70%
12	Sekupang	40.942	35.265	46.30%

Source: The General Election Commission

We found that respondents were familiar with the candidates who competed in Kepulauan Riau province because they were incumbents and the elites who had a lot of experience in local politics. Muhammad Sani who was paired with Nurdin Basirun was an incumbent, he had been sat as a deputy governor in 2005 to 2010 when Ismet Abdullah was a governor. Then succeeded to be a governor in 2010 - 2015 by defeating Nyat Kadir - Zulbahri, and Aida Zulaika Ismet - Eddy Wijawa. Whereas his partner Nurdin was a former District Head of Narimun Regency during 2005 - 2015 and he is also being the Chairperson of the Regional Representative Council (DPW) of the Nasdem party in Riau Islands.

In the same way, Soerya Respationo and his pair Ansar Ahmad had similar track record, which became deputy governor to Muhammad Sani from 2010 to 2015, and he was also was the member local parliament in Batam from 2000 to 2009. While Ansar Ahmad was a former Regent of Bintan District for two periods, and Ansar was considered as a major that bring Bintan Regency to become successful regions with good regional autonomy management. It shows by his award Satya Lancana Karya Bakti Praja Nugraha that he received from the Indonesian Vice President, Yusuf Kalla, in 2016. From that experience, they were well known in the public. We ask the important criteria that need to have by the regional head of the Riau Islands Province.

**TABLE III. IMPORTANT CRITERIA OF THE CANDIDATE**

Personality	Frequency	%
Religious	56	14
Insightful	42	10.5
Educated	34	8.5
Experienced	57	14.2
Honest	165	41.3
Polite	7	1.8
Care	25	6.3
Assertive	6	1.5
Authoritative	8	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>100</b>

TABLE III above shows that the experience of candidate incumbents is not more important than honesty which was answered by 41.3% of respondents, while religious leaders also remain a consideration for the respondents. Thus, we found that respondents indicated that most of them did not give positive response to the candidates regarding their personality. This can be seen from table below.

**TABLE IV. EVALUATION OF CANDIDATE PERSONALITY**

Personality	Governor Candidate No. 1			
	Sani		Nurdin	
	Description	%	Description	%
Religious	Average	32.8	Average	41.3
Insightful	Average	38	Average	42.5
Educated	Average	33.3	Average	38.5
Experienced	Good	35.5	Average	43.5
Honest	Average	39	Average	45
Polite	Average	36	Average	44.3
Care	Average	39.5	Average	44.3

Table 4. Cont.

Assertive	Average	42.5	Average	48.3
Authoritative	Average	40	Average	44
<b>Personality</b>	<b>Governor Candidate No. 2</b>			
	<i>Soerya</i>		<i>Ansar</i>	
	<i>Description</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>%</i>
	Religious	Average	47.3	Average
Insightful	Average	45.8	Average	46
Educated	Average	46	Average	41.8
Experienced	Average	44.8	Average	44.8
Honest	Average	50.2	Average	48.3
Polite	Average	49.3	Average	46.5
Care	Average	48.8	Average	48.5
Assertive	Average	45.8	Average	48.5
Authoritative	Average	47.3	Average	49

TABLE IV shows measurement of candidate personality based on the respondents' opinion, which only shows the highest share in measurement scale such as poor, average, good and excellent. Respondent's opinion when we asked about the nine personalities of the candidates. We found that only Sani who received good feedback about his experience by collecting 35.5% approval. This finding is similar to Prysby, personal characteristic plays the key role to gain votes from the public [13]. When incumbents are unable to maintain positive image, it will be difficult for them to get sympathy from voters. He said that political parties has an important role in the strategy to enrich public attention. Political parties were able to present candidates who have the character and can attract the sympathy of voters. This has helped voters to minimize the choices of candidates rather than choosing to not vote. The strategies by using the candidate personality approach seem to be lacking support from parties in Kepulauan Riau Province. Ulla Fionna claimed that the coalition party in the gubernatorial election still relied on character and ethnic identity to attract the voter's sympathy [20]. However, the situation in Kepulauan Riau Province shows that the eligible voters no longer believed in incumbent candidates even they have a similar attachment to ethnic identity.

TABLE V. REASON OF NON-VOTING

Reasons	%
Dissatisfied of work experience / Issues / programs offered	24.3
Uninterested with candidates	17.8
Mass media	8.3
Social media	7.2
Electronic media	5.3
No reason	37.3

The TABLE V shows that 37.3 voters did not have any reason why they did not attend the election poll and followed by 24.3% voters who dissatisfied with the previous work and program offered. Moreover, as can be seen in TABLE VI below, not all issues can attract voters' attention. There are 40.3% of respondents need employment opportunities, and followed by prosperity, basic needs, and education are the issues that must be resolved by the next government.

TABLE VI. IMPORTANT ISSUES ACCORDING TO NON-VOTING

	<b>Basic Needs</b>	<b>Prosperity</b>	<b>Job Opportunities</b>	<b>Formal Education</b>	<b>Others</b>
%	13	14.2	40.3	7	25.5

Referring to the candidates' programs that were addressed during the campaign, Sani - Nurdin have ten programs and Soerya - Ansar offers seven programs. Issue ownership is the perception among voters that the party or candidate is better able to deal with problems faced by the state than against the candidate. Then delivering an issue of strategy can be used to attract the sympathy of the masses. Unfortunately, both candidates do not provide a solution for the problem of employment. If the program plans are in accordance with what respondents are expected it will give more opportunity to increase sympathy from voters. As can be seen in TABLE VII, in terms of knowing candidate programs, most of respondents, or more than 70%, do not know what programs that candidates offer for the next five years.

TABLE VII. SHARE OF KNOWING CANDIDATES' PROGRAM

%	Sani - Nurdin	Soerya - Ansar
%	Sani - Nurdin	Soerya - Ansar
Yes	27.5	24.8
No	72.5	75.3

The issues that respondents hope to be resolved cannot be seen in the programs of those candidates. Although the candidates were well known as incumbents. On the contrary, only small number of respondents liked the program. Therefore, the best program socialization is by showing empathy and trust of candidates to the voters. However, when respondents know the programs of the candidates, only a small proportion of them like the program, as can be seen from this table.

TABLE VIII. OPINION OF CANDIDATE PROGRAM

%	Sani - Nurdin	Soerya - Ansar
Like	16.36	8.10
Dislike	83.64	91.90

TABLE VIII shows that 16.3 % of Golput respondents, who knew of the Sani-Nurdin programs, liked the program they had. While only 8.10% of the Golput respondents who knew the Soerya - Ansar programs, liked the program.

After seeing the two variables that can influence the absence of voters, it is also necessary to know whether the media affects as an important factor to the lower participation rate. Most researchers consider the information of media have an effect in political decisions. Kushin and Yamamoto said that interaction by using media is a campaign pattern that can be done by candidates either direct communication between producers called as Timses (campaign team of candidate) to consumers (voters) and or interaction between fellow users to each other invite choosing candidates they were sure with [21].

APJII (Association of Indonesian Internet Service Providers) published their survey report about Indonesia internet user in 2015 had reached 110.2 million users with an average length of 2.9 hours of social media usage/day. However, we found that, the respondents were not active users who access information from media regularly. Thus they do not consider the media as the main tool for collecting information on their political choices. Based on TABLE IX, it shows that 17.8% respondents receive their information from mass media, 22.5% from social media, and 15.5% from electronic media.

TABLE IX. MEDIA INFORMATION ACCESS OF CANDIDATE

	Frequency	Percent
Mass media	71	17.8
Social media	90	22.5
Electronic media	62	15.5
Not at all	177	44.3
Total	400	100.0

The viral issues on social media about incumbent candidates or reporting of incumbent issues on mass media. For example, in 2014 industrial workers in Batam City protested to reject the Governor's Decree concerning the city's Minimum Wage (UMK) in 2015 which is lower than expectation from the workers. In addition, there are considered as impartial policy issues such a land disputes between occupant of Uma Village and private sector for claims against Tanjung Uma's old village. When several representatives of the residents visited Soerya's house, which at the time served as Deputy Governor of Riau Islands Province to find solutions to land conflicts between residents and private companies. According to the news at that time, instead of getting a solution, Soerya's attitude was considered inappropriate as a leader because he snapped at the residents who visited to his house. Those discussed issues above did not affect respondent choice. The result shows that 44.3 percent of respondents did not consider the media as a tool to determine their absence in the election.

The interest to access knowledge for information from both viral and social media, as well as reports in the mass media does not have a significant impact on the desire to participate. When they were asked about whether or not their choice were affected by the candidates' debate that was broadcasted in the electronic media (TV), approximately of 49% answered Yes and 30.3% answered No. The rest were more to answer 'Don't know' at 20.8%. The table indicate it still had enough effect for decision to not choose incumbent candidates.

TABLE X. EFFECT OF CANDIDATE DEBATE ON ELECTRONIC MEDIA

Effect of Candidate Debate on TV	Frequency	Percent
Yes	196	49
No	121	30.3
Don't Know	83	20.8
Total	400	100

Finding results by observing respondents, besides they watched debates on TV they also turned out to pay attention to

the information regarding the debate. Such as when media broadcasting he held of debate, in the other hand they reported chaos accident behind the stage in the debate between the two of candidates' campaign teams. When Soerya-Ansar's supporters protested to the opponent's campaign team due to bring campaign props that alerted fraud to involve the police to relieve up the riots. This news report indirectly affected the voting. Respondents said that supporters from the pairs of candidates themselves were unable to maintain security and cannot be sportive then made them tend to demonstrate negative reaction during the open debate.

V. CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that the voters have developed distrust against the contestants in the gubernatorial election in Riau Islands in 2015. The incumbent was considered incapable of keeping alive the trust and expectation of eligible voters. Even though incumbents have experiences, neither issues nor programs were considered in accordance with the demands of voters. This results in decline of voters' participation. The low knowledge about the program was also being a problem for voters, which were caused by low frequency of incumbents' approach to the voters. Moreover, the respondents do not consider media (social media, mass media, media electronic) as the main tool to access information about candidate, which 44.3% of respondents do not consider the media despite the fact that information from media has become a lifestyle in the modern era voters tend to choose candidates that able to communicate about the program directly. Furthermore, voters preferred to discuss election with their colleague by face-to-face communication rather than using the media. In addition, this research should to be continued to find out the best strategies for maintaining voters' trust for incumbent candidates so that the elections are not only for getting formal legitimacy of the candidate as a government leader but also to execute the aspiration of the society as a whole.

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