

# Beginner Voters' Participation in the 2019 Election in Semarang

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**Abstract.** Beginner voters, consisting of millions of young people, are potential voters. They highly contributed to the victory of candidates in the 2019 simultaneous elections and helped to maintain robust and democratic governance. The level of participation of beginner voters in Semarang and its affecting factors are worthy of being studied. Therefore, this current study aims to examine this issue using a legislative and conceptual approach. Beginner voters seem to have unique characteristics and face external conditions that may affect their participation. Some of the conditions include unstable emotion and lack of political knowledge, which may influence their political preference. For instance, their political choice may be influenced by the popularity of candidates who are also their peers' idols. Likewise, administrative and political issues may influence the political participation of beginner voters. Thus, serious efforts need to be made to increase beginner voters' participation in general elections as a manifestation of the people's sovereignty.

**Keywords:** participation, beginner voters, 2019 election

## INTRODUCTION

The general election held on April 17, 2019, in Indonesia is not only a presidential transition but also an event that creates new experiences in the dynamics of state politics. The 2019 election is the first simultaneous legislative and presidential election. Besides the president and vice president, members of the House of Representatives (DPR), Regional Representative Council (DPD), and Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) were also elected. This simultaneous election is considered in line with the mandate of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NRI 1945). It aims to encourage voters to exercise their right to vote for each election category because they can vote for DPR, DPD and DPRD members concurrently along with a president and vice president.

It was hoped that public enthusiasm for the presidential election would significantly decrease the number of "abstentions" (people who do not use their right to vote) in the legislative election. In fact, an unexpected thing happened. Many voters seemed to be excited more about the legislative election, so they overlooked the presidential election. Most of these voters

have limited political experience and do not see politics as an integral part of all aspects of life, and are often referred to as beginner voters [1].

The number of beginner voters in the 2019 Election was quite significant, which was around 7.4% of the total 196.5 million voters, or approximately 14 million people [2]. With a large number of the beginner voters, encouraging the participation of beginner voters in the 2019 Election was essential for the success of the election. There are many things that promote the participation of beginner voters in the 2019 Election; the beginner voters are recorded in the final voter list, socialization and education on electoral affairs, exciting campaigns, and so forth. However, a month prior to the 2019 Election, some of these aspects were still problematic. Without making improvements, it is difficult to expect beginner voters to be enthusiastic about participating in the 2019 Election. This paper discusses the participation of beginner voters in the 2019 Election, especially in Semarang City and the factors influencing the participation of first-time voters.

## METHOD

The study was conducted using a normative juridical method focusing on the study of legal norms contained in the laws and regulations governing general elections, namely various laws and regulations that are directly or indirectly related to both legislative and presidential election.

Specifically, several approaches were used, namely: 1) Statute approach (to examine and analyze various laws and regulations governing the 2019 Elections), and 2) Conceptual approach (to explore the concept of election management and community participation, especially beginner voters). The aim is to understand how the voters' participation will influence the upcoming elections.

The primary material of this study is legal material, which serves as secondary data and includes primary and secondary legal materials. The primary legal materials are in the form of related legislation. On the other hand, the secondary legal materials were publication material on law, such as official documents and various writings by scholars, and supported by several opinions of persons who are competent and have experiences in the election administration. Other data were obtained from voters in

Semarang City Election Commission and the results of general elections.

Furthermore, to complement and support primary legal materials, interviews with relevant parties who have competence in the issue of election administration were conducted. All legal materials obtained were analyzed using prescriptive descriptive analysis method to provide an argument for the results of the study. The arguments were made by the researchers to offer prescriptions or assessments of the participation of the beginning voters.

## RESULT

### The Importance of General Elections

General elections are a logical consequence of the adoption of the principle of people's sovereignty (democracy) in the life of the nation and state [3]. Elections are believed to be instruments to express people's aspirations and interests. Through elections, the people's representatives can win a seat in the legislature, and a legitimate government is formed [4]. Therefore, elections must be carried out periodically at certain times in democratic countries [5].

According to Jimly Asshiddiqie, there are several reasons why holding elections regularly is important: [5] 1) People's opinions or aspirations regarding various aspects of shared life in society are dynamic and develop from time to time. In a certain period of time, people may change their opinion about state policy; 2) The conditions of living together in society can also change, either because of the dynamics of the international world or because of domestic factors, which are influenced by both internal and external human factors; 3) Changes in the people aspirations and opinions are also possible due to the increase in population, especially the adult one. In this case, voters or beginner voters do not necessarily have the same attitude as their own parents, and 4) Elections need to be held regularly for a leadership transition, both in the executive and legislative levels.

The importance of elections is apparent when elections are seen as a phenomenon. As a political phenomenon, the election can represent the political awareness of society through competition, participation, and use of political rights. As a social phenomenon, it reflects the pattern of people's behavior in responding to elections [6].

Given the importance of elections, many parties formulate the prerequisites of an election. The Global Commission on Election, Democracy, and Security proposes three indicators that must be present in an election so that they can be an election with integrity [7]: 1) Elections are based on democratic principles with generally accepted vote and political equality as described in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights; 2) The preparation and implementation (of elections) must be professional, impartial, and transparent, and 3) Compliance and ethical practices must guide the entire election cycle. Considering the

importance of elections, Indonesia also includes the principles of elections in its constitution [8].

### Political Participation in General Election

Political Participation. Samuel P. Huntington and Joan Nelson define political participation as "activity by private citizens designed to influence governmental decision making" [9]. Political participation is basically a guarantee that must be given to the people to be able to participate in the political process, namely in policymaking in the administration of government.

Political participation is the activity of citizens who act as individuals, which is intended to influence the decision made by the government. Participation can be individual or collective, organized or spontaneous, steady or sporadic, peaceful or violent, legal or illegal, effective or ineffective [10]. An example of political participation in the government administration is participating in political decision-making, while political participation related to general elections can be interpreted as the participation in determining the government policy by actively participating in general elections, both the legislative and presidential ones.

Types of Political Participation [10]. In general, political participation is divided into: 1) Active participation, namely participation oriented to the input and output processes; 2) Passive participation, namely participation solely oriented to output, by obeying government regulations, accepting and implementing every government decision, and 3) White group (abstentions) or apathetic groups who think that the existing political system deviates from their aspiration.

### The Participation of Beginner Voters in the 2019 Election in Semarang

Samuel Huntington states that political participation is an activity of citizens who act as individuals, which is intended to influence governmental decision-making. Concerning the general elections, political participation here is defined as the participation of the people in determining the policy of administering government by actively participating in general elections carried out simultaneously in 2019 (by electing members of the DPR, DPD, DRRD, as well as the president and vice president).

Beginner voters are those who are eligible to vote for the first time because in the previous election they have not been 17 years old or older, or have not been married, or have never married. Beginner voters in this context are citizens who are between 17 and 21 years old, unless married. Beginner Voter is a technical term in an election that describes those who have not been able to see politics as an integral part of all aspects of life.

At the end of the campaign, the election participants began to target the so-called swing voters or undecided voters, which included beginner voters. Although there are differences in the data of the number of beginner voters, qualitatively the votes of the beginner voters make a significant contribution to the victory of the candidate. The number of beginner voters in the 2019

Election is quite substantial, which is around 7.4% of the total 196.5 million voters or about 14 million people [2]. At the national level, the general voter participation rate for the 2019 Elections had been expected to reach the minimum of 77.5%, but the actual percentage of the national voters reached 80.90%, which far exceeded both the expected level and the previous participation rate in the 2014 elections of 70 % [11].

Based on the plenary meeting, the number of voters in the 2019 Election in Semarang decreased to 1,176,074 voters. It was caused by several factors, such as multiple names of the voters, and voter requirements were not fulfilled, so several names had to be crossed out [12]. However, compared to the 2018 Election (with approximately 1,114,643 voters), there was an increase in the number of voters in 2019.

Semarang voters reached 82% [13] from 1,176,074. The number of beginner voters in Semarang was 96,562 out of 1,176,074 voters. The number of beginner voters in Semarang during the 2019 Election was relatively high, and so was the voter participation, which showed an increase.

### **Factors Influencing the Level of Beginner Voter Participation in the 2019 Election**

Beginner voters seem to have unique characteristics and face external conditions that may affect their level of participation. Some of the conditions include unstable emotion and lack of political knowledge, which may affect their political preference. For instance, their political choice may be influenced by the popularity of candidates who become idols of their peers. Likewise, administrative and political issues may influence the political participation of beginner voters.

The results of this study showed that there were some factors influencing beginner voter participation in the 2019 Election. The factors encouraging them to vote in the election include: 1) Knowledge of beginner voters about the rights of the citizens as stated in the 1945 Constitution in implementing the sovereignty of the people / the democracy; 2) The existence of candidates who met the criteria; 3) The first general election for beginner voters; 4) Candidates/participants were their relatives.

Whereas some factors that caused beginner voters not to participate in the election this time were: 1) the voters were registered but did not take care of the A5 card since they were studying or doing other activities in other cities. Some of them were lazy to take A5 cards or did not know how to take care of it. 2) The assumption that their voices would not bring a change to the country.

### **CONCLUSION**

Beginner voters have different characteristics, which can influence their political participation in general elections. Also, the high number of beginner voters have the potential to significantly influence the outcome or victory of candidates. The participation of beginner

voters in the 2019 Election in Semarang was encouraged by several factors, such as the awareness of the right to vote in the democracy, the existence of candidates who are considered to meet the criteria, as well as family choice factors. Besides, the first experience as a voter in general elections makes them excited to take part in the election. On the other hand, there are administrative constraints and the assumption that their voices neither have an effect nor benefit for their lives, which hinder their participation in the 2019 Election.

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