

Political Participation of the Young Generation in the 2024 Regional Head Elections in Lubuklinggau City

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ABSTRACT

This study examines youth political participation and electoral expectations in the 2024 Local Election of Lubuklinggau City, with a particular focus on university students as strategic voters in local democracy. Despite their growing demographic dominance, youth participation is often characterized by high electoral turnout but limited deliberative engagement. This research aims to analyze voting intention, attitudes toward money politics, sources of political information, priority issues, and factors influencing candidate preferences among young voters. The study employs a quantitative approach using a survey method involving 442 student respondents aged 18–35 years. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and simple inferential techniques. The findings indicate that youth voting intention is relatively high; However, political participation remains largely procedural rather than discursive. Most respondents demonstrate a strong normative rejection of money politics and rely heavily on social media as their primary source of political information. Education costs, employment opportunities, and living expenses emerge as the most influential policy issues shaping electoral preferences. This study contributes to the literature on local democratic participation by highlighting the gap between electoral participation and substantive political engagement among young voters. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening political education, media literacy, and program-based digital campaign strategies to enhance the quality of youth participation in local elections.

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Introduction

Voter participation is an important indicator in assessing the quality of local democracy, particularly in the context of regional head elections. Citizen engagement in the electoral process not only indicates the level of democracy but also reflects the depth of legitimacy of the elected government. Young voters, as a significant demographic group, have unique characteristics and needs that can directly influence election outcomes. Studies show that young voters are more likely to engage in the political process if they feel connected to the issues facing their communities and if they see value in voting as a mechanism to advocate for change (Murugasu, 2020), (Bhusal & Acharya, 2024). Existing research shows that young voters exhibit different behavioral patterns compared to other age groups. They tend to be more responsive to social change and technological innovation, which influences how they participate in elections. For example, the use of social media as a tool for mobilization and dissemination of information has been shown to increase youth

voter participation in various countries (Kennedy et al., 2018). Research by Lameck highlights that in many countries, Local Government Reforms are designed to increase public participation in decision-making, although their implementation still faces many obstacles (Lameck, 2014), 2014; et al., 2023).

Low participation in local elections is often due to factors such as dissatisfaction with the electoral process itself and a lack of understanding of the importance of local elections. Studies by Asquith and colleagues show that, despite strong local government structures in several countries, including New Zealand, voter turnout has actually declined (Asquith et al., 2021). This suggests that despite the existence of democratic infrastructure, significant challenges remain in engaging voters actively. Increasing transparency and accessibility in the electoral process is expected to motivate young voters to participate (Herman et al., 2022). The importance of political education and community awareness among young people cannot be overemphasized. Research in West Sumatra suggests that public participation in gubernatorial elections can be increased through ongoing political education, where young people are informed and encouraged to participate in the political process (Pebriyenn et al., 2018; Sama et al., 2023). Furthermore, budget participation and citizen-led decisions demonstrate that when individuals feel they have a voice in decision-making, they are more likely to participate in elections. Several studies have shown that approaches emphasizing government-community collaboration in budgeting have led to increased voter participation in local elections (Bhusal & Acharya, 2024).

Political participation among young voters is often influenced by various factors, including voter rationality, social norms, and access to political information. Theoretically, voter rationality refers to the decision an individual makes to engage in political activity based on the perceived costs and benefits. For example, in the context of major elections, rational choice theory suggests that individuals are less likely to vote because they perceive their chances of influencing the outcome to be small and outweigh the costs of voting. However, challenges for young voters arise from the complexity of evolving social norms and the influence of peer pressure, which often influence their choice to engage in politics (Harahap, 2021). Despite these factors, studies have shown that despite the increasing number of young voters, they are not always a reliable political asset, but rather tend to feel alienated from the traditional political process (Oser, 2016, Olar, 2023, 2023). Recent research findings indicate that a high proportion of young voters often does not correspond to substantial levels of political engagement. This occurs due to political apathy among young people, who prefer not to participate in the voting process, citing political turmoil and boredom (Hutapea, 2021). A study conducted in Nigeria and South Africa found that political apathy among young voters is caused by distrust of the political system and negative experiences with previous elections (Nweke & Etido-Inyang, 2020). While social media and rapid access to information should encourage engagement, the phenomenon actually reflects the opposite, with many young voters choosing not to participate in elections, preferring activities outside the formal political arena (Bashir et al., 2024).

Research also notes that access to information is a critical factor in encouraging political participation. In many countries, the presence of competitive media and transparent information can increase political awareness among young voters (Cagé, 2020), (Kennedy et al., 2018) et al., 2018). However, findings indicate that participation only increases if the information received is relevant and can spark their interest in political issues that affect their daily lives (Shen, 2009). Furthermore, several studies suggest that social norms that provide

positive pressure for peer groups to engage in politics can increase participation, but these norms need to be transformed to reach segments of the currently passive young voter population (Oser, 2016). This emphasizes the need for a multidimensional approach that combines continuous information provision with the development of social norms in the political context into voter mobilization strategies.

Voter participation in Lubuklinggau City experienced a significant increase in the 2024 regional elections compared to the previous period. This increase is a positive signal for the quality of local democracy, indicating that the public is increasingly aware of the importance of their voice in the electoral process. Despite the overall increase, this high level of participation is not reflected in the involvement of young voters, particularly university students, who still show variability in the form and intensity of their participation. This is in line with findings by Hidayaturrehman et al., who showed that although millennials comprise 60% of potential voters, low political literacy remains a significant challenge to increasing their participation (Akhmad et al., 2023; Hidayaturrehman et al., 2023).

Previous studies have also shown that young voters are not only required to exercise their right to vote but are also expected to take an active role in public discussions, democratic oversight, and rationally evaluate candidates. Shaleh and Raihana (2021) emphasize the importance of effective youth voter participation in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, suggesting that emergency conditions can influence the political choices and decisions of first-time voters. The various barriers faced, such as health-related uncertainty and changes in voting procedures during emergency situations, require innovative strategies to increase engagement (Shaleh & Raihana, 2021). This illustrates the complexities of engaging young voters in a dynamic political environment. Furthermore, Sa'ban (2019) noted that in previous elections, public participation in Baubau was quite high, but factors such as political incentives and personal characteristics significantly influenced this level of engagement. Young voters in Lubuklinggau may be influenced by the local context and collective participation in their academic circles. Therefore, it is important to create space for productive dialogue and effective political education among students to ensure that they are not only present as voters, but also as agents of change in the monitoring and assessment of candidates (Niode & Sandiah, 2023).

Recent findings suggest that young voter engagement can be strengthened through appropriate and relevant political education. Several studies have shown that training and outreach programs targeting first-time voters can increase political awareness among university students (Nababan et al., 2024; Akhmd et al., 2023). Facilitating access to accurate political information and integrating social media into political awareness campaigns are essential approaches to engage and promote active participation by young voters in the upcoming regional elections. This highlights the need for initiatives involving various stakeholders from the government, universities, and civil society organizations to create a more inclusive and participatory political climate.

This research focuses on analyzing the political participation and expectations of young voters in the 2024 Lubuklinggau City Regional Election. This study is crucial for understanding the extent to which voting intentions, attitudes toward money politics, sources of political information, and policy preferences influence young voters' political behavior. The research findings are expected to contribute to the development of political education strategies and the formulation of more inclusive local democracy policies.

Method

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method, designed to systematically collect data on the political participation of young voters in Lubuklinggau City during the 2024 Regional Election. The study population was young people and students in Lubuklinggau City who met the age criteria of 18–35 years and were active students. The study sample consisted of 442 respondents, selected using a purposive sampling technique. The purposive sampling method was chosen to ensure that the participants in this study were the most relevant group, namely students who were exercising their right to vote for the first time. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, designed to evaluate several variables related to political participation. The questionnaire included variables such as voting intention, attitudes towards money politics, sources of political information, and voter preferences. The use of the questionnaire allowed researchers to obtain consistent and comparable data among respondents, thus facilitating more detailed analysis. The questionnaire was also adjusted to ensure that the terms used were easily understood by young voters, given their increasingly important role in current political dynamics. Data analysis applied descriptive analysis techniques to provide an overview of the characteristics of respondents and their political participation. In addition, inferential analysis was conducted using the chi-square test to assess the relationship between the variables studied and correlation to analyze the strength and direction of the relationship between voting intentions and other variables, such as attitudes toward money politics and sources of political information. This methodology is consistent with a positive approach that focuses on hypothesis testing and generalizing findings to the broader population.

Results and Discussion

A. Voter Participation

Apakah Anda akan menggunakan hak pilih dalam Pilkada Kota Lubuk Linggau 2024?
422 jawaban

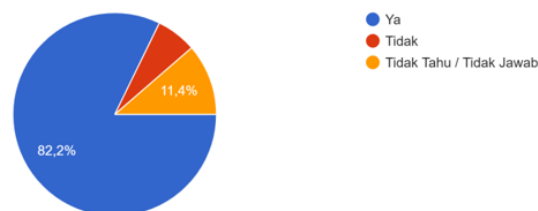


Figure 1. Voting Intention and Political Participation

The results of the study indicate that the level of voting intention among youth and students in Lubuklinggau City ahead of the 2024 regional elections is relatively high, with 82.2% of respondents stating that they will exercise their right to vote. This finding reflects the potential for significant political participation among young voters, which is expected to contribute to strengthening democracy in Indonesia. This context aligns with previous research findings that emphasize that political participation is a way for individuals to influence the direction of public policy and decisions, especially among the younger generation who now dominate the voter population (Rahmaniah et al., 2024; Romli et al., 2024). Although voting intention is high, there is a striking gap between this intention and deliberative political engagement. Only 46.2% of respondents admitted to rarely discussing the regional elections with peers or family, indicating that young voter participation is more

procedural than substantive. This indicates a lack of political discourse that is vital to creating voters who are not only active in voting, but also informed and engaged in constructive dialogue on political issues (Ramadhan et al., 2024). This is in line with the idea that political education and increasing political literacy are crucial to encourage young voters not only to participate in elections, but also to engage in critical political discussions (Rahmaniah et al., 2024; Saputro et al., 2024).

In this context, political education theory provides a meaningful perspective, where good education can help transform political intentions into concrete actions (Rahmaniah et al., 2024; Nadjib, 2023). Approaches based on utilizing social media to convey relevant political information have also proven effective in increasing youth voter participation (Ni'amah, 2018). If young people are encouraged and involved in more deliberative discussion processes, where they feel empowered and have a voice, their active participation in elections will not only increase but also create a more solid and informed basis for political participation in the future (Geisler, 2024; Saputro et al., 2024; Mukhlisah et al., 2024).

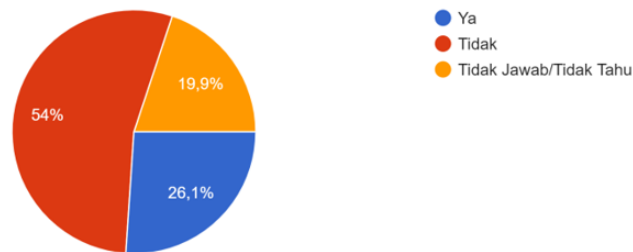


Figure 2. Attitudes towards Money Politics

The study, which found that 54% of respondents rejected the practice of money politics among youth and students in Lubuklinggau, reflects an increase in political awareness and normative integrity within this group (Geisler, 2024). The majority of respondents who viewed money politics as unfair, undermining democracy, and reducing electoral integrity emphasized a desire to create a fairer and more transparent political environment. These findings align with research indicating that dissatisfaction with immoral political practices, such as money politics, is increasingly creating space for anti-corruption movements and political education for young voters (Rahmaniah et al., 2024); (Romli et al., 2024).

This positive normative attitude toward rejecting money politics also aligns with the finding that many students tend to assess their involvement in politics morally. Previous research in several regions in Indonesia has shown that although money politics is a common practice, a growing number of young voters are aware of its negative impact on undermining the legitimacy of elections. One study found that the proportion of voters involved in money politics ranged from 19.4% to 33.1%, indicating that despite the momentum of rejection, challenges remain in eradicating the practice entirely (Ramadhan et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the role of monitoring institutions such as the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) is crucial in maintaining election integrity and preventing vote buying practices. Previous research highlights the contributions of various actors in preventing vote buying, including the role of youth organizations such as Karang Taruna (Saputro et al., 2024). Effective prevention efforts require multidimensional collaboration between the government, the community, and non-governmental organizations to educate voters about the importance of their vote and the impact of unethical practices such as vote buying.

The increased awareness among respondents illustrates the potential for attitudinal change among the younger generation, who are demanding greater transparency and accountability in government (Nadjib, 2023). In this context, inclusive and participatory political education can be key to addressing existing challenges and providing young voters with a deeper understanding of how to maintain electoral integrity. Future research should focus on developing political education programs that emphasize not only theory but also practical experience and active engagement in constructive political discussions (Ni'amah, 2018, 2018).

B. The Dominance of Social Media as a Source of Information for Young Voters in Regional Elections

The research findings show that social media has become the primary source of information for young voters regarding candidates and regional elections, which is very relevant in describing the changing patterns of political communication today. Platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram occupy a dominant position, indicating that young voters are increasingly relying on digital channels to shape their political perceptions and preferences. Previous research has shown that the use of social media in political campaigns has proven effective in reaching a wider audience, especially among the younger generation who are more comfortable with digital formats (Luthfie et al., 2024). Social media not only functions as an information channel, but also as an arena for political interaction where voters can discuss, share views, and engage directly with prospective leaders (Izzati et al., 2025).

The shift from traditional to digital media, demonstrated in this survey, indicates a dramatic shift in how young voters navigate political information. In the digital era, social media provides a platform that allows candidates to build their public image in a more interactive and direct manner. Research on election campaigns on social media underscores the importance of dynamic and adaptive communication strategies, including creative techniques to attract voter engagement, such as the use of short videos on TikTok (Sitorus & Gasperzs, 2021). While this creates opportunities for candidates to better connect with voters, it can also raise challenges related to the legitimacy of information circulating on social media, including smear campaigns and disinformation.

However, despite the benefits of using social media, it is important for young voters to have good media literacy to assess the information they receive. As revealed by previous research, the ability to analyze and understand the content they consume on social media is crucial to prevent them from being trapped in hoaxes and disinformation ((Arafah & Hasyim, 2023); (Gofur & Sunarso, 2020) Therefore, political education integrated with media literacy needs to be improved, so that young voters are not only passive consumers of information but are also able to play an active and critical role in the ongoing political process.

C. Voter Expectations

Issues considered most important by young people and students include the high cost of education, the difficulty of finding employment, the high price of basic necessities, security and crime issues, and environmental and waste management issues. Furthermore, the cost of healthcare services was also a concern for respondents. Key expectations for elected regional leaders include improving the quality of education, expanding employment opportunities, eradicating corruption, improving infrastructure, lowering basic food prices, and

maintaining security and order. These findings indicate that young voters tend to have a rational and substantive orientation toward public policy issues.

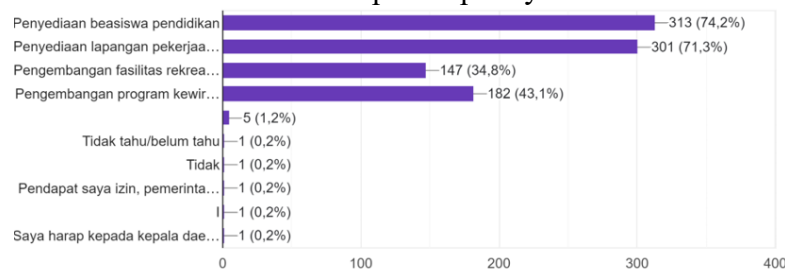


Figure 3. Priority Issues and Hopes of Young Voters

Survey results, which noted that the primary factor influencing respondents' choices was the candidate's vision and program (44.5%), indicate that young voters are increasingly considering substantive issues when making their political choices (Sahab, 2017). This indicates a growing level of political maturity among the younger generation, with them preferring candidates who not only have a good reputation but also offer concrete action plans for the future (Bulqiyah et al., 2023). Previous research has shown a similar trend, with young voters in some regions tending to pay more attention to a candidate's strategy and vision than simply the political figure's personality or social influence (Maulida et al., 2021). Values that align with their needs and aspirations appear to be an important consideration in making political decisions.

However, the proportion of undecided respondents (44.1%) highlights the dynamic nature of young voters' political preferences. Concerns about the unclear vision and work programs of candidates (53.8%) indicate that despite progress in political understanding, there is still much room for improved transparency and communication from candidates to voters (Muhammad & Anggara, 2021). Research examining the influence of social environments also found that family and kinship ties have a significant impact on shaping young voters' political attitudes, indicating that social factors remain powerful in their decision-making (Dadi et al., 2024). Clear and accurate information about candidates' track records (20.6%) also plays a crucial role, reinforcing the argument that political education and information literacy need to be strengthened among voters.

Open communication between candidates and voters can be a crucial factor in addressing the lack of information that can lead to uncertainty in political choices. Previous research has shown that elections involving public discussion and open dialogue tend to achieve higher turnout and create more critical and informed voters (Ilham et al., 2022; Husniyah et al., 2024). Given that factors such as work programs and visions significantly impact voting behavior, candidates should focus efforts on reaching young voters and conveying information in an engaging and relevant manner (Hariyanti, 2022). Respondents tended to favor leadership styles that care about the community, are honest and free from corruption, are authoritative, intelligent, courageous, polite, and nurturing. The majority of respondents stated that they did not have a problem with the gender of regional head candidates, indicating a relatively high level of acceptance of female leadership at the local level.

The high voter intention among youth and university students indicates that the younger generation in Lubuklinggau City has significant potential as a basis for political

participation in the regional elections. However, the low intensity of political discussions and the high number of undecided respondents indicate that this participation is still fluid and requires strengthening through ongoing political education. The dominance of social media as a primary source of information underscores the strategic role of digital space in local politics. Social media serves not only as an information channel but also as an arena for shaping young voters' political opinions and preferences. On the other hand, high reliance on social media also increases the risk of disinformation, making media literacy and responsible political communication urgently necessary.

The majority of respondents' rejection of money politics demonstrates the importance of social capital for strengthening election integrity. This finding indicates that young voters have the potential to be agents of change in suppressing transactional political practices. However, this normative attitude needs to be supported by effective oversight and consistent voter education to prevent it from being eroded by pragmatic practices on the ground. The research findings indicate that regional head candidates who are able to offer clear, realistic visions and work programs that address the real needs of young voters have a greater chance of gaining support. Campaign strategies that optimize social media in a transparent and interactive manner are key to reaching young voters, especially those who are undecided.

Conclusion

This study concludes that young voters in Lubuklinggau City have a high voter intention in the 2024 regional elections, but their political engagement is still dominated by electoral participation. Young voters demonstrate a critical attitude towards money politics and tend to rely on social media as a source of political information. Substantive public policy issues are the primary basis for shaping political preferences. These findings emphasize the need to strengthen political education, media literacy, and more participatory campaign communication strategies to improve the quality of local democracy. Future research is recommended to examine the dynamics of young voters' political participation in more depth.

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