

The Analysis of KPU Karawang Strategy in Building Political Culture through Voter Education

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Abstract

General elections provide the Election Commission (KPU) with an opportunity to educate the public on actively participating in the political process. Public political participation in general elections is not only about exercising their voting rights or mobilizing masses for the interests of election participants, but also about expressing their political awareness in determining the direction of government policies through the vision, mission, and programs of election participants. Public political awareness can be cultivated through voter education organized by the KPU. As a result, voter education has a positive implication in building a participatory political culture among the public and managing political polarization by equipping people with the knowledge to become rational voters. Rational voters indirectly influence societal consensus and social cohesion towards the government.

Keywords: *KPU Karawang 1, Political Culture 2, Voter education 3, keywords 4*

Introduction

Since the implementation of direct elections in 1955, the face of democracy has been continually tested in Indonesia through the five-yearly political contests. The ethical principles of Pancasila democracy have been publicly confronted with complex challenges within the configuration of political culture. According to data from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) Democracy Index, Indonesia still falls into the category of a flawed democracy, with a score of 6.71 in 2022, after reaching 7.03 in 2015. The index's anatomy scores for election processes and pluralism are 7.92/5.63, government functions 7.86/4.64, political participation 7.22/5.39, and civil liberties 6.18/5.37. Indonesia's weak position lies in the variable of political culture, with a score below the global average, namely 4.38/5.38. Out of the total of 5 variables, Indonesia has achieved 2 ratings of very good for government function and political participation, 2 ratings of good for election processes and pluralism, and 1 rating of poor for political culture.

According to Almond & Verba (1984:25), political culture is the citizenry's attitude and orientation towards the political system and its various components, as well as the citizen's role within that system. In this context, the political culture of a society is inseparable from the social values that exist within it. These social values are dominated by customs and religion. Customs and religion have a significant influence in shaping the community's views on the possible steps to be taken within the political system.

Indonesia is a country that possesses six unique and complex religious and customary characteristics. With such conditions, Indonesia characterized by an plural society that strives to build coexistence. In accordance with the founding mandate of Indonesia, as conveyed by Ir. Soekarno on June 1, 1945, "We want to establish a state for all. Therefore,

if you agree, let us take as the first foundation of the state: Indonesian nationality. rounded Indonesian nationality! Not Javanese nationality, not Sumatran nationality, not Bornean, Sulawesi, Balinese, or others, but Indonesian nationality, which together forms a single foundation, a national state."

The intended national state is built on the awareness of nationalism born from a sense of common destiny and responsibility by taking a democratic path that can be held accountable by political actors. The ideal standards of behavior in the practice of politics in this pluralistic democratic country must refer to Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, and MPR Decree No. 6 of 2001 concerning the Code of Conduct for National Life. However, the lingering problem is the phenomenon of political polarization, which tends to divide society during the five-yearly democratic events.

Political polarization according to Fiorina & Abrams (2008) is the simultaneous accentuation of opposing principles and perspectives. Meanwhile, according to McCoy & Somer (2019), political polarization is a phenomenon of differing views and political choices among political elite groups that permeate society and become highly extreme. From the perspectives of these two experts, it can be concluded that political polarization is a deep-seated ideological conflict involving political elites and/or society. This ideological conflict encompasses policy issues, assessments of leaders, and their political visions. In this regard, political polarization has a significantly negative impact on the democratization process, political stability in ensuring the overall quality of political life, and can hinder the state's ability to achieve the necessary consensus to address social and economic challenges

As for the causes of political polarization according to McCarty (2019), it is the strategy of political actors, which overlooks the fundamental aspects of a country in maintaining political stability, thus leading to identity division. In this regard, the author believes that the strategy of political actors in producing political polarization begins with using divisive rhetoric with the aim of mobilizing the masses. Then, they use identity issues such as ethnicity, religion, or gender to strengthen the support base of political actors. Next, they utilize mass media and other social media platforms to produce political polarization with tendentious narratives. Subsequently, these steps will trigger the dissemination of information that can increase information bubbles that are not verified by various segments of society. After all steps have been successfully taken, the final stage of the political actor's strategy is to carry out political polarization aimed at strengthening differences between groups using certain ideological issues. This step will affect the psychological state of political opponents and capture the support of the public.

In the historical records of political polarization during the implementation of democratic processes from 2014 to the 2019 democratic elections in Indonesia, as explained by Mansyur (2023); Fossati (2019); Pepinsky (2019), Indonesia has consistently been confronted with two different spectrum choices, between Islamic or Pluralist groups. According to Mansyur (2023), pluralist groups use the term "Islamic" to refer to groups that seek to Islamize the state and erode the harmony and trust of society through religious exclusivity. This statement is thrown by pluralist groups as a form of criticism against those who politically dichotomize religion to achieve their political desires. However, for the other spectrum, rejecting this criticism with a narrative of resistance, politics without religious elements will lose direction. The debate continues, creeping into the daily lives of society and triggering social movements that disrupt Indonesia's diversity.

The framing of political actor polarization during democratic elections tends to be less beneficial. Considering that political actor polarization will lead to divisional impacts that ultimately result in horizontal conflicts. Daniel Webster, in Pickering 2001, defines conflict as competition or contention between parties that are incompatible with each other and conflicting behaviors. The escalation of potential conflicts will continue to grow in severity over time. However, the essence of previous democratic elections has already been

explained by Ir. Soekarno in a pamphlet distributed in 1955, clearly stating that "General Elections should not become a battleground. Party struggles should not destroy the unity of the Indonesian nation." In addition, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections also states that general elections are a platform to uphold the sovereignty of the nation and, in a unitary state, are direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair.

Interestingly, in the 2024 election, the election process in Karawang Regency ran smoothly without any noisy public discussions regarding the spectrum of Islamic and pluralist sects. As stated by the Head of the BRIN Social Sciences and Humanities Research Agency, Ahmad Najib Burhani, at the "Political Outlook 2024" event in Jakarta, the 2024 elections relatively calm. Compared to the 2019 election where terms such as *cebong*, *kampret*, *buzzer*, *kadrun*, and others were widely discussed on various social media platforms and in real life in society, the impact of the polarization of political actors from two opposing groups. In fact, the 2024 election is the first time in the history of Indonesian democracy that it coincides with the national regional head election.

However, the relatively calm conditions of the 2024 election do not necessarily mean that the primordial aspects and antagonistic sentiments in political polarization related to religion or ethnicity which have the potential to divide the Indonesian nation will not recur. It is possible that it will be used again when there is a particular issue or case that could trigger a public reaction. Remembering the statement by the Chairman of the Indonesian General Election Commission (KPU-RI), Hasyim Asyari, that elections, including regional elections, are an arena for conflict which is considered valid and legal to gain power or maintain power. Therefore, elections always have the potential to cause polarization. It is important for all parties to realize that political polarization cannot be avoided, rejected, or even eliminated. However, the political polarization that occurs during election contestation must not be allowed to develop and spread in society. In this context, political polarization must be managed well by all relevant parties to prevent extreme situations that could endanger and disrupt the social order and threaten national unity over national diversity.

Managing polarization in the political actors' strategy during campaigns can be done by building consensus with other political actors, so that there are no more antagonistic political narratives such as exploiting politics related to religion, ethnicity, and ethnicity sharply to the community. Furthermore, managing political polarization can also be done through voter education. Voter education is a crucial element in democracy. Rational voters become the measure of democracy quality in a country. The success of voter education can be seen in determining political choices that are no longer oriented towards short-term political interests such as money, power, and individual political compensation. Instead, political choices will be given to political parties or candidates who have the competence and integrity to govern in accordance with the Pancasila culture, a culture that is polite, civilized, and humane.

Therefore, the author is interested in conducting further research on the strategies of the General Election Commission, especially in Karawang Regency, in playing its role in managing and mitigating politically elite polarization. This research is entitled "Analysis of the Karawang General Election Commission's Strategies in Building Political Culture Through Voter Education." The aim of this research is to contribute to theoretical aspects and strategic steps of election organizers in determining more relevant voter education programs in efforts to shape a participatory political culture.

Method

Preparation of sample

This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative research method aimed at discovering and analyzing the underlying factors of a phenomenon. The researcher seeks to describe the results of the phenomenon under study in a descriptive manner, demonstrating the practical role of interest groups in mitigating political actor polarization. The study focuses on mapping stakeholders related to building a political culture in general elections, analyzed using the concept of stakeholder mapping, which involves a series of processes from identification, mapping, to prioritization categorized into two groups of relevant actors, including primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders who play a role in the success of general elections in a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2015), to study social and human issues, researchers collect data in the field and are sensitive to local social conditions, analyze data inductively and deductively, and employ various modern qualitative approaches that form patterns or themes.

The sampling technique used in this research is purposive sampling. In using purposive sampling, the researcher will select data sources based on specific considerations, namely, individuals who are considered to have the most knowledge about what the researcher expects. In this case, the data sources for this research are derived from the Chairperson of the Karawang Regency Election Commission, Mari Fitriana; Members of the Karawang Regency Election Commission, including the Socialization, Voter Education, Community Participation Division member, Ikmal Maulana; Legal and Supervision Division member, Kasum Sanjaya; Technical Implementation Division member, Putra Muhammad Wifdi Kamal; and Voter Data Update Division member, Ahmad Subhi. Data analysis in this research employs source triangulation by comparing and cross-checking the level of trustworthiness of information obtained through data sources.

Results and Discussion

The Collaborative Approach Strategy of the Election Commission in Managing Political Polarization

The General Election Commission, often abbreviated as KPU, in Law Number 17 of 2017, is a national, permanent, and independent institution responsible for conducting elections. The KPU is tasked with conducting Presidential and Vice Presidential elections, elections for members of the DPR (House of Representatives), DPD (Regional Representative Council), DPRD (Regional House of Representatives), as well as elections for Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads. In the implementation of the democratic process, the KPU is obligated to conduct voter education with the aim of increasing political participation among the public and promoting a conducive atmosphere for safe, peaceful, orderly, and smooth elections. In this context, an inclusive election is required, which is owned collectively and provides political equality for all citizens without exception.

According to Rahman Yasin (2019), elections are politically recognized as part of the power transition governance. The power transition process is fraught with political polarization, and political polarization will continue to evolve if the focus of debate surrounding elections is on the candidate's personality rather than ideas, vision, or work programs. Political polarization will shape voter classifications, namely rational voters and irrational voters, which can be triggered by issues of basic sentiment in political group manipulation to achieve their interests

Karawang is one of the districts known as an industrial hub with a diverse population. According to the Population and Civil Registration Office of Karawang Regency in 2018, the number of newcomers from outside the region reached 1.7 million, while the native

population of Karawang is around 1.1 million people. Of the total population, the Central Statistics Agency of West Java Province in 2023 recorded that the population of Karawang consists of 2,489,386 Muslims (98%), 35,040 Christians (1.37%), 8,483 Catholics (0.33%), 464 Hindus (0.01%), 5,765 Buddhists (0.22%), 190 Confucians (0.007%), and 53 people adhering to other beliefs (0.002%).

The diversity of the population is susceptible to potential conflicts, as seen in an incident affecting one of the residences of the congregation of the Huria Kristen Batak Protestant Church located in Amansari Village, Rengasdengklok, Karawang, West Java. Residents stormed the house, alleging it to be a place of worship. The protest was marked by intimidation and the destruction of one of the congregation's houses. However, the house was not used as a place of worship but only as a coordination and preparation site for Sunday worship.

The incident eventually surface on social media, sparking various reactions, including one from the Indonesian Communion of Churches (PGI), which condemned the actions of the group of residents. This unfortunate event occurred on Friday, October 29, 2021, indicating the ongoing escalation and disturbance of rejection towards worship for minority groups.

Additionally, quoted from Awaluddin, L. (2017, October 4), accessed from <https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-barat/d-3670271/aking-saputra-terdakwa-penistaan-agama-didakwa-pasal-berlapis>, in the case of Aking Saputra, a blasphemy defendant in 2017, who was charged with multiple articles, including Article 156A letter A of the Criminal Code (KUHP) regarding religious defamation, and Article 28 paragraph (2) of Law Number 19 Year 2016 concerning electronic information and transactions for uploading a Facebook status stating "The holy book teaches hatred, curses, threats of painful hell, murder, laws of cutting hands, stoning to death" on his personal account. This phenomenon drew public attention, leading to mass demonstrations at several locations, namely in front of the district court and the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) office in Karawang.

The two social phenomena illustrate that sensitivity issue related to religion can give rise to binary oppositions, pitting communities against each other and against the government. According to research findings in the Electoral Vulnerability Index and simultaneous elections in 2024 published by the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in January 2023, Karawang Regency scored 46.2969017, categorized as moderate. Looking at the scores in the dimensions of socio-political context, it's 41.34000015, moderate category; in the dimension of election administration, it's 47.02000046, moderate category; in the dimension of contestation, it's 69.06999969, high category; and in the dimension of participation, it's 0, moderate category. Although Karawang Regency falls into the moderate category, it doesn't mean that vulnerability in conducting general elections and simultaneous elections doesn't require mitigation, as stated in the Electoral Vulnerability Index and simultaneous elections book, even areas classified as low still have potential vulnerabilities that require special attention

Of the four dimensions, Karawang Regency receives a high category in the contestation dimension in the Electoral Vulnerability Index and simultaneous elections in 2024. This contestation sub-dimension includes 1) Right to Vote: phenomena or events showing rejection of candidates/election participants based on gender, ethnicity, tribe, religion, or race resulting in potential social vulnerability in society. 2) Candidate Campaign: phenomena or events during the campaign period showing information or campaign materials that could disturb public order and security and also potentially violate campaign rules that have been established.

The high category in the contestation dimension score based on the Electoral Vulnerability Index and simultaneous elections concludes that Karawang is one of the regencies vulnerable to potential violations or fraud from the electoral participants' ambitions in gaining power by justifying various means. In this context, electoral behavior

will affect the quality of the electoral process and outcomes, which can lead to various social impacts on community harmony, trigger conflicts, and potentially lead to national disintegration.

Contestation in general elections should be interpreted as a showcase of statesmanlike behavior offering various ideas in developing political culture within the government sphere through various political positions, so that in the process it does not erode the unity of the nation. In this context, the Karawang Regency KPU (General Election Commission) employs a collaborative approach strategy by inviting political parties to ensure the success of the general elections through healthy means, through consolidation activities, campaign collaborations with all candidates and political parties contesting in the general elections. The purpose of this activity is to prevent political contestant polarization that could lead to social division in society. In this activity, the KPU seeks to realize the implementation of elections colored by peaceful campaigns among contestants through a spirit of nationalism. In this activity, the KPU invites political parties and contestants to conduct campaigns based on the principles of honesty, fairness, legal certainty, orderliness, public interest, openness, proportionality, professionalism, accountability, effectiveness, and efficiency. Considering that campaigning is a means of political education for the public that must be carried out responsibly.

In the General Election Commission Regulation Number 15 of 2023 concerning Campaigns, specifically Article 22 regarding campaign materials which must include the vision, mission, and program of Presidential and Vice-Presidential Candidates for Presidential Election Campaigns, as well as individual candidates for DPD. The presentation of the vision, mission, and program material of political parties for the House of Representatives (DPR-RI), Provincial DPRD, and District/City DPRD. The provisions during the campaign are stipulated in Article 24, which states that it should not disrupt public order, provide beneficial information and educate the public, not attack individuals, groups, factions, or other Candidates, not be provocative, and establish healthy political communication between Election Participants and the public as part of building a democratic and dignified political culture in Indonesia.

As for the sanctions in campaign prohibitions, if a court decision with legal force has been issued, violators under Law Number 7 of 2017 Article 285 may be subject to the cancellation of contestants from the permanent candidate list and the cancellation of the designation of contestants as elected candidates.

As stated in Law Number 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties as amended by Law Number 2 of 2011, political parties in Article 10 paragraph (2) aim to build ethics and political culture in societal, national, and state life. Then in Article 11 paragraph (1) political parties under point (a) function as a means of political education for members and the wider community to become Indonesian citizens aware of their rights and obligations in societal, national, and state life. Point (b) creates a conducive climate for the unity of the Indonesian nation for the welfare of society.

The provisions in the regulations outlined above are sufficient to serve as the basis for the Karawang KPU strategy in managing and limiting political elite polarization that could lead to national division. With synergy between the KPU and political parties, election administration can become an effective tool for strengthening national integration, providing political education to the public as voters. In this regard, researchers analyze that the KPU and Political Parties can collaborate well to ensure a fair electoral administration process and provide results that represent the overall will of the people, without any findings of excesses related to electoral participant violations in using their political polarization.

The General Election Commission (KPU) and the Strategic Value of Mass Media.

The synergy between the Karawang General Election Commission (KPU) and the press in the electoral process is one of the essential points to ensure openness of information that can be objectively accounted for in providing information to the public, in accordance with Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning Elections. Articles 287-297 explain that the mass media are required to provide accurate and objective information to the audience entitled to information about the entire electoral process. In this context, the role of mass media, especially the press, is crucial when all parties need fast and accurate access to information about the conduct of elections in Indonesia.

Most of the public still tends to believe that what is presented in the mass media is information of high validity. Therefore, mass media have important strategic value in participating in conveying the meaning that elections are a means of national integration and the dissemination of information rich in voter education content by helping the public determine their choices through information related to the vision, mission, and track record of election participants. The goal is that elections will not improve the political culture if the public does not receive information related to the quality of election participants. The delivery of information by mass media about the quality of election participants is a momentum for the public to conduct a fit and proper test for candidates for representatives and leaders of the people before making their choice.

Thus, the synergy between the role of the KPU and mass media can proceed optimally in the conduct of elections, which serve as a democratic legitimization tool in determining a government and representatives' culture that have qualifications and loyalty to the people, not just their own interests. In this context, the KPU collaborates with mass media during the general election stages with the hope that mass media will act independently by prioritizing information as a tool of social control in social and political life.

Information as a tool of social control in social and political life can also be interpreted as mass media serving as a breaker of issues or misinformation that can influence election results, disrupt public order, and negatively impact societal diversity. Mass media play a crucial role in fact-checking and presenting accurate news, allowing the public to make decisions based on correct information. In this regard, the Karawang KPU involves 13 mass media organizations in voter education and awareness-raising activities. The voter education provided to these 13 organizations aims to provide an understanding to the mass media about their important role in contributing to the success of the 2024 elections.

Implications of Voter Education for Political Culture

Voter education is aimed at enhancing the knowledge, understanding, and awareness of the public regarding their rights and responsibilities as voters, as well as the importance of active participation in the democratic process. The quality of democracy is reflected in citizens' behavior in making their choices, whether based on short-term interests or through rational calculations considering the competence and integrity of electoral candidates, done with full consciousness. The political awareness of society will transform political contests into battles of ideas among candidates and political polarization into a more civilized and courteous discourse.

Technically, the Karawang District Election Commission (KPU) has implemented various voter education designs targeting different voter groups, including family-based voters, first-time voters, youth voters, female voters, people with disabilities, voters with special needs, marginalized communities, religious communities, democracy volunteers, and internet users (netizens). Out of these 11 categories, the KPU Karawang has devised voter education designs using discussion methods in collaboration with the Karawang Election Supervisory Body and the Karawang Disability Community. Additionally, voter education activities for first-time voters are organized through the KPU Goes To School and Goes To Campus

programs. Content creation for social media platforms by the KPU Karawang aims to reach internet users. Furthermore, voter education events like KPU Goes To Pesantren feature activities such as group screenings of the film "Chase the Promise." Besides, there are initiatives like Tular Nalar: Socialization and Voter Education for First-Time Voters with the Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society.

Through all these voter education activities, the Karawang District Election Commission (KPU) strives to cultivate a participatory political culture. Participatory political culture entails a societal condition where people are aware of their political rights and responsibilities to contribute to nation-building and engage in determining the nation's direction. It is characterized by a strong understanding among the populace of the factors shaping political culture, adequate knowledge about the political system as a whole, including the government's role in policy-making and political structure reinforcement, and active involvement in ongoing political processes. Moreover, it involves participation in various aspects of the government's political system.

Efforts to foster a participatory political culture through voter education encompass various themes such as democracy, state institutions, elections, and political participation. The democracy theme covers the concept and characteristics of democracy, the role of citizens in a democratic state, challenges to democracy implementation, and the effectiveness of democratic processes. Discussions on state institutions include their definition, branches of state power, state authority within the Constitution, institutional challenges, and citizen roles in state institutions. Meanwhile, election-related topics include the definition of elections, principles of fair and just elections, electoral systems and institutions along with their functions, election stages, and the effectiveness of elections as a means of popular sovereignty.

The content of the voter education design organized by the Karawang Election Commission is a determining factor in the high voter participation rate in Karawang District. According to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), countries with established voter participation consistently reach at least 70 percent. In the 2024 General Election, voter participation in Karawang District reached 82.62 percent of the total eligible population, marking a significant increase compared to 80.07 percent in 2019, 65.86 percent in 2014, and 70.03 percent in 2009.

Based on the above participation rate data, Karawang District was once classified as a critically democratic threshold area in 2014, but saw an increase in 2019. During that time, according to Mansyur (2023), political polarization between Islamist and pluralist groups strengthened in Indonesia from 2014 to 2019. However, in 2024, the political polarization spectrum from 2014 to 2019 does not seem to significantly affect society. Observing this phenomenon, people are beginning to recognize the drawbacks of political polarization that pits ideologies, ethnicities, and religions against each other. This shift may be influenced by Karawang's heterogeneous population, which can impact its political culture. People tend to base their choices on leadership qualities and track record competence rather than divisive factors. Thus, society is shifting towards an evaluative orientation in candidate assessment, based on feelings about the information received, evaluating a candidate's uniqueness or credibility in presenting themselves to the public.

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Conclusion

In striving to create quality elections as a means of national integration, the Karawang District Election Commission faces various challenges. These include the vulnerability of electoral contestants resorting to ethnic or religious issues, as indicated by the election vulnerability index released by the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and the spread of information through various digital platforms, resulting from political polarization among election participants. To minimize these challenges, the Karawang Election Commission has formulated a voter education strategy with various designs to manage political polarization and prevent its negative impact on daily life. This education aims to empower the public with knowledge to increase participation and ensure the success of elections without falling victim to political polarization, which often emphasizes power interests and influences society using ethnic or religious issues. Ethnic or religious issues employed in political polarization to attack opponents often surface across digital media platforms. To counter this, the Karawang Election Commission has designed an extensive voter education program as a tool for control and mitigation of political polarization's adverse effects on election quality. Voter education is conducted prior to the campaign period, equipping the public with knowledge to become rational voters who appreciate diversity. It targets various segments of society, including religious groups, community organizations like those representing disabilities, media organizations, and others.

Recommendations

Voter education is an effort by election organizers to instill democratic values and principles in society to achieve quality elections. Quality elections go beyond increasing voter participation; they also involve enhancing the political awareness of the community in exercising their political rights based on the competence and track record of election participants. Moreover, given the everyday reliance on technology in Karawang, voter education strategies must evolve with the times, utilizing digital platforms to disseminate comprehensive information widely. This strengthens the systematic work of election organizers by redefining voter education guidelines through planning, organizing, controlling, and evaluating programs.

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