

POLITICAL LITERACY AND KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION OF FIRST-TIME VOTERS IN THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract. First-time voters constitute a strategic segment in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election due to their significant numbers and characteristics, which are still in the process of forming political orientations. Although various studies have addressed young voter participation, studies on the construction of first-time voters' political knowledge in the context of Islamic boarding school-based education are still limited. This study aims to analyze the knowledge and information sources of first-time voters regarding the 2024 Presidential Election among students of Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) at Al Falah Islamic Boarding School, West Jakarta. The study used a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm through in-depth interviews with 20 purposively selected informants. The results showed that most informants had an adequate understanding of election procedures, the candidates' visions and missions, and the importance of political participation. Social media was the primary source of information, followed by discussions with teachers and the school environment. This knowledge contributed to a more rational voting decision-making process, although a small number of respondents still demonstrated limited understanding. These findings emphasize the importance of strengthening political literacy based on educational institutions to improve the quality of first-time voter participation in Indonesian democracy.

Keywords: new voters, political literacy, social media, political participation, 2024 elections.

Abstrak: Pemilih pemula merupakan segmen strategis dalam Pemilu Presiden Indonesia 2024 karena jumlah dan karakteristik mereka yang signifikan, yang masih dalam proses pembentukan orientasi politik. Meskipun berbagai studi telah membahas partisipasi pemilih muda, studi tentang konstruksi pengetahuan politik pemilih pemula dalam konteks pendidikan berbasis pesantren masih terbatas. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengetahuan dan sumber informasi pemilih pemula mengenai Pemilu Presiden 2024 di kalangan siswa Madrasah Aliyah (SMA Islam) di Pesantren Al Falah, Jakarta Barat. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan paradigma konstruktivis melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 20 informan yang dipilih secara purposif. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar informan memiliki pemahaman yang memadai tentang prosedur pemilu, visi dan misi kandidat, dan pentingnya partisipasi politik. Media sosial merupakan sumber informasi utama, diikuti oleh diskusi dengan guru dan lingkungan sekolah. Pengetahuan ini berkontribusi pada proses pengambilan keputusan pemilu yang lebih rasional, meskipun sebagian kecil responden masih menunjukkan pemahaman yang terbatas. Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya memperkuat literasi politik berbasis lembaga pendidikan untuk meningkatkan kualitas partisipasi pemilih pemula dalam demokrasi Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: pemilih pemula, literasi politik, media sosial, partisipasi politik, Pemilu 2024

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election is a crucial momentum in the consolidation of Indonesian democracy. Under Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, citizens who are 17 years of age or older or who are/have been married have the constitutional right to vote. This group exercising their right to vote for the first time is known as first-time voters. Demographically, this group represents a significant proportion of the 2024 election voter structure, making it a strategic actor in electoral dynamics.

From a political communication perspective, elections are an arena for interaction between political actors, the media, and the public as voters (Fossati, 2019). Media serves not only as a channel for information but also as a space for constructing political meaning (Labolo et al., 2020). For the younger generation, social media plays a dominant role in shaping political orientation and preferences (Briandana et al., 2024). International research shows that exposure to digital media contributes to

increased political interest while also potentially reinforcing polarization or misinformation if not accompanied by adequate literacy skills (Briandana & Dwityas, 2019).

The concept of political literacy emphasizes that quality political participation requires the ability to understand the political system, critically evaluate information, and connect public issues with electoral choices (Taufik et al., 2014). Political literacy is not solely related to the level of participation, but also to the quality of decision-making. Political knowledge is an important predictor in shaping rational voting attitudes and behavior (Reicher, 2004). Meanwhile, research by Quintelier (2010) confirmed that the process of political socialization at a young age has a long-term impact on patterns of political participation in adulthood (Hubeis & Susanto, 2019).

Several studies in Indonesia have examined first-time voters in the context of political participation, voting motivation, and the influence of social media on electoral preferences (Solihat, 2016). However, most of this research focuses on the level of participation or intensity of media use, without delving into how political knowledge is constructed within specific social and institutional contexts (Anggoro, 2016). Yet, international literature demonstrates that the educational environment plays a significant role in shaping the political literacy of the younger generation (Ahmad, 2020).

In the context of Islamic boarding school-based education, the process of knowledge formation is influenced not only by the media and formal curriculum, but also by religious authority, collective culture, and a strong religious value system. These characteristics have the potential to shape different patterns of political interpretation compared to first-time voters in public schools. However, empirical studies specifically examining the construction of political knowledge among first-time voters in Islamic boarding schools are still very limited, especially in contemporary situations such as the 2024 Presidential Election.

The research gap in this study lies in the lack of studies integrating the perspectives of political literacy and the social construction of knowledge within the context of Islamic boarding school educational institutions for first-time voters. Previous research tends to measure participation levels or media influence quantitatively, without exploring how first-time voters understand, interpret, and evaluate political information within specific socio-religious environments. Therefore, a qualitative constructivist approach is needed to more deeply understand the process of political knowledge formation.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze first-time voters' knowledge regarding the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election and identify the information sources that shape this understanding among students of Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Senior High School) at the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School in West Jakarta. This research is expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on political literacy and political communication of the younger generation, as well as practical contributions for election organizers and educational institutions in designing more contextual and effective political education strategies.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a constructivist paradigm. This paradigm views social reality as the result of the construction of meaning formed through social interactions and individual subjective experiences. In the context of this research, the political knowledge of first-time voters is understood as the result of a construction process influenced by the social environment, educational institutions, and media exposure.

The research design used was an intrinsic case study, focusing on first-time voters at the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School (Madrasah Aliyah), West Jakarta. The location was selected purposively, considering that Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) are educational institutions with unique social characteristics, values, and authority structures, potentially influencing the construction of students' political knowledge.

The study subjects were 20 first-time voters who met the following criteria:

1. Aged 17–21 years old.
2. Registered voters in the 2024 Presidential Election.
3. Never voted in a previous election.
4. Students attending the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School (Madrasah Aliyah).

The sampling technique used purposive sampling, considering the suitability of informant characteristics to the research objectives (Yin, 2013). The number of participants was determined based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained shows recurring patterns and no significant new themes are identified.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Questions focused on:

1. Informants' understanding of the 2024 Presidential Election system and procedures.
2. Knowledge of the candidates' visions, missions, and programs.
3. Political information sources used.
4. Evaluation and consideration processes in making choices

Interviews were conducted in-person at the school, lasting 30–45 minutes per respondent. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with 20 first-time voters at the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School, four main themes were found that describe the construction of informants' political knowledge regarding the 2024 Presidential Election, namely: (1) procedural understanding of the election, (2) sources and authority of political information, (3) evaluation of candidates, and (4) rationality in making voting decisions.

Procedural Understanding of the Election

Most informants demonstrated an adequate understanding of the basic mechanisms of the 2024 Presidential Election, including the voting schedule, voting procedures, and the requirements for valid votes. This understanding was gained through school outreach, social media, and online news coverage.

One informant (18 years old) stated:

"I know how to vote correctly so that my vote is not invalidated, and I also know the election date because I often see it on social media and it's explained at school."

This procedural understanding indicates that basic aspects of political literacy have been established (Fossati, 2019). From a political literacy perspective, the ability to understand election systems and procedures is the initial level of civic competence. However, some informants still view elections as merely a formal five-yearly event without deeply linking it to public policy or the direction of national development.

This finding indicates that political literacy at the procedural level has developed, although it has not yet fully reached the analytical and reflective stages (Lalancette & Raynauld, 2019).

Sources and Authorities of Political Information

Social media was the primary source of information for the majority of informants (Dwityas et al., 2024). Digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube were cited as the most frequently used channels for obtaining information about candidates and campaign dynamics.

One informant (17 years old) stated:

"I often see content on TikTok about the presidential candidates' visions and missions, sometimes explaining their programs in simpler language."

However, in the context of Islamic boarding schools, teachers and the school environment also play a crucial role in verifying information. Several informants cited class discussions and the religious teachers' explanations as sources for verifying the veracity of information they obtained from social media.

Another informant (18 years old) stated:

"If there is news that is not clear, we usually ask the teacher so we know which one is true."

These findings indicate that informants' construction of political knowledge is not singular and linear. Digital media serves as the initial source of information, while educational environments serve as spaces for clarification and reflection. From a political communication perspective, this demonstrates the interaction between media and social structures in shaping political meaning.

Evaluation of Candidates and Programs

The majority of informants stated that they considered the candidates' vision, mission, and work programs before making their choice. Some even compared candidates based on specific issues such as education and employment.

Informant (19 years old) stated:

"I'll compare the programs first, especially regarding education and employment, because those are important for our future."

This statement demonstrates an evaluative ability that goes beyond mere symbol recognition or candidate popularity. Within the framework of political literacy, the ability to compare political alternatives is an indicator of a higher level of competence.

However, a small number of informants still indicated a tendency to vote based on environmental influences or general perceptions without in-depth analysis. This indicates that informants' levels of political literacy range across a spectrum.

Rationality in Decision Making

The final theme indicates that the majority of informants view election participation as a form of moral and civic responsibility. They don't simply follow the crowd, but strive to understand the reasons behind their choices.

One informant (18 years old) stated:

"Voting is a responsibility, so you must first know who you are electing and what their program is."

This statement demonstrates both normative and rational awareness in decision-making. From a constructivist perspective, the decision to choose is understood as the result of an interaction between personal experience, media exposure, social discussions, and the values embraced in the educational environment.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that informants' political knowledge is formed through a social construction process involving digital media and educational authorities (Pratama et al., 2021). Social media is the initial source of political information for most informants, particularly through platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Briandana et al., 2021). However, this information is not received passively, but rather through a process of interpretation and clarification within the educational environment. In other words, digital media serves as a gateway to political information, while educational institutions act as spaces for reflection and verification.

This finding aligns with Boulianne's research, which shows that social media significantly contributes to increasing exposure to political information among the younger generation. However, its influence on political participation is strongly influenced by the social and environmental context in which individuals find themselves. This means that social media does not function independently in shaping political attitudes, but rather interacts with social factors such as education, family, and community environment.

In the context of this study, the Islamic boarding school environment serves as a unique space for political socialization. Information obtained by informants from social media is not accepted at face

value but is often discussed within the school environment, both through interactions with teachers and through conversations between students. This process demonstrates the existence of an information mediation mechanism that connects digital media exposure with the institutional values that develop within the Islamic boarding school environment.

These findings reinforce Campbell's view that the educational environment plays a crucial role in shaping the political engagement of young people. Schools serve not only as venues for the transfer of academic knowledge but also as spaces for civic learning that can foster political awareness and critical thinking skills regarding public issues. In this context, Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) can be understood as unique arenas for political socialization, combining formal education with religious values and moral authority.

Furthermore, the results of this study also indicate that the level of political understanding among informants is not homogeneous. Some informants have demonstrated evaluative skills by comparing candidates' visions and programs before making a choice, while others are still at the stage of procedural understanding regarding elections. This variation indicates that political literacy develops gradually through a continuous process of political socialization.

These findings align with research by Delli Carpini and Keeter, which asserts that political knowledge is a crucial foundation for quality political participation. Individuals with higher levels of political knowledge tend to be better able to evaluate political information and make rational electoral decisions. Meanwhile, Quintelier emphasized that experiences with political socialization at a young age have a long-term influence on future patterns of political participation.

Thus, the results of this study demonstrate that the construction of political knowledge among first-time voters is influenced not only by exposure to digital media but also by the socialization process that occurs within educational and community settings. In the context of Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), the interaction between digital media, teacher authority, and institutional values forms a process of negotiating meaning that results in a relatively more reflective understanding of politics.

This finding also complements previous studies on first-time voters, which tend to emphasize the direct influence of social media on voting behavior. This research demonstrates that in the context of Islamic boarding school-based educational institutions, the process of political knowledge formation occurs through a more complex mechanism, namely through the interaction between exposure to digital information and the clarification process within the educational environment.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that first-time voters at the Al Falah Islamic Boarding School (Islamic Senior High School) have a relatively good level of knowledge regarding the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. Most informants understand the procedural aspects of the election, including the voting mechanism and the importance of participation in the democratic process. This knowledge is acquired not only through formal socialization at school but also through exposure to information from digital media, particularly social media.

The results also indicate that social media is a primary source of political information for first-time voters. However, information obtained from digital media is not directly accepted without a process of reflection. In the context of Islamic boarding school education, the school environment and the role of teachers serve as a clarifying space that helps informants interpret and verify the political information they receive. This suggests that the formation of first-time voters' political knowledge occurs through the interaction between exposure to digital media and the socialization process within the educational environment.

Furthermore, this study found that most informants exhibited a rational tendency in making political choices, considering the visions, missions, and programs of the candidates. Nevertheless, there was variation in the level of political literacy among informants, with some still at the procedural understanding stage, while others had demonstrated evaluative skills in assessing political alternatives. The findings of this study confirm that educational institutions play a strategic role in improving the political literacy of first-time voters. Therefore, strengthening political education through educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), is crucial to fostering more conscious, critical, and responsible political participation in a democratic society.

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