

THE EFFORT OF THE GENERAL ELECTION COMMISSION OF MOJOKERTO REGENCY TO IMPROVE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THE 2020 GENERAL LOCAL ELECTION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract. This study examines the effort of and the barriers faced by the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum - KPU) of Mojokerto Regency to improve community participation in the 2020 General Local Election (Pemilihan Kepala Daerah - PILKADA) during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study was qualitative to explore comprehensively the phenomenon under study. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data were analyzed through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing or verification. Findings confirmed that the pandemic became a new challenge for PILKADA 2020. KPU Mojokerto tried to tackle the challenge through socialization, partnerships with relevant actors, and providing better information access through social and electronic media. Other challenges included the need for knowledge of the local community on the importance of the election, low trust of the community to candidates, money politics, and low interest of the local community in the election process. It is recommended that the KPU Mojokerto improve the awareness of the local community on the importance of their votes in the election, strengthen partnerships with relevant actors, and disseminate information through various channels.

Keywords: KPU Mojokerto Regency; PILKADA 2020

I. INTRODUCTION

A General Local Election (Pemilihan Kepala Daerah - PILKADA) is followed by residents of a local administrative area who fulfill specific predetermined criteria. PILKADA is held to elect the head and vice of the local region, namely the Governor and the Vice Governor for the provincial level, the Regent and Vice Regent for the regency level, and the Mayor and Vice Mayor for the city level. Direct PILKADA started in 2005, along with changes in the applicable election law. General elections are an indicator of a democratic country, a country that gives its citizens the freedom to determine who will be the leader or representative in parliament is a democratic country. In other words, democracy is manifested in an election activity where the public can vote. Democracy is a way of life and has become a choice of many countries (Irawan, 2016). Meanwhile, an election can be said to be democratic if it is open for all, represents a rotation of power, and holds public accountability (Liando, 2017). Before 2005, the Regional People's Representative Council (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah - DPRD) chose the regional heads. Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Local Government mentions that the local people must directly vote for the regional heads and vice heads through PILKADA. The first PILKADA was held in June 2005. Law Number 22 of 2007 concerning the Implementation of General Elections includes PILKADA as part of the election system, known as Pemilukada (Pemilihan Umum Kepala Daerah dan Wakil Kepala Daerah). Law Number 15 of 2011 mentions it as Pemilihan Gubernur, Bupati, dan Walikota.

The 2020 PILKADA marked an important celebration of democracy in Indonesia since it was held amid the Covid-19 pandemic. It was problematic, causing pros and cons, because the country, and all countries, were fighting against the virus and faced threatening situation and uncertainties. The pandemic caused a delay in 2020 PILKADA (Kennedy & Suhendarto, 2020) due to the high number of Covid cases in December 2020 (Ramadhan, 2020). It was predicted that 2020 PILKADA would not be as successful as before due to low people participation. The 2020 nationwide PILKADA was regulated in Law Number 10 of 2016; it was planned to be held in 270 regions in Indonesia, including 9 provinces, 224 regencies, and 37 cities, one of which was Mojokerto Regency. General elections are the responsibility of the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum - KPU), and KPU Mojokerto is responsible for the election in Mojokerto as mandated by the law that the organization responsible for holding elections at the regency or city level is a Regency and City KPU, which is under the authority of Province KPU and the Central (state-level) KPU. KPU Mojokerto was committed to holding PILKADA by implementing health protocols, as stated during the official launch of 2020 PILKADA on October 4, 2020.

Participation is the involvement of people voluntarily without pressure and is not related to the government's external interests (Handayani, 2006). The purpose of participation is to bring together all the same and different interests in formulating and placing policies for all parties involved and affected by the policies set therein Sinambela et al., 2007). So far, community

participation is still considered as mobility for the benefit of the government or the state; however, community participation should be as it is as a form of control over government policies. The increasing participation of the people in elections shows the strengthening of the democratic order in a country. Society is a very important factor in a democratic order. Voter participation is crucial. Abstention, which cannot be separated from participation, will always exist in every election. In a democratic political system, people have the right to elect their representatives directly. One of the important indicators in a democratic country is the implementation of elections carried out without money politics. Participation comes from the word participate, which means to include and take part (Wijaya, 2004). Political participation is the activity of citizens as individuals to influence government decision-making; participation can be individual or collective (Huntington & Nelson in Miaz, 2012).

At all levels, the basic foundation for 2020 PILKADA was strict health protocol implementation. The initial interviews with members of KPU Mojokerto Regency showed that people were reluctant to come to polling locations due to the pandemic; they were worried that new clusters would appear after the election. The other reason was that they believed that no matter who was elected or became the leader of Mojokerto, nothing could change their lives. This was why we chose Mojokerto Regency as our research sample. A study showed that the 2020 PILKADA in Blitar City ran well. KPU Blitar City prepared everything well. KPU Blitar City followed the mechanism and procedure mentioned in PKPU Numbers 6 and 13 of 2020 (Ismayanti, Muchsin, & Sekarsari, 2021). However, a different study in Minahasa Regency showed that many violations related to the health protocol happened, especially during the campaigns (Kolono, 2021). Because the voting organization did not strictly implement the health protocol, Covid cases and the risk of new clusters increased after the election. Based on the explanation above, we were interested in analyzing the efforts of KPU Mojokerto Regency to increase community participation for 2020 PILKADA amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative research method is a research approach that focuses on an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Sugiyono (2019) mentions that the qualitative research method is based on the philosophy used to research scientific conditions (experiments) where researchers become instruments, with data collection techniques and qualitative analysis emphasizing meaning. Data was collected using interview techniques, observation, and document analysis. Data analysis adopted the method by Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014): data reduction, data presentation and conclusion drawing or verification.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Efforts of KPU Mojokerto Regency to Increase Community Participation in the 2020 PILKADA

The 2020 PILKADA in Mojokerto included 2084 voting locations (Tempat Pemungutan Suara - TPS) in 18 districts and 304 villages and urban villages. KPU Mojokerto Regency used three strategies to increase the participation of novice voters: formulation and long-term goals, selection of actions, and allocation of resources. Based on the studies and strategies above, this research attempts to describe the strategy implemented by KPU. KPU Mojokerto Regency focused on three strategies to increase community participation in the 2020 PILKADA amid the Covid-19 pandemic: adjusting outreach strategies, collaborating with related parties, and increasing access to information. During the pandemic, KPU Mojokerto Regency used social and electronic media to disseminate information about the election schedule and stages. In addition, they also had limited face-to-face outreach by adhering to health protocols. The strategies are elaborated as follows:

1. Adjustment of the socialization strategy: KPU Mojokerto Regency adjusted the socialization strategy by utilizing social media and electronic media as the main means. They created posts and advertisements on Instagram and used other platforms to disseminate information regarding the election schedule and stages.
2. Limited face-to-face outreach: Even though restrictions on physical contact were made, KPU still held face-to-face outreach by adhering to the established health protocols to provide direct information to the public regarding the importance of participation in elections.
3. Collaboration with related parties: KPU Mojokerto Regency cooperated with various parties, including community organizations and educational institutions, to increase voter participation. For example, they asked HMI to support and organize activities involving KPU.
4. Increasing access to information: KPU Mojokerto Regency improved public access to election information. Besides social media, they disseminated information through the people so that information about elections could be widely available to the public.

KPU Mojokerto Regency made various efforts to increase public participation. Through these efforts, KPU Mojokerto Regency wanted to overcome the obstacles to implementing the 2020 PILKADA due to the Covid-19 pandemic. By adjusting socialization strategies, collaborating with related parties, and increasing access to information, public participation was expected to increase even in an unusual situation like this pandemic. KPU Mojokerto Regency adjusted the outreach strategy by utilizing social media and electronic media, limited face-to-face outreach by complying with health protocols, collaborating with related parties such as community organizations and educational institutions, and increasing access to information through various channels.

Factors Inhibiting KPU Mojokerto Regency to Increase Community Participation in the 2020 PILKADA

KPU Mojokerto Regency also cooperated with community organizations and educational institutions, such as

HMI, to increase voter participation. In this case, KPU directed them to support and organize activities involving KPU Mojokerto Regency. In addition, KPU Mojokerto Regency also worked hard to increase access to information by disseminating it to the public. However, several factors hindered the implementation of the 2020 PILKADA in Mojokerto Regency amid the Covid-19 pandemic. These factors included the lack of public knowledge and understanding of the importance of elections, lack of trust in candidates' promises, and money politics. In addition, some people tended to be indifferent to elections and were not interested in participating. In detail, the inhibiting factors for the implementation of the 2020 PILKADA in Mojokerto Regency can be summarized as follows:

1. Lack of public understanding and knowledge about the importance of election participation. Some first-time voters did not understand the voting process and tended to be indifferent.
2. Low public trust in the campaign promises of prospective leaders. Many voters were disappointed with previous leaders who could not fulfill their campaign promises, so they felt skeptical and reluctant to participate in elections.
3. The need for more effective socialization and information from KPU, especially through its public relations. Despite these efforts, some voters still felt they needed more information about the schedule, the stages of the election, and the importance of electing regional leaders.
4. Some voters tended to vote for candidates who provided financial benefits (money politics). This could reduce public awareness in choosing based on the qualifications and integrity of candidates.

More intensive efforts in election socialization and education to the public would be necessary to increase voter participation and overcome these inhibiting factors, especially for first-time (novice) voters. It is also important to rebuild trust by upholding the integrity of elections and strengthening effective communication between KPU and the public. Factors inhibiting public participation in the 2020 PILKADA in Mojokerto Regency during the Covid-19 pandemic included the lack of knowledge about the election stages, disinterest in finding out about elections, lack of trust in the campaign promises, and disappointment with previous leaders who could not fulfill their campaign promises. Nonetheless, the efforts made by KPU public relations in increasing voter participation through outreach on social media and electronic media were proven effective.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our findings confirmed the efforts made by KPU Mojokerto Regency to increase community participation to vote in the 2020 PILKADA during the Covid-19 pandemic through adjusted socialization, collaboration with related parties, and increased access to information through social media and electronic media. KPU also cooperated with community organizations and educational institutions to increase voter participation. However, several inhibiting factors also existed, such as a lack of public knowledge and

understanding of the importance of elections, low trust in campaign promises, money politics, and a lack of public interest and concern for elections. In dealing with these factors, KPU is expected to provide a better understanding of the public related to election participation, increase cooperation with related parties, and widen information dissemination through various channels to increase public awareness. These efforts to increase voter participation must be continuously implemented by involving the public, increasing understanding, and overcoming inhibiting factors so that elections can run well and meet people's expectations.

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