

The Phenomenon of Political Participation Apathy: Analysis of Voter Turnout Decline in the 2024 Regional Head Elections of Cirebon Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the phenomenon of declining voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Regional Head Elections (Pilkada). This phenomenon is of concern because political participation is an important indicator of the quality of local democracy. The purpose of this study is to identify the factors causing the decline in participation and to analyze its implications for the democratization process at the regional level. Using a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, this study involved various elements of society, such as religious leaders, village officials, youth, students, and election organizers. Data were collected through field observations and in-depth interviews with key informants, then analyzed thematically to find patterns and meanings behind the phenomenon. The results show that the decline in voter participation is influenced by a combination of structural and cultural factors, including low political awareness, increased population mobility, the policy of regrouping polling stations (TPS), and growing apathy towards local politics. Young voters and urban communities tend to be indifferent due to a lack of political literacy and disappointment with regional head candidates who are considered to bring no change. The regrouping of polling stations, which increases the number of voters per location, also reduces the convenience and effectiveness of voting. These findings imply the need for strategies to increase participation through continuous political education, innovation in voting systems that are adaptive to citizen mobility, and political campaigns based on concrete ideas and programs to restore public trust in the democratic process.

Keywords: political participation, regional elections, Cirebon, apathy, local democracy

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis fenomena penurunan partisipasi pemilih dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada) Kabupaten Cirebon tahun 2024. Fenomena ini menjadi perhatian karena partisipasi politik merupakan indikator penting kualitas demokrasi lokal. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor penyebab menurunnya angka partisipasi serta menganalisis implikasinya terhadap proses demokratisasi di tingkat daerah. Menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif, penelitian ini melibatkan berbagai elemen masyarakat seperti tokoh agama, aparatur desa, pemuda, mahasiswa, serta penyelenggara pemilu. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi lapangan dan wawancara mendalam dengan informan kunci, kemudian dianalisis secara tematik untuk menemukan pola dan makna di balik fenomena yang terjadi. Hasil

penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penurunan partisipasi pemilih dipengaruhi oleh kombinasi faktor struktural dan kultural, meliputi rendahnya kesadaran politik, meningkatnya mobilitas penduduk, kebijakan regrouping Tempat Pemungutan Suara (TPS), serta tumbuhnya apatisme terhadap politik lokal. Pemilih muda dan masyarakat urban cenderung abai karena kurangnya literasi politik dan kekecewaan terhadap calon kepala daerah yang dianggap tidak membawa pembaruan. Regrouping TPS yang memperbanyak jumlah pemilih per lokasi turut menurunkan kenyamanan dan efektivitas pemungutan suara. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan perlunya strategi peningkatan partisipasi melalui edukasi politik berkelanjutan, inovasi sistem pemungutan suara yang adaptif terhadap mobilitas warga, serta kampanye politik berbasis gagasan dan program konkret untuk memulihkan kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap proses demokrasi.

Kata kunci: partisipasi politik, Pilkada, Cirebon, apatisme, demokrasi lokal

A. INTRODUCTION

Elections are the most prominent political activity in the selection of people's representatives in democratic countries. In the information age, the accuracy and volume of available information provide an opportunity to influence the decision-making of election candidates (Fiarni et al., 2024). In direct elections, voters directly choose from a list of candidates. This differs from systems where voters elect representatives, who then elect or unanimously appoint the head of government (Lewis, 2023). Political participation is one of the main indicators in assessing the quality of democracy in a country. Political participation is a main pillar in a democratic system (Arifin et al., 2025). In a democratic system, active public participation, especially in general elections, is a tangible form of popular sovereignty. Democracy is a system or mechanism of government that aims to realize popular sovereignty, where power is in the hands of citizens and exercised by the government as their representation (Hemafitria et al., 2021). According to the theory of political participation put forward by Verba and Nie, political participation refers to the active involvement of citizens in the process of formulating and making public policies (Verba & Nie, 1987). One of the main principles of democratic life is that every citizen must participate actively in the political process. In other words, members of society take part or participate in the formation of a political agenda that the government uses to make decisions (Mujib, 2017).

In a democratic state system, the highest power is in the hands of the people, which is realized through collective participation in determining the direction of policy, formulating future goals, and electing leaders who will run the government (Triwijaya et al., 2020). In a democratic country, one form of transfer of power is through elections or voting mechanisms. Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) as part of the democratic process provide an opportunity for the public to determine the leaders who will manage regional government. However, in recent years, various regions in Indonesia, including Cirebon Regency, have experienced a downward trend in voter participation rates in Pilkada. This

phenomenon raises concerns regarding the legitimacy of the elected government and the quality of democracy at the local level. With a low level of participation, it can be understood that many people remain uninterested or do not participate in issues that arise in the country (Kariem, 2024). Organizationally, general elections present complex operational challenges, involving millions of voters and thousands of election officials at various levels of the election administration hierarchy. Perhaps the biggest challenge lies at the lowest level, namely at polling stations, where on the one hand it is necessary to recruit thousands of polling station officers who must implement complex rules, while on the other hand they are only active for a short period every three, four, or five years, depending on the frequency of elections (Partheymüller et al., 2022).

Indonesia, as the third-largest democracy in the world, provides a strategic context for examining the dynamics of political communication transformation, particularly in the context of regional head elections (Sanofi et al., 2025). In a democratic system, there are certainly challenges, such as corruption (Mietzner, 2015), vote buying (Muhtadi, 2019), political dynasties, and oligarchy (Aspinall & As'ad, 2016). In a democratic system, the dynamics of politics and governance at the local level play an important role in shaping the character of Indonesian democracy as a whole. Therefore, the simultaneous Pilkada is one mechanism that allows the public to participate more broadly in the political process, as well as a means of building and strengthening public trust in candidates competing in the electoral contest. Thus, the quality of democracy in an election depends greatly on the level of public participation in determining leaders who are considered worthy and trustworthy. In this case, the democratic process at the local level serves as a reflection of national democracy. As stated by Robert Dahl, democratization at the national level can only be realized if democratic principles have been instilled and implemented effectively at the local level (Akbar, 2016). The level of public participation is a fairly important indicator in assessing the success of an election. However, the magnitude of voter participation does not always have a linear correlation with the quality of the election itself. The quality of an election depends more on efforts to increase public understanding through political education, socialization, communication, as well as the process of articulation and aggregation of political interests. These factors become fundamental elements in realizing the implementation of democratic and quality elections.

Many political scientists emphasize the importance of the level of public participation in elections based on the fundamental value of the people's vote for the state and government. The level of voter participation has a direct correlation with the legitimacy of government, where the higher the public participation, the stronger the legitimacy obtained by the elected government. Therefore, political participation is not only a form of citizen involvement in the electoral process, but also a crucial element in building the legitimacy of a government obtained through a popular mandate in elections. Political participation is still often perceived by the public as involvement in general elections limited to the activity of voting at polling stations. In fact, the concept of political participation has a broader scope, namely as a form of voluntary involvement of citizens in

various aspects of the political process. This participation includes the role of individuals in the election of public officials as well as involvement, both directly and indirectly, in the process of formulating public policies. More than just electoral action, political participation is an effort to influence government decisions. More broadly, this participation reflects public involvement in influencing the distribution of values and resources authoritatively in a political system. Therefore, political participation is not only procedural, but also substantial in determining the direction of policy and community development (Zarkasi & Rizal, 2020).

Prior research has been widely conducted by academics analyzing the level of public participation in Regional Head Elections (Pilkada). However, issues related to the low level of public involvement in exercising their right to vote remain unresolved in every Pilkada implementation. A number of previous studies can be used as references in this study. For example, a study conducted by Akbar, confirms that public political participation requires a commitment to ensure that every citizen can participate optimally. Furthermore, Pilkada has a crucial role in determining the quality of leadership at the local level and building a synergistic correlational relationship between leaders and the people they lead (Akbar, 2016). In addition, Suyatno revealed that the dynamics of incumbent wins and losses in Pilkada are closely related to the level of public participation in exercising their right to vote (Suyatno, 2016).

Research conducted by Hendrik revealed that limitations in the socialization of Pilkada by the General Election Commission (KPU) and low public political awareness are contributing factors to the level of voter participation in Pilkada (Hendrik, 2010). Furthermore, a study conducted by Chaniago showed that the implementation of simultaneous Pilkada has not reached the expected level of efficiency, considering that the policy does not significantly increase political participation, does not completely close the opportunity for money politics practices, and still faces obstacles in the recruitment process for regional head candidates that is less open and transparent (Chaniago, 2016). In addition, the thesis put forward by Siringoringo indicates that the low voter participation in the 2015 simultaneous Pilkada was caused by the weak role of the KPU in carrying out socialization, political education, and political communication to the public (Siringoringo, 2016).

This research has novelty in several key aspects. First, this study specifically analyzes the factors for the decline in voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regent Election, which has not been widely discussed in previous studies. Second, this study not only identifies general factors that influence political participation, but also highlights local dynamics such as the impact of polling station (TPS) regrouping and high population mobility on voter participation. Third, this study provides a new perspective by linking political apathy and distrust of the government as the main determinants in the decline in voter participation, which has not been widely studied in the context of the Cirebon Regency Pilkada. Finally, this study offers recommendations based on empirical findings that can serve as a basis for policymakers in increasing public political participation in future elections.

The 2024 simultaneous Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) were held in 37 provinces and 508 regencies/cities throughout Indonesia, including Cirebon Regency as one of the regions participating in the democratic process. Pilkada, or regional head elections, is a very important tool for running regional government based on the principles of regional democracy, because it shows that the people as holders of sovereignty determine state policy (Fatahilah, 2019).

Based on the recapitulation of the results of the calculation of the Permanent Voter List (DPT), the number of voters in Cirebon Regency was recorded at 1,744,235 people. However, the level of public participation reflected in the number of voters who exercised their right to vote only reached 1,038,434 voters (KPU Kabupaten Cirebon, 2024a). This figure is still below the national political participation target set at 82%. Ideally, public participation in the democratic process can reach a higher level in accordance with national expectations. Therefore, the level of voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada is a major concern and raises fundamental questions regarding the factors that cause the failure to achieve the participation target. Because Indonesia's electoral system is unstable, parties must work hard to win votes in elections in order to survive (Kristiyanto et al., 2023).

The decline in voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada is an issue that needs to be studied in more depth. Various factors can contribute to this phenomenon, such as increasing distrust of candidates and political parties, low effectiveness of election socialization, the influence of social media and political disinformation, to economic and geographical factors that limit voter access to Polling Stations (TPS). In addition, the practice of abstaining as a form of political protest is also an aspect that cannot be ignored. The level of trust in state institutions and politics depends on the structure of the political system and the performance of elected officials (Frye & Borisova, 2019). Public trust in the state and its political institutions is essential for a well-functioning government and economy (Algan, 2018). Seeing the complexity of this problem, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of political participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada with a focus on the factors that cause the decline in voter participation rates. In addition, this study will also examine the impact of low voter participation on government legitimacy and democratic stability at the regional level. With a systematic approach, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide more comprehensive insights and strategic recommendations for stakeholders in increasing public political participation in future elections.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research was conducted in Cirebon Regency with the aim of describing and analyzing public political participation in regional head elections. The determination of research informants includes various elements of society, such as community leaders, youth leaders, government officials, and election officials, in order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. Data collection techniques applied include direct and

indirect observation, as well as in-depth interviews both face-to-face and through online communication media with various related parties in Cirebon Regency.

Tabel 1. Research Informants

No	Respondent Category	Position/Role in Society	Total	Data Collection Techniques	Description
1	Community Leaders	Ulama, Head of RW (Neighborhood Association), or local community leader	3 people	In-depth interview	Providing insights into the voting behavior of rural communities
2	Youth Leaders	Karang Taruna, Student Activists	2 people	Interview and Observation	Conveying the views of the younger generation on local politics
3	Village Government Apparatus	Village officials, BPD	3 people	Direct interview	Explaining the government's role in political socialization
4	Election Organizers	KPU, PPK, and local PPS	4 people	Interview and documents	Providing technical data and experiences during the Regional Head Elections
5	General Public	Citizens from various social backgrounds	5 people	Observation and interviews	Providing perceptions and reasons for participation/non-participation

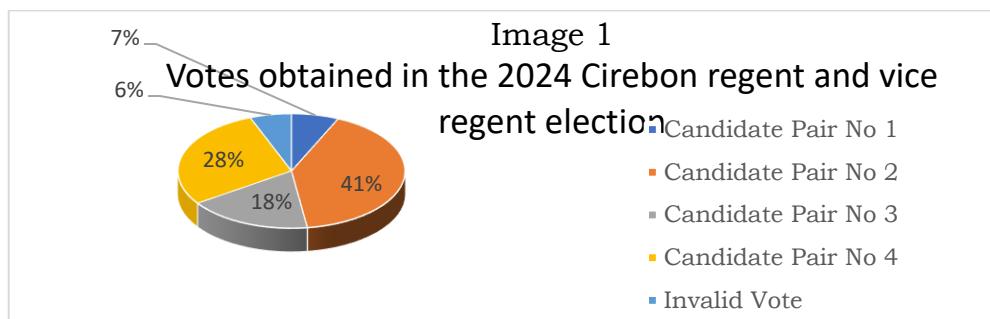
Source: Research data

C. RESULTS

In the simultaneous Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) in 2024, almost all regions in Indonesia held regional head elections, including Cirebon Regency. The election of the Regent and Deputy Regent of Cirebon is scheduled to take place on November 27, 2024, as part of the national agenda to strengthen the democratic system at the local level. In this contest, all pairs of candidates for regent and deputy regent are nominated through Political Parties or a combination of Political Parties in accordance with the provisions stipulated in Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning Pilkada. This nomination process reflects the dynamics of local politics involving various interests, both from the supporting parties, voters, and other political actors. The results of this process produced four pairs of candidates competing in the election. Each pair of candidates has different political strategies, visions, and missions in attracting support from the community, which will ultimately determine the election results and the direction of future regional government policies. Therefore, the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada is not only a venue for electing regional leaders but also an important indicator in assessing the level of public political participation and the effectiveness of the democratic system at the local level.

The 2024 Cirebon Regent and Vice Regent Election became a competitive and dynamic political contest. The competition in this election is increasingly fierce, considering

that three of the four candidate pairs competing have strong political track records and experience in strategic positions in the previous period. Candidate 02, as the incumbent, is running again after serving as Regent of Cirebon in the previous period. Candidate 03 is also the incumbent, who previously served as Deputy Regent of Cirebon. Meanwhile, Candidate 04 has a strong political background as Chairman of the Cirebon Regency DPRD in the previous period. Meanwhile, candidate 01 comes from a retired police officer with the last rank of Brigadier General who served as Head of the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Papua Province for the 2022 – 2023 period. With this background and political experience, these four candidates have a relatively strong base of support, so the competition in this election is becoming increasingly competitive. The following are the results of the votes obtained by each candidate pair in the 2024 Cirebon Regent and Vice Regent Election:



Source: KPU Cirebon Regency, 2024

The results of the 2024 Cirebon Regent and Vice Regent Election show quite a tight competition among the candidates. From the total registered voters, both in the Permanent Voter List (DPT), Additional Voter List (DPTb), and Special Voter List (DPK) totaling 1,744,235, as many as 1,038,434 voters used their voting rights. Of this number, 977,092 votes were declared valid, while 61,342 votes were invalid. Candidate number 2, won the most votes with 426,323 votes or 43.63% of the total valid votes. The second position was occupied by candidate number 4, who obtained 297,531 votes or 30.45%. Meanwhile, candidate number 3 won 183,467 votes or 18.78%. Candidate number 1 received the fewest votes, namely 69,771 votes or 7.14% of the total valid votes. With these results, candidate number 2 excelled significantly compared to other candidates, securing more than 40% of the voters' votes. This result reflects the political dynamics in Cirebon Regency, where the incumbent still has a strong electoral appeal compared to his competitors. The main challenge in implementing the Pilkada does not only lie in procedural aspects, such as honest, fair, and transparent implementation, but also in how to build more mature political awareness in the community. The research results show a shift in the level of political participation of the Cirebon Regency community in the Election of Regent and Deputy Regent, which has decreased compared to the previous period's election. In the 2018 Pilkada, the number of registered voters reached 1,656,686 people, with the number of voters using their voting rights as many as 1,056,804 people. Meanwhile, in the 2024 Pilkada, the number of registered voters increased to 1,744,235

people, but the number of voters using their voting rights actually decreased to 1,038,434 people. The recapitulation can be seen in the following table.

Tabel 2. Voter participation data

Year	Total of Voters	Total of voters using their voting rights	Level of participation
2024	1.744.235	1.038.434	59,53%
2018	1.656.686	1.056.804	63,79%

Sumber: (KPU Cirebon Regency, 2024)

Several social, economic, and technical factors contributed to the decline in voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Regional Head Election. Some of the main factors contributing to this decline include low levels of political awareness, high population mobility, polling station (TPS) regrouping policies, and increased political apathy caused by the ongoing political crisis. As a result of field observations and interviews, the following information:

Some informants, especially from the general public and youth, consider participation in elections unimportant. Out of 17 informants, 10 of them stated that they felt hopeless about the political process because they considered the promises of the regional head candidates to be just empty talk and never realized after being elected. One informant from the youth said, *"We have often heard the same promises in every election, but after winning, they never come back or pay attention to the community."* This statement illustrates a high level of disappointment with the reality of local politics, where people judge that there is no significant difference between one leader and another. This condition shows symptoms of political apathy that arise due to the loss of trust in the integrity and commitment of regional head candidates. A community leader stated, *"People here are busier looking for a living, they believe that whoever serves as regent, their lives will remain the same."* This statement reflects the still low level of public political awareness. They tend to view the political process as something that has no direct relevance to their daily well-being. In fact, participation in regional head elections is an important instrument for the community to determine the direction of public policy. Non-participation in the election process has the potential to put the community in a passive position in determining its own fate, because the elected regional head will set policies that directly or indirectly affect the social, economic and welfare aspects of the community. Many citizens of productive age work outside the region, especially in Jabodetabek and Bandung, according to interviews with village officials.

According to a village official in Cirebon Regency, *"Many people work in factories outside the city, and because they don't come home on election day, they can't vote."* This statement shows that high population mobility is an important factor causing a decrease in voter participation. Some citizens of productive age work outside the region, so they find it difficult to be present at polling stations (TPS) on election day. This phenomenon shows that economic factors and work mobility have a significant influence on political participation, especially in areas with high levels of labor urbanization.

One of the factors that also influenced the decline in voter participation was the policy of regrouping or merging Polling Stations (TPS). According to information from the Head of the Cirebon Regency KPU, this policy caused the number of voters in one TPS to increase from an average of 300 people to around 600 people. This was admitted to have influenced the level of accessibility and convenience of voters in using their right to vote. He explained, "*These factors affect the accessibility and convenience of voters*". Although locally between RTs they look close, geographically there are obstacles that affect people's access to polling stations (TPS). Some areas have geographical conditions that are not supportive, such as the distance between settlements or limited public transportation to the TPS location. In addition, he also mentioned that the level of urbanization is a significant challenge because many residents who are registered in the permanent voter list (DPT) are not present on polling day, because they are looking for a living outside the Cirebon Regency area. They are registered as voters, but in fact they are somewhere else on polling day, he added. This condition shows that technical issues and the socio-economic mobility of the community are interrelated in influencing political participation. Thus, technical policies such as TPS regrouping and high levels of urbanization have a structural impact on voter participation, especially for migrant worker and urban communities.

Some informants, especially from youth and urban communities, showed a tendency to be apathetic towards the local political process. They expressed disappointment with the figures of regional head candidates who were considered not to present new ideas or meaningful changes. A student activist revealed, "*The figures that appear only change parties. Therefore, people no longer believe in change*". This statement reflects the emergence of political fatigue and declining public trust in political elites who are considered more oriented towards power than the interests of the people. This distrust has a direct impact on increasing political apathy, which is reflected in the attitude of abstainers (golput) and indifference to campaign activities. Of the 17 informants interviewed, around 7 of them explicitly stated that they would not use their right to vote, because they believed that the election results would not bring significant changes in the socio-economic life of the community.

In addition, another factor that reinforces this apathetic attitude is the weak political communication between the government and the community. The election socialization carried out tends to be formal and ceremonial, without touching on substantive issues that are relevant to the needs of citizens. Political campaigns focus more on the image and rhetoric of candidates than on conveying concrete and realistic work programs. As a result, people find it difficult to understand the relationship between the policies offered by candidates and their impact on their lives. This condition shows that a lack of participatory political communication and the absence of a narrative of change are important factors that deepen political apathy at the local level.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing the level of political participation of the Cirebon Regency community in the 2024 regional head elections is a complex challenge. Community participation in using their voting rights is influenced by various multidimensional factors. However, the dynamics of political behavior and various events in the regional head election contest can be relevant objects of study to produce a comprehensive analysis. The level of political participation of the community in elections is influenced by a number of factors that determine the high or low level of individual involvement in the political process. Meylana asserts that individuals with a high level of political awareness and strong trust in the government tend to be more active in participating in the political process. Conversely, if political awareness and trust in the government are low, then public political participation tends to weaken (Meylana & Erowati, 2020).

In addition to political awareness, the level of voter participation in an election is greatly influenced by the existence and accuracy of the Permanent Voter List (DPT). A valid and well-verified DPT ensures that every eligible citizen has the opportunity to exercise their right to vote. Conversely, if there are obstacles in the preparation of the DPT, such as inaccurate voter data, unregistered voters, or information that is not well socialized, then this can have an impact on the low level of participation in elections. Therefore, the quality of the DPT is a crucial factor in determining the extent of public involvement in the democratic process (Widiyaningrum, 2020).

The Rational Choice Theory proposed by James Coleman emphasizes that individual actions are always oriented towards a specific goal. In this framework, each individual acts based on rational considerations by choosing the action that best suits their values, preferences, and interests. This theory is related to Exchange Theory, which asserts that humans are constantly faced with various alternative behavioral choices and make decisions based on an analysis of the cost and reward obtained from each available choice (Damsar, 2017). Performance evaluation, economic conditions, and individuals and collectives greatly influence political decisions. Rational voters gather information and consider the benefits of economic and political aspects. They also assess the performance of the current government and the opposition as a basis for making their political decisions (Perangin-Angin & Raffiudin, 2023).

Thus, in a political context, Rational Choice Theory explains how individuals determine their political participation, including in general elections. The decision to exercise the right to vote or to be apathetic is influenced by a rational calculation of profit and loss, where voters will consider the benefits obtained, both in the form of policies that support their personal interests and other incentives. In addition, this theory is also relevant in analyzing the behavior of political elites and candidates in designing campaign strategies that can influence voter decisions. Therefore, this rational approach provides a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political participation and voter preferences in every democratic contest. The decisions taken by a person are not random, but rather the result of an evaluation of the various alternatives available in order to achieve the results

that are considered most profitable or in accordance with the desired goals (Sastrawati, 2019). In a political context, this theory can be used to explain how individuals determine their political attitudes and choices, including in the general election process. Voters, for example, will consider the benefits and consequences of supporting a particular candidate or party based on their personal or group interests. Thus, this theory helps in understanding patterns of public political behavior that are based on rational calculations in order to achieve optimal results in accordance with the values and preferences they have.

Political participation is a key element in democracy, reflecting the extent to which society is involved in the political process, including in regional head elections. Society plays a significant role in determining the individuals who will occupy executive and legislative positions, both at the central and regional government levels (Zarkasi & Rizal, 2020). The level of political participation refers to the involvement of individuals or groups in political activities, both directly and indirectly. This participation can be realized through the election of state leaders and efforts to influence government policies in order to contribute to the political decision-making process (Jafar et al., 2024). In traditional societies, the structure of political leadership tends to be dominated by ruling elite groups who have authority in decision-making. In such a system, the participation of citizens in the political process, including influencing public policy and the direction of national development, tends to be very limited. This is due to the strong hierarchy of power and the limited access of the public to a wider space for political participation. As a result, public involvement in determining policies and the future of the nation becomes minimal, because political decisions are mostly determined by the ruling group that has control over the government system and public policy (Husna & Fahrimal, 2021).

In the context of the 2024 Regional Head Election (Pilkada) in Cirebon Regency, there was a decrease in voter participation compared to the previous election. This phenomenon is interesting to analyze in order to understand the factors that cause this downward trend. Based on research data conducted by the West Java National and Political Unity Agency (Kesbangpol) regarding political participation in the 2018 Governor Election, Cirebon Regency was recorded as one of the regions with a fairly large gap between the number of voters registered in the Permanent Voter List (DPT) and the number of voters who actually used their voting rights. It was recorded that around 36% of people in Cirebon City did not participate in voting in the election (Agustino et al., 2022). This phenomenon reflects the challenges in increasing public political participation, which can be caused by various factors, such as low levels of trust in candidates or the political system, lack of effective election socialization, as well as technical factors such as administrative constraints in voter registration. In addition, social and economic factors can also influence the level of voter participation, where certain community groups may face obstacles in accessing polling stations or have other priorities that are considered more urgent. This high rate of non-involvement shows the importance of strategic efforts from local governments, election organizers, and political parties to increase public political awareness. Measures such as optimizing political education, increasing election

transparency, and simplifying administrative procedures can be solutions to encourage broader participation in the democratic process in the future.

Public political awareness, especially among young voters and urban residents, is still relatively low and is one of the main factors in the decline in voter participation rates. Many young voters believe that their votes do not have a significant impact on changes in regional policies, so they feel they have no interest in exercising their right to vote. This apathetic attitude is exacerbated by the lack of ongoing political education and the lack of effective socialization from the government and election organizing institutions.

According to research by Harry Krashinsky, participation rates increase in areas where the majority of voters support the majority party, but not in areas where minority voters are more numerous (Krashinsky, 2024). Existing socialization programs are often formal and unattractive to the younger generation, thus failing to increase their understanding of the importance of participation in the democratic process. In addition, the high flow of information in the digital era creates a paradox, where many young voters are more exposed to biased or hoax information than to data- and fact-based political education. Without serious efforts to increase political awareness and build public trust in the democratic system, low voter participation will continue to be a challenge in realizing a government that truly represents the will of the people.

High population mobility is a challenge in increasing voter participation rates, especially in the context of the Cirebon Regency Pilkada. This regency has many residents who work in big cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Semarang, and even abroad as migrant workers. The high number of residents who migrate causes a reduction in the number of voters who can be present directly at polling stations (TPS) on election day. One of the main factors causing low participation among highly mobile voters is the limitations of the election system which still requires voters to cast their votes at the TPS according to the domicile registered in the permanent voter list (DPT). Although there are mechanisms such as moving to vote, complicated administrative procedures and lack of socialization make many voters not take advantage of them. In addition, voters who work outside the region often have limited time and accessibility to return to their area of origin just to vote, especially if the cost of travel and lost economic opportunities are considered greater than the political benefits obtained.

In addition to administrative and logistical obstacles, social and economic factors also play a role in the low participation of voters with high mobility. For migrant workers and informal laborers who depend on daily income, leaving work to return to their area of origin to participate in elections is not a priority. This is exacerbated by the lack of government initiatives in providing more flexible participation alternatives, such as technology-based voting or remote voting methods (absentee voting) that have been implemented in several countries. If there are no more inclusive policies in facilitating voters with high mobility, then this trend of declining political participation may continue. Therefore, reforms are needed in the election system, such as simplifying the procedure for moving to vote, expanding TPS accessibility, or even adopting online voting technology

that can reach voters outside the region. Thus, political participation can be more evenly distributed and not hampered by geographical factors and individual mobility limitations. Therefore, the digitalization process must be started immediately by the regional head election organizers. Digitalizing elections has many advantages, such as making them more transparent, accountable, credible, practical and economical (Saksono, 2020). Conversely, the public feels greater benefits because the digital election process teaches them to choose moral regional leaders.

The policy of regrouping polling stations (TPS), which led to an increase in the number of voters per TPS from an average of 300 to 600 people, had a significant impact on voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada. This policy, which aims to achieve efficiency in the implementation of elections, actually presents a number of challenges that have the potential to reduce public enthusiasm in exercising their right to vote. The increase in the number of voters per TPS contributes to long queues and longer waiting times, which can cause inconvenience to voters. With a larger number of voters, the administrative process at the TPS, from identity verification to voting and counting votes, becomes more complex and time-consuming. This is exacerbated by the limited facilities at some TPS which do not have adequate capacity to accommodate a larger number of voters effectively. As a result, voters have to wait in uncomfortable conditions, especially for the elderly, pregnant women, or disability groups, who may have difficulty accessing crowded TPS.

In addition, the longer voting duration also affects people's productivity. For voters who have limited time, such as informal workers, daily laborers, or traders, having to queue for a long time at the TPS can be seen as a disruption to their economic activities. Some of them may choose not to vote at all in order to avoid losing work time or income. Therefore, innovations related to effective and efficient election processes are needed. Such as, for example, using E-Participation. Based on research by Mario Klačmer, it shows that the majority of respondents prefer public e-participation services with a higher level of complexity (Klačmer, 2022).

On the other hand, the decrease in comfort due to more crowded TPS can also cause dissatisfaction with the election process, which contributes to increased political apathy. If voters feel that the election system is not designed to provide an efficient and comfortable experience, they may be increasingly reluctant to participate in future elections. To overcome the negative impacts of the TPS regrouping policy, more effective solutions are needed, such as providing better facilities, optimizing the number of election officials, and implementing digital technology to speed up the verification and voting process. Thus, the election process can remain efficient without sacrificing public participation in democracy.

Increasing political apathy among the public has become one of the main factors contributing to low voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Pilkada. This phenomenon reflects low public trust in the effectiveness of the political system and limitations in the representation of public interests by candidates. Many citizens feel that

regional head elections do not provide direct benefits for them, because so far the changes promised in the campaign have not been significantly realized. Fundamental problems such as infrastructure that is still poor, public services that are not optimal, and campaign promises that are merely rhetoric without concrete implementation further reinforce the perception that elections are just a formality that has no real impact on public welfare.

One of the main causes of this increasing political apathy is the low public trust in the candidates competing in the 2024 Pilkada. This is in line with Fatahillah's research (Fatahilah, 2019) which found that trust in the government, or government performance, is very influential on a person's level of participation in regional head elections or pilkada. If they want to maximize election support from their members, parties must consider the people who are running and their nomination process (Simas & Lothamer, 2025). Many voters assess that the candidates who are running are old figures who are already known, but do not offer new ideas or innovative policy breakthroughs. The campaigns carried out tend to still be based on conventional methods, such as installing banners, billboards, and distributing campaign props, without any substantive discussion regarding solutions to the problems faced by the community. The lack of use of a participatory approach in campaigns makes voters feel that they are not involved in the formulation of policies and programs, so they are increasingly reluctant to exercise their right to vote. In addition, the deficit of visionary ideas in political campaigns is also a major factor that reduces public interest in participating in elections. Many candidates are unable to offer concrete solutions to existing problems, so people feel that whoever is elected will not bring meaningful change to Cirebon regency. In situations like this, voters become skeptical of the democratic process and see elections as a routine that does not provide real improvement for their welfare. Based on research conducted by Al Izzati, the political situation during direct elections also greatly influences trust. We found that elections do not really improve welfare or satisfaction, making people apathetic and distrustful (Al Izzati et al., 2024).

Addressing this issue requires a more inclusive and participatory strategy in rebuilding public trust in politics. Regional head candidates must be able to present a more concrete, transparent, and needs-based policy narrative. In addition, election organizers and related institutions need to increase political education to invite the public to understand the importance of their role in determining the direction of regional development. If these steps are not taken immediately, political apathy will continue to increase and can have a negative impact on the quality of democracy at the local level. Furthermore, to enhance the function of democracy, engaged and informed voters are essential. Active and knowledgeable voters can better articulate their preferences and influence the choice of leaders and policies, enhancing political accountability and government responsiveness (Keefer & Vlaicu, 2025).

Some people tend to see elections as something that does not have a direct impact on their lives, thus reducing participation in the democratic process. This perception arises from past experiences that show that the results of regional head elections often do not have significant implications for their welfare. The absence of real incentives in the form of

pro-people policies that are felt directly, such as improved public services, infrastructure improvements, or economic programs that empower the community, further reinforces the view that elections are merely a political formality without a concrete impact on their lives. In addition, many people, especially from middle to lower economic groups, assess political participation as an activity that does not provide direct benefits. In difficult economic conditions, they prioritize work and meeting daily needs over taking the time to go to the TPS. When they do not see real changes resulting from previous elections, the reluctance to participate increases. In line with Juliasih and Lia's research, public rationality greatly influences political participation. Economic considerations and money politics are one of the factors that influence political participation (Juliasih, 2019).

This attitude is also influenced by low trust in the effectiveness of the government, where policies implemented after the election often do not match campaign promises. As a result, people feel that their voices have no influence on changes in regional policies, so voting is considered a futile act. Another factor that reinforces this apathetic attitude is the lack of effective political communication between the government and the community. The election socialization carried out is often formal and does not touch on issues that are relevant to the community. Political campaigns focus more on rhetoric and candidate branding than explaining clear and realistic work programs. As a result, people find it difficult to understand how the policies carried out by the candidates can have a direct impact on their lives. To overcome this problem, a more participatory and community-based approach is needed in the political and election process. The government and regional head candidates need to develop policies that are more inclusive and responsive to community aspirations, and ensure that information regarding the impact of these policies is conveyed clearly. In addition, more intensive and community-based political education efforts can help increase public awareness of the importance of participation in democracy. If these steps are not implemented immediately, the trend of declining voter participation will continue and impact the quality of legitimacy of regional government.

Based on the findings of this research, it can be concluded that the low voter participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regent Election was influenced by various interconnected factors. The still low political awareness reflects the lack of understanding and concern of the community regarding the importance of voting rights in a democracy. The high mobility of the population caused many voters to not be in their place of origin during the election, thus reducing the number of votes cast. In addition, the policy of regrouping Polling Stations (TPS) caused confusion and inconvenience for some voters, which ultimately contributed to a decrease in the level of participation. Political apathy and distrust of the government further exacerbated the situation, where many voters felt that their votes would not bring significant change. Finally, the absence of incentives or direct benefits for voters made many individuals not feel encouraged to exercise their right to vote. Thus, these factors collectively became the main cause of the decline in participation in the 2024 Cirebon regent election, which indicates the need for a more effective strategy in increasing public awareness and political involvement.

D. CONCLUSION

This study shows that political participation in the 2024 Cirebon Regency Regional Head Election decreased compared to the previous period. The main factors contributing to this phenomenon include low political awareness, high population mobility, the TPS regrouping policy, and increased political apathy in society. Young voters and urban residents tend to have less political awareness, while high mobility makes it difficult for many voters to exercise their right to vote. TPS regrouping, which increased the number of voters per TPS, impacted the effectiveness and convenience of voting, causing some people to be reluctant to participate. In addition, distrust of regional head candidates who are considered to lack new ideas also worsened political apathy. The decline in voter participation in the Regional Head Election is not only caused by technical aspects of the election, but also by social, economic, and psychological factors. Therefore, strategic efforts are needed such as broader political education, reform of the voting system to be more flexible for voters with high mobility, and campaigns based on real programs to rebuild public trust in democracy. Based on this, the next idea that can be studied is a comparison related to community participation in elections in urban and rural areas.

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