

## THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL AWARENESS ON THE ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION OF VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES IN INDONESIA

Wira Yudha Alam<sup>1)\*</sup>, Anastasia Puspa Anggraini<sup>1)</sup>, Ririn Dwijayanti<sup>1)</sup>, Rika Zulvamita Anggraini<sup>1)</sup>

*Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Indonesia<sup>1)</sup>*

*Email: anastasiaapuspa@gmail.com \**

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### Abstract

The participation of voters with disabilities in elections is one of the important aspects in realizing an inclusive democracy. This study aims to investigate the influence of political awareness on the level of participation of voters with disabilities in elections in Indonesia. Using qualitative methods and literature study techniques, this study analyzes various relevant sources, including scientific articles, policy reports, and previous studies. The results of the analysis show that high political awareness contributes significantly to the participation of voters with disabilities. Voters who are aware of their political rights tend to be more active in exercising their right to vote, even though they are still faced with various challenges such as physical accessibility and limited information. Therefore, this study recommends the need for greater efforts to increase political awareness through inclusive education and the provision of disability-friendly information. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of more inclusive election policies in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Disability, Election, Inclusivity, Political Awareness, Voter Participation

### A. INTRODUCTION

Elections are the main foundation of a democratic system, where all eligible citizens have the right to participate in determining the direction of state policy through the election of leaders and representatives of the people. Inclusive participation in elections reflects the degree of democracy in a country. However, in practice, not all citizens can participate fully and equally. Groups with disabilities are an example of a population that still faces challenges in accessing their political rights, including exercising their right to vote.

Table 1. Voters with Disabilities in the 2019 and 2024 Elections

Category	2019	2024
Physical Disabilities	100.765 People	482.414 People
Sensory Disabilities	130.165 People	298.749 People
Intellectual Disability	54.295 People	55.421 People
Mental Disabilities and others	77.995 People	264.594 People

Source: Ministry of State Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia

From the data above, the General Election Commission (KPU) recorded that there were 363,220 disabled voters in 2019, while in 2024 there were 1,101,178 permanent voters with disabilities in the election. The increasing number of voters in 2024 needs to be a concern for all election organizers to provide political education and ensure accessibility for voters with disabilities. As regulated in the technical provisions of Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, the KPU is responsible for providing accessibility of information and polling places (TPS) for all types of disabilities.

In Indonesia, the population of people with disabilities reaches more than 22 million people, making this group an important part of society that needs to be considered in the democratic process. Constitutionally, the political rights of disabilities are protected and their existence is recognized through the provisions of Article 27 Paragraph (1), Article 28D Paragraph (3), and Article 28E Paragraph (3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The following is strengthened through Article 13 of Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities. These obstacles include physical accessibility at polling places, lack of easily accessible information, and social stereotypes that underestimate their political participation.

One of the key factors that can encourage disability voter participation is political awareness. Political awareness includes a person's understanding of their political rights, knowledge of the political process, and the willingness to be involved in political activities. For voters with disabilities, political awareness is very important because it can be a trigger that encourages them to actively demand their political rights and participate in elections. Voters who have high political awareness will be more motivated to take part in the election process, even though they are faced with various challenges.

On the other hand, low political awareness can exacerbate the marginalization of disability groups in the political arena. Disabled voters who do not understand their rights may feel unmotivated to participate or even feel inappropriate to take part in the election. Therefore, understanding the relationship between political awareness and the participation of disabled voters is important in order to design more inclusive policies and improve the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

Through this research, it is hoped that we can find out how political awareness influences the participation of voters with disabilities in elections in Indonesia. It is also hoped that this research can provide recommendations for increasing the accessibility and involvement of voters with disabilities in the political process, thereby creating elections that are more inclusive and fair for all citizens.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Disability**

Disability refers to a condition that results in physical, sensory, intellectual, or mental limitations, significantly impacting an individual's ability to participate in daily life, including political and electoral processes. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), disabilities are categorized into three groups: (1) impairment, which involves abnormalities or loss of psychological, physiological, or anatomical functions; (2) disability, referring to limitations in carrying out daily activities due to impairment; and (3) handicap, which represents the social consequences of impairment and disability that hinder an individual's participation in society.

In the context of this study, disability is examined as a factor influencing electoral participation, particularly in terms of accessibility, inclusive policies, and political awareness. Research indicates that individuals with disabilities encounter accessibility barriers in elections, ranging from physical infrastructure to the lack of suitable voting materials (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Additionally, despite existing regulations promoting inclusivity, policy implementation remains inconsistent (Virendrakumar et al., 2018). Therefore, the operationalization of the disability concept in this research will focus on how these barriers affect the electoral participation of individuals with disabilities..

### **Political Awareness**

Political awareness refers to an individual's understanding of political issues, their rights as citizens, and their ability to analyze and respond to public policies and democratic processes. According to Rudiansyah (2019), political awareness comprises three key aspects: cognitive (understanding the political system), affective (emotional connection to politics), and behavioral (engagement in political activities). For individuals with disabilities, political awareness plays a crucial role in enhancing their participation in elections.

Studies have shown that higher levels of political awareness correlate with increased voter participation (Nanggala & Suryadi, 2024; Nasution et al., 2023). Targeted political education programs for individuals with disabilities have been proven effective in improving their understanding of political rights and electoral procedures (Park & Kim, 2017). Consequently, this study will operationalize political awareness in relation to the electoral engagement of individuals with disabilities, with a particular focus on how political education and advocacy efforts can enhance their participation.

### **Elections**

Elections serve as a fundamental pillar of democracy, allowing citizens to exercise their political rights by choosing representatives in government. Voter participation is a key indicator of democratic health, reflecting the level of political engagement among the public (United Nations Development Programme, 2021). However, despite legal guarantees, individuals with disabilities often face institutional, infrastructural, and societal barriers that hinder their electoral participation (KPU, 2020; Sihombing, 2020).

Research suggests that voter participation among disabled individuals remains significantly lower than that of the general population. Blais & Massicotte (2020) highlight that structural barriers, such as inaccessible voting stations, limited transportation options, and inadequate voter education, are major impediments. Furthermore, Schur et al. (2017) argue that social stigma and a lack of targeted political campaigns contribute to low turnout rates among disabled voters.

One of the main barriers to political participation among individuals with disabilities is electoral inaccessibility. Studies by Zajadacz (2020) reveal that many polling stations lack proper accommodations, such as Braille ballots, wheelchair-accessible voting booths, and sign language interpreters. Moreover, Gonzalez et al. (2021) found that poorly trained election officers often fail to address the specific needs of disabled voters, further discouraging their participation.

Another key issue is political education and awareness. Lindner & McNutt (2019) emphasize that many disabled voters lack adequate knowledge about their political rights and available accommodations. This lack of awareness limits their ability to advocate for themselves, reducing their engagement in political activities.

In many cases, legal frameworks meant to protect disability rights in elections are either poorly enforced or insufficient. Peters et al. (2022) argue that while laws guaranteeing equal voting rights exist, their implementation varies widely across different countries. Similarly, Eisenberg & Kogan (2020) highlight that some jurisdictions impose restrictive voting requirements, such as requiring in-person voting, which disproportionately affects individuals with mobility impairments.

Political awareness plays a crucial role in influencing voter engagement. Verba et al. (1995) argue that citizens who are politically informed are more likely to participate in elections and advocate for their rights. For disabled voters, political awareness campaigns can serve as a tool to increase turnout and representation (Schmidt et al., 2020).

Studies show that countries with strong civic education programs tend to have higher voter participation rates among disabled individuals (Powell, 2019). Additionally, Harris et al. (2021) suggest that targeted voter outreach initiatives, such as media campaigns and community engagement programs, can significantly enhance electoral inclusion.

Moreover, digital technology is emerging as a powerful tool to increase political awareness and accessibility. Kearns et al. (2021) highlight that online voting platforms, virtual candidate debates, and accessible informational websites have helped bridge the participation gap for disabled voters. However, the digital divide remains a concern, as not all disabled individuals have equal access to technology (Morris & Shade, 2022).

Governments and electoral bodies play a critical role in ensuring voting accessibility through inclusive policies and legal frameworks. Gooding & Anderson (2019) argue that countries with strong disability-inclusive election laws have higher participation rates among disabled voters. For example, the United States' Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and the United Kingdom's Representation of the People Act mandate accessibility measures to facilitate voting for individuals with disabilities (West et al., 2020).

Additionally, international organizations, such as the United Nations and the European Union, have emphasized the need for universal suffrage and disability rights protections in their democratic frameworks (Thompson & Flynn, 2021). Electoral commissions worldwide are increasingly adopting universal design principles, which ensure that all voting processes accommodate individuals with varying abilities (Duggan et al., 2020).

Studies indicate that training election officials and volunteers on disability rights and accessible voting procedures is essential for improving the voting experience of disabled individuals (Martin & Turner, 2022). Public awareness campaigns, conducted in partnership with disability rights organizations, have also proven effective in increasing voter turnout (Rodriguez & Nichols, 2021).

Ensuring greater electoral participation among individuals with disabilities requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses accessibility, legal protections, and political awareness. Structural barriers such as inaccessible polling stations and poor voter education must be tackled through inclusive policies and targeted outreach initiatives. Furthermore, technological advancements and digital platforms have the potential to revolutionize election accessibility, provided they are implemented equitably. By enhancing political awareness, strengthening legal frameworks, and fostering civic engagement, societies can create more inclusive and representative democracies for all citizens.

### **Voter Participation in Elections**

Voter participation in elections refers to individuals' involvement in the electoral process, including voter registration, casting ballots, and participating in political campaigns.

According to Blais and Massicotte (2020), voter participation encompasses all actions that allow individuals to engage in the political process, not only by voting but also by supporting candidates or political parties and contributing to broader political discourse.

Furthermore, a report by the United Nations Development Programme (2021) highlights voter participation as a crucial indicator of democratic health. This participation is influenced by various factors, including political awareness, access to information, and socio-economic conditions. The report emphasizes that high voter participation reflects a society's commitment to the democratic process and can impact the legitimacy of election outcomes.

In general, voter participation is considered both a fundamental right and a civic duty within a democratic system, providing every individual with the opportunity to contribute to shaping public policy through elections (International IDEA, 2020).

### **Inclusivity**

Inclusivity refers to an approach that ensures all individuals, regardless of their background, circumstances, or abilities, have equal access and opportunities to participate in social, political, and economic processes. In the political context, inclusivity means creating an environment where all groups, including marginalized communities such as persons with disabilities, can actively engage in decision-making and electoral processes. Inclusivity is not merely about presence; it is about granting individuals a voice and recognizing their needs and aspirations within society.

According to the United Nations (2020), "Inclusion is about ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, which is fundamental to achieving sustainable development and social cohesion" (United Nations, 2020). This statement highlights that inclusivity is a key element in fostering a just and democratic society.

Campbell et al. (2021) emphasize that "political inclusion requires not only the recognition of diverse identities but also the dismantling of barriers that prevent marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, from participating fully in political life" (Campbell et al., 2021). This underscores the importance of identifying and addressing existing obstacles to achieve political inclusivity.

From a policy perspective, Mendez (2022) asserts that "inclusive policies must prioritize the participation of all individuals, particularly marginalized communities, to ensure that their voices are heard in the political arena" (Mendez, 2022). This approach suggests that inclusive policies should be designed to empower underrepresented groups and facilitate their active participation in democratic processes.

Electoral policy reforms in Indonesia, particularly after 2016, demonstrate progress in promoting inclusivity. The implementation of policies aligned with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has contributed to increased voter participation among persons with disabilities in the 2019 elections (Amrurrobbi et al., 2020; Kramer et al., 2022). However, challenges persist, particularly concerning social prejudices and the lack of accessible electoral infrastructure (Noviani et al., 2021). Therefore, this study will evaluate the extent to which inclusive policies have been implemented and their impact on the political participation of persons with disabilities. Ensuring inclusivity in elections and political participation is essential to guaranteeing that the voices of all citizens, including those with disabilities, are heard and considered in decision-making processes.

Overall, this literature review indicates that disability, political awareness, voter participation, and electoral inclusivity are interrelated concepts. Persons with disabilities face various barriers to electoral participation, including issues of accessibility, policy frameworks, and political awareness. Consequently, this study aims to operationalize these concepts in identifying factors influencing the political participation of persons with disabilities and formulating strategies to enhance inclusivity in elections..

### **C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative approach with literature study techniques. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aims to understand the phenomenon in depth, especially regarding the influence of political awareness on the participation of voters with disabilities in elections in Indonesia. Literature study techniques allow researchers to review and analyze various literature sources that are relevant to the research topic, whether in the form of books, scientific journal articles, policy reports, or the results of previous research.

This type of research is analytical descriptive research. This research aims to describe and analyze the relationship between political awareness and participation of voters with disabilities in elections based on findings that have been published in various literature sources. This research not only describes the phenomenon, but also seeks to understand the factors that influence the participation of disabled voters as well as the implications of political awareness for this participation.

The data collection process was carried out by identifying relevant literature through various scientific databases, digital libraries and websites using related keywords. Next, the collected data will be analyzed by grouping information based on themes and synthesizing results from various sources to produce in-depth understanding. To ensure validity and reliability, this research also applies analysis to each piece of literature used.

### **D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Inclusive elections are an indicator of the quality of a country's democracy. In Indonesia, people with disabilities are a group that is vulnerable to marginalization in the election process. Even though the law regulates political rights for people with disabilities, their participation in elections is still far from optimal. One of the factors that plays an important role in increasing the political participation of disabled groups is political awareness, namely the level of knowledge and understanding of individuals regarding their political rights and the political process as a whole.

This chapter discusses further the relationship between political awareness and participation of disabled voters in elections. This discussion will begin by explaining the concept of political awareness and its influence on the motivation of voters with disabilities to exercise their right to vote. Next, various challenges faced by disabled voters in participating in elections are discussed, both in terms of physical accessibility and political information. Finally, this chapter will also review several efforts that can be made to increase the participation of disabled voters through increasing political awareness and improving election policies that are more inclusive.

#### **Political Awareness and Participation of Disabled Voters**

Political awareness is an important factor influencing voter participation, including those with disabilities. Political awareness is defined as an individual's level of knowledge and understanding of political rights, the electoral process, and political issues that are relevant to

their lives. In the context of voters with disabilities, political awareness plays an important role in encouraging the courage to get involved in elections, even though they face various challenges, such as limited accessibility at polling stations and information that is difficult to access.

Research conducted by Widiyanto (2020) found that voters with disabilities who had higher political awareness were more likely to participate in elections than those with low awareness. This is due to a better understanding of the importance of their voices in influencing policy, as well as an internal drive to exercise their political rights. In contrast, voters with disabilities who lack political awareness often feel ignored and lack confidence in participating because of the minimal information they receive about the election process and their rights.

### **Challenges of Participation of Disabled Voters in Elections**

Disabled voters in Indonesia still face many obstacles in participating fully in elections. According to a report from the General Election Commission (KPU), despite efforts to increase inclusivity, such as providing disability-friendly polling stations and officers trained to assist voters with special needs, structural and social barriers remain. One of the biggest challenges is physical accessibility. Many polling places do not have adequate facilities, such as paths that are easily accessible for wheelchair users, or companions who understand how to communicate with voters who have hearing or visual impairments.

Apart from that, barriers to access to information are also a major obstacle for voters with disabilities. Research by Susanto (2021) shows that much of the political and election information that is disseminated is not friendly to voters with disabilities, especially for those who have sensory limitations, such as the deaf or blind. Information that is not presented in Braille, sign language, or audio book format prevents voters with disabilities from gaining an in-depth understanding of the election process. This has a negative impact on their political awareness and, ultimately, reduces participation rates in elections.

### **The Relationship between Political Awareness and Participation of Disabled Voters**

From the various literature analyzed, it was found that political awareness plays an important role in increasing the participation of disabled voters. Voters who have sufficient knowledge about their political rights tend to be more confident in exercising their voting rights, even when faced with physical or social obstacles. They are also more proactive in seeking information and solutions to overcome the obstacles they face in the election. For example, blind voters who have high political awareness will seek to obtain information in an appropriate format, such as audio, and will request appropriate assistance at the polling place.

In contrast, voters with low political awareness tend to be more passive and reluctant to get involved in elections. They often feel marginalized in the political process, either because of a lack of understanding of their rights or because of distrust of the existing political system. In a study conducted by Hermawan (2019), it was found that disabled voters who lacked political awareness tended to participate less in elections, and this was exacerbated by a lack of social support and weaknesses in inclusive policies.

### **Efforts to Increase Participation of Disabled Voters Through Increasing Political Awareness**

Increasing the political awareness of disabled voters can be a key solution to increasing their participation in elections. The government and election management institutions, such

as the KPU, can play a key role in this regard by carrying out more inclusive political education campaigns.

1. Inclusive Political Education

The government, election management institutions and civil society organizations must work together to provide inclusive political education programs for voters with disabilities. This program must be adapted to various types of disabilities and be accessible to all groups, whether through print, electronic or digital media. such as providing materials in Braille format, videos with sign language, and training for accompanying voters with disabilities, can help increase their political knowledge.

2. Increased Accessibility at TPS

Election organizers need to ensure that each polling station has disability-friendly facilities, including adequate access points, voting booths that are accessible to wheelchair users, as well as assistive devices for voters with special needs, such as voting guides or voter companions.

3. Disability-Friendly Socialization

Information about elections, including procedures and candidates, must be provided in a format that is accessible to all types of disabilities. Socialization must be carried out widely and evenly, so that voters with disabilities can obtain the information needed to make the right decisions.

4. Empowerment of The Disability Community

Disability organizations need to be encouraged to actively play a role in the political socialization and education process. The disability community has an important role in supporting its members to participate in elections and demand their political rights.

### **Recommendations for a More Inclusive Election Policy**

Several recommendations can be proposed to increase the participation of disabled voters in Indonesia:

1. Increase physical accessibility at polling places

The government needs to ensure that all polling stations are equipped with disability-friendly facilities, such as wheelchair ramps, hearing aids and companions trained to assist voters with special needs.

2. Increase access to inclusive political information

Providing information in formats appropriate for all types of disabilities, such as Braille, sign language, and audio, is critical to ensuring that voters with disabilities can properly understand the political and electoral process.

3. Carry out an inclusive political education campaign

Governments and civil society organizations need to work together to organize political education programs specifically designed to increase the political awareness of voters with disabilities.

## **E. CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the results of the discussion that has been presented, it can be concluded that political awareness influences the participation of voters with disabilities in elections in Indonesia. Disabled voters who have a higher level of political awareness tend to be more proactive in exercising their right to vote, even though they are faced with various obstacles. Political awareness provides a better understanding of the importance of participation in elections, and encourages them to overcome physical and social obstacles that often hinder their participation.

However, accessibility challenges, both in terms of physical and information, are still the main obstacle to the participation of voters with disabilities. Many polling places are not disability friendly, and the political information provided is not fully inclusive and accessible to all people with disabilities. Therefore, it is important for the government, election organizers and the community to work together to increase the accessibility and inclusiveness of elections.

Efforts to increase disability voter participation must start with increasing political awareness through inclusive political education and campaigns targeting the disability community. In addition, more inclusive election policies must be implemented consistently, including the provision of disability-friendly facilities and easily accessible election information in various formats. By overcoming these obstacles and increasing the political awareness of disabled voters, Indonesia can realize more inclusive and democratic elections, where all citizens, without exception, can participate fully and equally in determining the nation's future.

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