

Research Article

The Strategy of the General Elections Commission in Increasing the Political Participation of Voters with Disabilities to Realize Inclusive Elections: Study of the General Election Commission of Blora Regency

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Abstract.

Political participation is a fundamental aspect of democracy, ensuring that all citizens, including persons with disabilities, can exercise their voting rights. Indonesia, through Law Number 19 of 2011 concerning Ratification of the Convention On The Rights of Persons of Disabilities, has committed to upholding these rights and preventing discrimination in political life. However, voter participation among disabled individuals remains low. In the 2020 regional election in Blora Regency, out of 959 registered voters with disabilities, only 344 exercised their right to vote, highlighting significant gaps in participation.

This study examines efforts to create more inclusive elections in Blora using a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through interviews and observations, focusing on local regulations, accessibility challenges, and strategies to increase voter turnout.

The Blora General Election Commission (KPU) has implemented several strategies to promote inclusive elections: i. collecting accurate voter data, ii. improving accessibility at polling stations, and iii. forming democracy volunteer programs that include persons with disabilities as peer educators. Key challenges include low self-identification among persons with disabilities, often due to stigma or family reluctance, and a lack of accessible information. Despite these barriers, the inclusion of disabled individuals in voter outreach programs has helped build confidence and encourage greater participation. Addressing these issues through continued awareness and accessibility improvements is essential for ensuring equal political rights for all citizens.

Keywords: election, participation, disability, inclusive

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1. Introduction

Political participation can be defined as the involvement of ordinary citizens in shaping government policies that affect their lives. The definition of political participation refers to (1) an individual's or a group's active engagement in political life, including electing national leaders and influencing public policy, either directly or indirectly.

In a democratic country like Indonesia, political participation is a crucial aspect, as it allows citizens to determine the political direction of their region and the nation. Political participation also serves as a means for the people to exercise legitimate political power through their involvement in elections. In a democratic system (2), participating in elections is a fundamental political right of every citizen. This right includes the freedom to explore available alternatives and the right to participate in deciding whom to elect.

The fulfillment of political rights is reflected in the freedom of every citizen to express opinions and assemble, as enshrined in Article 28 of the 1945 Constitution: "The freedom to associate, assemble, and express thoughts orally and in writing shall be regulated by law." Every individual has an equal right to participate in governance, as this right is part of human rights, as stated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and further detailed in Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights.

A most important thing in organizing elections is ensuring the participation of eligible citizens in exercising their political voting rights, including persons with disabilities (3). Law No. 19 of 2011, which ratifies the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, states that Indonesia is obligated to realize the rights of persons with disabilities in all aspects of life, including political participation, to prevent discriminatory practices. One of the essential political rights for persons with disabilities is the right to vote in general and regional elections.

The political rights of persons with disabilities in elections are explicitly recognized in Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections. Article 5 of this law states that eligible persons with disabilities have the same opportunities to be voters, candidates for the House of Representatives (DPR), the Regional Representative Council (DPD), the President/Vice President, the Regional Legislative Council (DPRD), and election organizers. Furthermore, section 75 (2) of the Disability Law states that "The Government and Regional Governments are required to ensure the rights and opportunities for Persons with Disabilities to vote and be elected."

Despite these legal guarantees, persons with disabilities still face challenges in exercising their voting rights during elections. Their votes are often overlooked, and they are frequently underestimated by society due to their physical limitations. Many persons with disabilities are not registered in the Permanent Voter List (DPT). For example, in Blora Regency, voters with disabilities encountered difficulties at polling stations (TPS). Wheelchair users struggled to access voting areas due to narrow spaces and high ballot box placement, making the voting process difficult. Additionally, inaccurate voter data collection remains a problem. Some election organizers at the PPS and KPPS levels do not take voter registration for persons with disabilities seriously.

Evidence of these challenges emerged in the 2020 elections regarding the number of voters with disabilities (4). According to the General Elections Commission (KPU) data, 959 voters with disabilities were registered in the 2020 Regional Elections in Blora, yet only 344 exercised their voting rights. However, data from Disabilitas Blora Mustika (DBM) indicated 6,600 persons with disabilities by name and address, while Statistics Indonesia (BPS) recorded 16,000 persons with disabilities in 2020. Meanwhile, in Central Java, there were 56,080 registered voters with disabilities, but only 20,054 participated in the election.

The lack of voting participation among persons with disabilities highlights the issue of many eligible voters not being registered. This is a serious concern, as individuals with the right to vote should not be excluded solely due to their disability status. This study is important for two main reasons: 1) The low political participation of persons with disabilities in Blora Regency and the presence of discrimination in fulfilling their voting rights, 2) The significant discrepancies in the recorded number of persons with disabilities in Blora Regency. Data from the Social Service (5), Women's Empowerment, and Child Protection Agency (Dinsos P3A) indicate that 2,829 persons with disabilities are spread across 16 sub-districts and 295 villages/urban areas.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Participation

Political participation can be defined as the involvement of ordinary citizens in shaping government policies that affect their lives. In general, political participation refers to (6)

the engagement of citizens who do not hold formal authority in influencing the process of policymaking and implementation.

According to McClosky (1), political participation consists of voluntary activities by citizens through which they take part in the process of electing leaders and, either directly or indirectly, in the formulation of public policy. Public involvement in policy determination plays a crucial role in determining the democratic nature of government decisions. The higher the level of public participation in politics, the more democratic the political system becomes.

Milbrath and Goel (7) categorize political participation into four types:

- a. Apathetics, Individuals who withdraw from political activities and have no interest in engaging in the political process.
- b. Spectators, Those who minimally participate, such as by voting in elections.
- c. Gladiators, Individuals who are actively involved in the political process.
- d. Critics, People who scrutinize and challenge government actions.

David F. Roth and Frank L. Wilson describe political participation using a political participation pyramid (1), where society is divided into three categories: gladiators, spectators, and apathetics. Gladiators are those who are highly active in politics, Spectators are individuals who exercise their voting rights but do not engage further, Apathetics are those who are completely inactive and do not participate in elections or any political process.

Lane (8) identifies four functions of political participation: The first is as A means to pursue economic motives is Individuals engage in politics to seek financial or material benefits, second is as A means to satisfy social needs Participation provides social interaction and community engagement, third is as A means to uphold specific values Some individuals participate to promote and defend particular principles or ideologies, fourth is as A means to fulfill subconscious and psychological needs – Political engagement can be driven by deeper psychological motivations and personal fulfillment. This theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding the various dimensions and motivations behind political participation in a democratic society.

2.2. Persons with Disabilities

According to Law No. 19 of 2011 on the Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, persons with disabilities are individuals who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, when interacting with their environment and societal attitudes, may face barriers that hinder their full and effective participation on an equal basis with others.

Vash (9) defines disability as a physiological, anatomical, or psychological impairment caused by injury, accident, or congenital conditions, which tends to be permanent. The term handicap refers to the obstacles an individual faces when attempting to perform daily tasks due to such impairments.

In the field of Special Education (PLB), persons with disabilities are also referred to as children with special needs those who, during their growth and development, experience significant deviations (physical, mental-intellectual, social, or emotional) compared to other children of the same age.

According to Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, Article 1 defines persons with disabilities as individuals who have long-term physical, intellectual, mental, and/or sensory limitations that may cause barriers to full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.

Types of Disabilities (Article 4, Paragraph 1) The law further classifies disabilities into the following categories:

1. Physical Disabilities – Includes individuals with visual impairments (blindness), mobility impairments (limb disabilities), and hearing impairments (deafness).
2. Intellectual Disabilities – Individuals experiencing cognitive or developmental delays, including those with intellectual disabilities.
3. Developmental Disabilities – Conditions caused by issues in bodily growth and development.
4. Sensory Disabilities – Impairments affecting one or more senses, such as vision, hearing, or other sensory functions.
5. Mental Disabilities – Refers to individuals with below-average intellectual capabilities, including those with psychiatric disorders or mental health conditions.

These legal and theoretical definitions highlight the diverse challenges faced by persons with disabilities and emphasize the need for equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of life, including social, economic, and political participation.

2.3. Voting Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The right to vote is a fundamental right of Indonesian citizens that must be protected and recognized, as stipulated in Article 27(1), Article 28D(3), and Article 28E(3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This right is further reinforced by Article 43(1) of Law No. 39 of 1999 on Human Rights, Law No. 8 of 2016, which specifically regulates the rights of persons with disabilities, and Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections, which provides technical provisions on voting rights.

The protection of voting rights for persons with disabilities is explicitly mentioned in Article 350(2) of Law No. 7 of 2017 on Elections, which mandates that polling stations (TPS) must be located in accessible areas, including for persons with disabilities. Additionally, polling stations should not merge villages and must consider geographical factors to ensure that every voter can cast their vote directly, freely, and confidentially. These provisions aim to uphold the rights of persons with disabilities by ensuring accessibility, which refers to the ease of access provided to create equal opportunities, and reasonable accommodation, which involves necessary modifications and adjustments to guarantee the enjoyment and exercise of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis.

Although persons with disabilities have the same voting rights as other Indonesian citizens, they remain vulnerable to discrimination due to negative stigma and societal barriers. According to Ndaumanu (10), persons with disabilities are classified as a vulnerable group, meaning they are among those most frequently subjected to discrimination and whose rights are often unfulfilled.

3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a constructivist paradigm, as referenced in (11), and employs a descriptive qualitative research method to analyze and construct in-depth interviews with research subjects. The objective is to provide a clear depiction of the General Election Commission's (KPU) strategy in increasing political participation among persons with disabilities to achieve an inclusive election in Blora Regency. Data collection methods include semi-structured interviews and direct observation of research subjects. Additionally, documentation analysis is conducted, referring to relevant books (12).

The research subjects include the Chairperson of the Blora Regency General Election Commission (KPU) and persons with disabilities who have voting rights in the elections. Data collection methods consist of interviews and documentation studies. To ensure data validity, source triangulation is applied, as referenced in (13). The study follows Miles and Huberman data analysis technique, which includes the following steps: 1) Data Collection, Gathering information related to the fulfillment of voting rights for persons with disabilities in Blora Regency through local regulations. 2) Data Reduction, Selecting and filtering relevant data that align with the research problem. 3) Data Organization, Structuring the data to determine which information will be included in the research findings. 4) Conclusion Drawing, Deriving conclusions based on the answers to the research problem (14). This methodological approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the strategies used to enhance political participation among persons with disabilities in Blora Regency.

4. Research Result and Discussion

The results of this study use several indicators in order to answer the problem formulation based on the title raised, namely the strategy of the General Elections Commission (KPU) in increasing the political participation of voters with disabilities. In simple terms Marrus (15) defines strategy as a process of determining the plans of top leaders that focus on the long-term goals of the organization, accompanied by preparations related to efforts or how to achieve these goals. This study will also explain the obstacles and efforts of the KPU in providing socialization, services and programs as a form of easy access to voting rights for persons with disabilities.

Blora has become the place of choice for researchers in deepening discussions related to voters with disabilities because according to the data that has been found, it shows that the level of political participation in the use of rights as voters with disabilities tends to be low, so it is necessary to examine several things that are factors in the lack of political participation as well as efforts or the strategy used in overcoming this is in the form of socialization carried out by the Blora KPU.

Based on this data, it can be seen that the number of voter data collection with disabilities has decreased, according to the Head of KPU Blora , Amri Syaiful explained that

TABLE 1: Number of Disabled Voters.

	2018 Gubernatorial	Election 2019 Election	2020
Election of Disability Voters	905	863	959
Use of Voting Rights	158	300	344
Percentage	17.46%	34.76%	35.87%

“The decline in voter data collection for people with disabilities occurred because there were several obstacles, namely when officers came to visit residents’ homes in order to register voters there were people with disabilities who did not want to admit that they were a person with disabilities, this was due to the effect of embarrassed if they are known as a person with a disability, even though not a few are encountered when those who do not recognize themselves as a person with a disability experience difficulties in accessing some of the accesses when exercising their right to vote at the polling station (TPS)”, he said.

Regarding the use of voting rights which can be said to have increased starting from the gubernatorial election, presidential election, to the election of regents, although as has been seen that there is data that can be said to be a question mark related to why in the gubernatorial election it is written that the data collection of disabled voters is 905 but the use of voting rights is only 158. It is very much different when compared to the presidential election with the number of data on voters with disabilities as many as 863 with the use of 300 voting rights. As explained by Brother Amri Saiful:

There is such a thing as a trend where the trend greatly affects the use of one’s right to vote, the trend here is defined as a person’s tendency, it can be seen when the election of a regent, people including people with disabilities will tend to hear more issues related to the nomination of a regent because the distance is close in the sense that the regent candidate is in their area, then the presidential election can also be said that the trend is close to the community, every presidential nomination there is always news in various media that explains the latest news or issues from the presidential candidate so that this is more remembered by the public because the issue of the candidate is often heard by the public. This is also the reason why the presidential election in 2019 was combined with the election of legislative members for each province, due to high public interest in conducting presidential elections so that indirectly if they came to the TPS (Polling Station) they would also choose legislative candidates. although they don’t really know who and what the background of the

legislative candidate is because they lost the issue with the presidential candidate,” he said.

Knowledge of the general public is important for people with disabilities where they tend to be easily influenced by the family or community environment. If their environment does not follow trends or is not very aware of candidate developments or issues, the disabled will also act in the same way where their interest in political participation also tends to be low.

Data obtained from the Blora Mustika Difabel Community (DBM) shows that there are 6050 people with disabilities by name by address from 16 sub-districts in Blora Regency. However, only 344 of all persons with disabilities exercised their right to vote, namely in the last election to be exact, the Regent Election in 2020 and also a small number of data on them as voters with disabilities. As previously explained by the Head of the Blora KPU regarding several factors that influenced the decline in the voter list as well as the political participation of people with disabilities. Head of the Difabel Community Blora Mustika, Ghofur also added that:

The inferiority factor of a person with a disability is the main factor in decreasing the number of disabled voters, they are people with disabilities feel ashamed to meet many people, then there is a fear in them that makes movement limitations within themselves. Eliminating feelings of inferiority for people with disabilities is not an easy thing so that the administrators always approach and motivate people with disabilities to get up and be enthusiastic in living life as well as contributing to political participation. Actually, the feeling of inferiority will be minimized from the disabled themselves if they get support from the parties, namely the family environment, the community, as well as the disabled community. However, until now, there are still some families who tend to isolate people with disabilities and lock them in their homes. This is what makes people with disabilities even more depressed.”

KPU is an effort to introduce rights and obligations as citizens in the context of our country that upholds democratic values where the involvement of all people from various circles is a must. The Blora KPU has also carried out socialization as a form of their contribution as an institution that plays a very important role in the process of increasing political participation. The KPU chairman, Amri Syaiful said that:

“Various forms of socialization have been carried out by the Blora KPU, not only through face-to-face, namely directly visiting places of persons with disabilities. people with disabilities, but also the use of social media such as Instagram and Facebook,

besides that Blora KPU also directly involves people with disabilities to take part in socialization officers”.

4.1. Blora KPU Strategy in Realizing Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities

4.1.1. Data collection as a voter

Data collection of a person with a disability in disability voters encountered many obstacles, as explained above that a sense of insecurity makes people with disabilities not admit that they have special needs so that later special services are needed from the organizing committee at TPS. Therefore, the KPU in this case focuses more on how to give stigma and influence to people with disabilities so that later they will be more enthusiastic so that a sense of self-confidence will be embedded so as to facilitate the process of collecting data on the selection of disabilities. KPU Blora provides socialization to families where there is a person with disabilities in the family where KPU Blora explains several things related to the importance of self-recognition as a person with disabilities so that later it will facilitate access and also services as voters with disabilities.

4.1.2. Ease of Access for People with Disabilities

It is undeniable that people with disabilities need a special service in exercising their right to vote. Ease of access is one of the things that the Blora KPU focuses on. For example, there are people with disabilities who cannot walk but only lie down. So with this the Blora KPU provides services in the form of TPS officers who come directly to the house of the person with disability to help him exercise his right to vote. In the process of increasing the participation of people with disabilities, KPU Blora has carried out various services according to the needs of the disabled.

4.1.3. Formation of Volunteers for Democracy

Volunteer democracy is a special program in the form of direct contributions from persons with disabilities where they participate in becoming socialization officers whose job is to disseminate information to those with disabilities. The participation of people

with disabilities who become volunteers for democracy in the form of socialization officers is the main attraction for other people with disabilities where direct socialization by fellow disabled people allows them to be more enthusiastic in listening and is also affected so that later they can increase their confidence that people with disabilities can also contribute to the country. one of them is in political participation which determines the future leader candidates. With the presence of these democratic volunteers, KPU Blora is increasingly optimistic that people with disabilities will be motivated to improve their quality and participation.

The various strategies carried out by the Blora KPU show that the Blora KPU pays special attention to people with disabilities where political participation for people with disabilities is no less important because all Indonesian citizens should have the same rights and treatment so that opportunities for people with disabilities are wide open. in contributing to the country through political participation. However, it should be noted that the Blora KPU in socializing also encountered several obstacles, with such obstacles the Blora KPU will also make efforts to overcome these obstacles.

4.2. Blora KPU Strategy in Realizing Inclusive Elections for Persons with Disabilities

4.2.1. Self-awareness of a person with a disability

It is common when families meet at the time of data collection that they do not say that one of their family members is found to be a person with a disability. There are two possibilities behind it, namely the unwillingness of a person with a disability to recognize himself as a person with special needs because he may be ashamed and afraid of being looked down upon, then a family environment that may maintain his good name by not saying that they in the family have a person with a disability. This is what the Blora KPU continues to strive for to date to instill confidence that people with disabilities are also able to rise up so that in this case the Blora KPU and the Blora Mustika Difabel community (DBM) are passing through democratic volunteers who continue to strive to be able to provide stigma and good influence on the community. Persons with disabilities with the aim of increasing their motivation.

4.2.2. Lack of access to disability information

For people with disabilities, access to information is an important thing which can increase their knowledge, especially in terms of political participation, namely knowing political issues and candidates who will run in elections. However, access to information cannot be comprehensively obtained by people with disabilities because as is well known, they have special needs in various forms. Therefore, active efforts were made from the KPU Blora, the Difabel Community, the family environment and the community where they could introduce the latest news to be digested and understood by the disabled.

Based on the obstacles faced in the socialization process along with the solutions, it can be said that KPU Blora has made every effort to increase the political participation of voters with disabilities. The Blora KPU program, namely democracy volunteers, according to the Head of Difabel Blora Mustika (DBM), Ghofur said that: "The program from the Blora KPU, namely democracy volunteers, has been able to better introduce people with disabilities to their rights and obligations as citizens, through democracy volunteers which here by people with disabilities as well as socialization officers are able to increase the spirit of other people with disabilities to be more confident. Indeed, the percentage of disabled voters tends to be low when compared to the total number of people with disabilities in Blora district. However, increasing the political participation of voters with disabilities takes time because it is known that the process of approaching a person with a disability is not an easy thing, so more patience is needed". With this, it can be concluded that the program from KPU Blora so far has fulfilled the needs of the disabled, it just takes time and patience where the program can run optimally.

5. Conclusion

Political participation in elections is one form of embodiment of the democratic system in Indonesia. A good democracy must be able to create good political participation from all walks of life. Persons with disabilities are one of the voters who receive special attention and services from the government where in the process of political participation they have special needs according to the type of disability they experience. Blora is one of the cities that pays attention to voters from people with disabilities, this is proven by the implementation of one of the leading programs, namely the formation of

democracy volunteers where democracy volunteers are a program by involving people with disabilities to participate as socialization officers for other people with disabilities with the aim of increasing enthusiasm and self-confidence so that later it will also increase the political participation of voters with disabilities.

The socialization and program of the Blora KPU, as explained and also said by the Head of the Blora Difabel Community, Mustika, has fulfilled the needs of the disabled in Blora, although it has not been able to significantly increase political participation, but the program and socialization have begun to introduce people with disabilities to the importance of political participation.

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