



Political Representation Among Young Voters: Analysis of Students' Political Preferences in the 2024 West Java Regional Election

Diani Dewi Saila¹, Karim Suryadi², Vini Agustiani Hadia³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: dianidsl@upi.edu

Article Info

Article history:

Received : 10 May 2025

Acceptance : 02 December 2025

Published : 06 December 2025

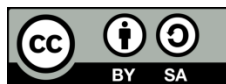
Available online

<http://aspublisher.co.id/index.php/cakrawala>

E-ISSN: 3063-2447

How to cite:

Saila, D. D., Suryadi, K., Hadia, A. V (2025). "Political Representation Among Young Voters: Analysis of Students' Political Preferences in the 2024 West Java Regional Election" *Cakrawala: Journal of Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, " *Cakrawala: Journal of Citizenship Teaching and Learning*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 62-69, 2025.



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license

ABSTRACT

Political participation among young citizens in regional head elections has become a crucial element in strengthening local democracy in Indonesia. This study aims to analyze the political preferences of young voters in the 2024 West Java Pilkada and identify the factors influencing their decision-making processes. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving 12 students of the Indonesian Education University (UPI) who represent active voters in campus-based political activities. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify dominant patterns in voter behavior. The findings reveal that young voters tend to prioritize candidates' track records, leadership experience, clear vision and mission, and realistic work programs, particularly those related to education, employment, and community welfare. They also consider the credibility of supporting political parties and the educational background of candidates as indicators of competence. These results indicate a shift towards more rational, critical, and issue-oriented political preferences among young voters. This study highlights the growing political awareness of younger generations and offers insights into how youth perspectives may influence regional policymaking in the future.

Keywords: Political Representation; Political Preferences; Young Citizens; Regional Election; West Java

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) represent a fundamental mechanism of democratic governance in Indonesia, enabling citizens to directly elect governors, regents, and mayors who will lead regional administration for a specified period. In accordance with Article 18 Paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution, the election of regional heads must be carried out democratically, upholding principles of transparency, accountability, and popular

sovereignty. The system of direct elections provides citizens with the opportunity to evaluate candidates' proposed programs, track records, and ideological orientations (Sinka & Mukhson, 2024). Consequently, Pilkada embodies not only a procedural dimension of political participation but also a substantive avenue through which citizens articulate their preferences and influence public policy.

Within this electoral landscape, young citizens constitute a strategically important demographic group. With the ongoing demographic shift, Generation Z and millennials now represent the largest proportion of Indonesia's population, bringing considerable electoral leverage and potential for democratic transformation (BPS, 2023). Their participation is not merely quantitative but also qualitative, as they contribute energy, innovation, and a global outlook grounded in values of equality and humanity inherent in Pancasila (Murdiono et al., 2024). From a civic education perspective, political participation reflects both individual agency and collective responsibility, where citizens are expected to safeguard rights, pursue justice, and contribute to public welfare (Efendi & Poernomo, 2022).

The significance of youth participation is underscored by data from the General Election Commission (KPU), which shows that Generation Z and millennials constituted over 113 million permanent voters in the 2024 elections, making them the most influential voter groups nationally (KPU, 2024). In West Java-Indonesia's most populous province—this demographic concentration is expected to shape electoral outcomes, political competition, and leadership direction. However, empirical evidence simultaneously indicates that youth political engagement is often impeded by apathy and distrust toward political institutions, which are perceived as corrupt, elitist, and disconnected from public concerns. As a result, many young voters adopt low-information or disengaged electoral behaviors.

Although previous studies have examined youth political participation in Indonesia, most of them focus on national-level elections, general political attitudes, or patterns of online engagement (Fithriya, 2014; Kurniawati, 2023). Research has predominantly highlighted idealism, civic knowledge, and digital literacy as determinants of youth political behavior. However, few studies have examined political preference formation at the provincial level, especially in the context of Pilkada, which involves different political dynamics, candidate proximity, and issue prioritization. Furthermore, research rarely explores how university students—particularly those exposed to civic and educational frameworks construct ideal leadership criteria and make electoral choices within real-life political contests.

Based on this gap, the present study offers two key contributions. First, it investigates youth political preferences through a context-specific case study of the 2024 West Java Pilkada, an electoral event with national implications due to the size and heterogeneity of its electorate. Second, it explores how university students conceptualize ideal leadership attributes and assess candidates, thereby providing insights into the emerging logic of youth political rationality in a democratic society. This focus advances the understanding of youth political behavior beyond descriptive statistics toward an analysis of value-based decision-making and normative expectations.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the political preferences of students at the Indonesian Education University (UPI) in selecting gubernatorial and vice-gubernatorial candidates in the 2024 West Java Pilkada. The research examines (1) the ideal criteria they use to evaluate candidates and (2) the factors influencing their political preferences. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to demonstrate how youth political behavior may shape electoral outcomes and the broader trajectory of regional governance in Indonesia over the next five years.

Based on the above explanation, the research problems are formulated as follows:

- 1) What ideal criteria underlie the political preferences of UPI students in determining candidates for governor and vice-governor of West Java?
- 2) What factors influence the political preferences of UPI students in choosing candidates for governor and vice-governor of West Java?

2. RESEARCH METHODE

This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method, which allows researchers to explore and interpret social phenomena within a real-life context. A qualitative approach is defined as a process of investigating social problems experienced by humans to obtain meaning, understanding, and descriptions of a phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is characterized by its naturalistic orientation, emphasizing the observation of phenomena in their real setting without manipulation by the researcher (Zaini et al., 2023). In line with this perspective, a case study design enables an in-depth examination of individuals, groups, or organizations to develop a holistic understanding of the subject of inquiry (Sugiyono, 2020).

The unit of analysis in this study is university students who participate in campus-based political activities, particularly those engaged in intra- and extra-campus student organizations at the Indonesian Education University (UPI). The research was conducted in Bandung, West Java, from February to April 2024. A total of twelve participants were selected purposively, consisting of: (1) eight active undergraduate students representing different faculties, and (2) four organizational leaders at intra- and extra-campus levels. This selection was based on their involvement, knowledge, and potential influence in political activities, which are relevant to the study objectives.

Data collection was carried out through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted individually, with an average duration of 45–60 minutes each, exploring the ideal leadership criteria, political perceptions, and factors influencing voting preferences. Observations were carried out during student meetings, discussions, and political campaigns within the campus environment to capture interaction patterns and behavior. Documentation included organizational records, campaign materials, and media content related to student political activities. All interviews were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy.

The data analysis process followed three stages: (1) data reduction through coding and categorization, (2) data display in thematic matrices and narrative descriptions, and (3) conclusion drawing and verification. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to ideal candidate criteria and influencing factors in students' political preferences. The analysis was iterative, allowing researchers to revisit data, refine codes, and reorganize themes during the research process.

To ensure the credibility and validity of the findings, several strategies were employed. First, triangulation of data sources and techniques was conducted by cross-checking interview data with observations and documentation. Second, member checking was carried out by presenting preliminary interpretations to selected participants for verification and clarification. Third, peer debriefing was performed with fellow researchers to reduce individual bias and strengthen analytical rigor. Ethical considerations were maintained by ensuring confidentiality, voluntary participation, and anonymity throughout the research. Overall, this qualitative case study design enables a comprehensive and contextual understanding of students' political preferences in the 2024 West Java gubernatorial election, providing a rich portrayal of their perceptions, motivations, and decision-making processes.

3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

In the political dimension, citizens participate in both governing and being governed, reflecting Aristotle's fundamental view that citizenship is inseparable from political activity and collective responsibility. Citizens are not merely subjects of political authority, but individuals who possess rights to influence state decisions and shape public policies (Putri et al., 2023). This principle is relevant in the context of regional elections (Pilkada), where young citizens hold significant electoral power. Data from the General Election Commission (KPU) shows that Generation Z and millennials collectively represent over 113 million voters, positioning them as the decisive demographic group capable of influencing electoral outcomes and political direction in the 2024 Pilkada (KPU, 2024).

However, a paradox emerges between demographic potential and political reality. Despite their numerical strength, young voters frequently experience political apathy, distrust of political institutions, and low political literacy (Fatma Sjoraida & Nugraha, 2023). For many, politics is viewed as corrupt, irrelevant, or excessively formal, leading to disengagement or low-information voting behavior. Several students stated that politics "does not solve real problems" and is "too much about elites," reflecting a sentiment that weakens motivation to engage meaningfully. One participant noted:

"Politicians talk a lot, but our campus problems and job prospects remain the same"
(Informant S4).

Such narratives demonstrate a perception gap: students intellectually recognize the importance of elections but do not emotionally connect political processes to their lived experiences.

Rational Choice and Instrumental Evaluation of Candidates

Yet, findings indicate that students of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) do not merely adopt passive or emotional voting tendencies. Instead, they evaluate candidates using criteria aligned with rational choice theory, which assumes voters select options that maximize personal and collective benefits (Downs, 1957). Students prioritize a clean track record, clear and measurable programs, and evidence-based commitments. One informant emphasized:

“If a candidate cannot explain how their program will work, I cannot trust them” (Informant S2).

This perspective illustrates a cost–benefit calculation in political decision-making. Rather than being swayed solely by identity politics, students assess pragmatic values—credibility, competence, and policy relevance particularly in areas directly affecting youth: education, employment, and environmental sustainability.

Sociological Embeddedness of Political Choice

The sociological approach offered by Lipset and Lazarsfeld highlights the role of social background in shaping political attitudes. This framework helps explain why UPI students critically evaluate leaders’ ethical integrity and social values, not only technical capacities. Many participants expressed skepticism toward candidates perceived as disconnected from grassroots issues. As stated by one student:

“A leader must understand the economic struggles of people here, not just talk about big projects” (Informant E3).

Such statements reflect how socioeconomic identity and group membership shape expectations of political representation. Students’ political choices thus extend beyond individual preferences, incorporating group-based aspirations for equity, social justice, and inclusive development.

Psychological Dimensions of Political Preference

The psychological approach proposed by Campbell, Miller, and Stokes helps explain why candidate image, personality, and communication style influence voting behavior. Among UPI students, political engagement increases when candidates display openness, responsiveness, and dialogical leadership. One participant stated:

“I want a leader who listens, not someone who just tells us what to do” (Informant S6).

This preference indicates affective attachment shaped by perceived accessibility and authenticity rather than partisan loyalty. Although students rarely identify strongly with a political party, they evaluate personality traits honesty, empathy, and humility as indicators of good governance.

Needs-Based Orientation of Political Choices

Maslow’s theory of needs further contextualizes these behaviors. Students tend to select leaders who can address needs related to security, belonging, and self-actualization, rather than basic survival. In the context of Pilkada West Java, security is interpreted as lawfulness and stability in education policies, belonging is linked to social inclusivity, and

self-actualization relates to future opportunities in technology, entrepreneurship, and innovation. For many, voting becomes a means to secure prospects for personal and collective development. As one informant noted:

“Education should help us grow, not just survive. I want a leader who understands that” (Informant A1).

These findings extend Maslow’s logic into political decision-making, showing how higher-order needs structure policy expectations.

Synthesis: How Theories Explain the Empirical Reality

Taken together, these theoretical frameworks help explain the multifaceted nature of youth political preference:

- 1) Rational choice theory explains their emphasis on competence, measurable programs, and accountability.
- 2) Sociological theory captures the role of identity, shared values, and group solidarity.
- 3) Psychological theory explains sensitivity to personality, communication style, and relational leadership.
- 4) Needs theory demonstrates how political decisions correspond to aspirations for security, belonging, and self-actualization.

Thus, young voters at UPI are not politically indifferent subjects. Instead, they demonstrate hybrid rationality, combining pragmatic reasoning, value-based expectations, and affective responsiveness. Their political judgments are shaped by structural conditions (economic prospects), cultural norms (social justice), and personal motivations (self-development).

Key Criteria Shaping Political Choices

Data shows that UPI students prioritize the following criteria:

- 1) Clean track record and ethical integrity;
- 2) Professional experience and leadership capacity;
- 3) Clear, realistic, and measurable policy programs;
- 4) Responsiveness to youth aspirations;
- 5) Social sensitivity and inclusivity;
- 6) Vision for long-term educational and economic development.

These criteria reflect a sophisticated understanding of governance, contradicting assumptions that young voters are apathetic or irrational.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it shows that in general, students of the Indonesian Education University (UPI) want a leader who has high integrity, a figure who has good ethics or personality, is close to the people, has a character in accordance with the values of Pancasila, is noble and has authority. An ideal leader is not only good at making sweet

promises, but is able to realize the promised work program. There are two main factors that influence the political preferences of students of the Indonesian Education University (UPI) in choosing regional head candidates, especially gubernatorial candidates, namely internal and external factors. These internal factors include personal values or principles, political knowledge within oneself, level of literacy in politics, experience, conscience, political intelligence, ideological views and spiritual atmosphere due to the influence of religion, social and organization while external factors can include track records, experience of each candidate, political ethics of each individual, supporting parties and the influence of the social environment including discussions with peers, lecturers, student organizations, social media, openness to public aspirations.

References

- Central Bureau of Statistics (2024). Population Growth Rate of West Java Province <https://jabar.bps.go.id/id/statistics-table/2/OTIxIzI=/laju-pertumbuhan-pendudukkabupaten-kota-provinsi-jawa-barat-hasil-sensus-penduduk-2020.html> (accessed at 07.00, October 6, 2024).
- Central Bureau of Statistics (2023). Young Generation The Generation with the Largest Population in Indonesia.
- Creswell, J. W., & David Creswell, J. (2018). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*.
- Efendi, A., & Poernomo, F. (2022). The Principle of Isonomy in Indonesia: Philosophy, Meaning, and Comparison. *Constitutional Journal*, 19(2), 247. <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk1921>
- Fatma Sjoraida, D., & Ruchiat Nugraha, A. (2023). Efforts to Increase Political Knowledge Through Socialization of Political Education for Generation Z. *Journal of Collaborative Service and Innovation of IPTEKS*, 1(2), 104-111. <https://doi.org/10.59407/jpki2.v1i2.20>
- Fithriya, DNL (2024). A Study of Presidential Debate Framing from the Perspective of Young Voters (Analysis of Young Voters' Perceptions and Preferences in the 2024 Election). *Muqoddimah Scientific Journal: Journal of Social, Political, and Humanities Sciences*, 8(1), 360. <https://doi.org/10.31604/jim.v8i1.2024.360-364>
- Hutabarat, DTH, Sari, AA, Wella, A., Elfindra, A., Lubis, FF, MHD, FM, MPR, FA, & Rahmadani, S. (2022). Pancasila Education: State, Religion, and Citizens. *Journal of Educational Research and Teaching*, 1(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.55047/jrpp.v1i1.202>
- Herbert Hyman. (1959). *Political Socialization*.
- General Election Commission (2024). Permanent Voter List for the 2024 Election. <https://www.kpu.go.id/berita/baca/11702> accessed on October 7, 2024.
- Kurniawati, M. (2023). The Influence of Celebrities, Political Figures & Voting Behavior in Elections on First-Time Voters. *Serina Social Humaniora Journal*, 1(2), 61-65. <https://doi.org/10.24912/jssh.v1i2.27800>
- Maslow, A.H. (1970). *Motivation and Personality*. Harper & Row, 369.

- Lipset. (1968). Party Systems and Voter Alignments Cross-National Perspectives. Seymour M. Lipset, Stein Rokkan. In *The Journal of Politics* (Vol. 30, Number 4, pp. 1119-1120).<https://doi.org/10.2307/2128697>
- Murdiono, Mukhamad, et al. "Building Global Insight of Young Citizens with Pancasila Character." *Journal of Character Education*, no. 2, Jun. 2014, doi:10.21831/jpk.v0i2.2790.
- Citizenship: Theoretical and Practical.
- Satriadi, Y., Yusuf, S., & Ali, R. (2021). Understanding the Voter's Behavior as an Effort to Increase Publics' Political Participation in Indonesia. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(2), 960-972.<https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v11-i2/9192>
- Sugiyono. (2020). Quantitative, Qualitative and R & D Research Methodology.
- Sumantri, E., Darmawan, C., & Saefulloh. (2008). Module 1: Generations and Young Generations. Open University, 1-35.<http://repository.ut.ac.id/3897/1/PKNI4312-M1.pdf>
- Sinka, V., & Mukhsan, Z. (2024). Implementation of Democratic Principles in the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads during the Simultaneous Regional Elections. 17(2).<https://doi.org/10.30595/pssh.v17i.1171>
- Sarbaini, S. (2020). The Implementation of Direct and Democratic Regional Head Elections as a Form of Realization of the Political Human Rights of the People in Indonesia. *Legality: Journal of Law*, 12(1), 107.<https://doi.org/10.33087/legalitas.v12i1.197>
- Law No. 12 of 2006 concerning Indonesian Citizenship
- Zaini, PM, Zaini, PM, Saputra, N., Publisher, Y., Zaini, M., Lawang, KA, & Susilo, A. (2023). *Qualitative Research Methodology* (May Number).