

PARTICIPATION IN THE 2024 LEGISLATIVE ELECTION FOR THE REGIONAL PEOPLE'S REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL OF DAPIL 5, DONGGALA REGENCY

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Abstract

Voter participation constitutes a fundamental dimension of democratic governance, particularly within legislative elections that shape policy-making at the regional level. This study examines voter participation in the 2024 legislative election for the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency, Indonesia. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, the study draws on in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and analysis of official electoral documents to explore the patterns and determinants of electoral participation. The findings reveal that while voter turnout in the district remained relatively stable, participation was predominantly procedural rather than substantive. Many voters engaged in the electoral process without sufficient understanding of legislative functions, candidate programs, or policy implications. Voter participation was strongly influenced by political literacy, candidate-centered mobilization strategies, socioeconomic considerations, and the quality of electoral administration. Furthermore, the simultaneous conduct of elections in 2024 contributed to reduced voter attention toward legislative contests, thereby limiting meaningful engagement. The study concludes that voter participation in Electoral District 5 reflects broader challenges of local democratic consolidation in Indonesia, where formal participation persists amid weak deliberative quality. Strengthening civic education, improving party institutionalization, and enhancing the responsiveness of local legislative institutions are essential to fostering more informed and substantive voter participation in future elections.

Keywords: local democracy; legislative elections; voter participation

INTRODUCTION

Electoral participation constitutes one of the most fundamental indicators of democratic consolidation, reflecting the extent to which citizens actively engage in political decision-making processes. In democratic systems, elections serve not merely as procedural mechanisms for leadership selection but also as instruments through which public legitimacy, accountability, and representation are constructed. Globally, trends in voter participation have shown considerable variation, with several democracies experiencing declining turnout rates, particularly in legislative elections, due to political apathy, distrust in political institutions, and perceived inefficacy of political participation (Franklin, 2004; Dalton, 2017). International institutions such as the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) emphasize that sustained voter participation is essential for ensuring inclusive governance and strengthening democratic resilience, especially at the subnational level where public policies directly affect citizens' daily lives (IDEA, 2023). Consequently, understanding patterns and determinants of electoral participation remains a critical concern in contemporary political and governance studies. Within the Indonesian context, electoral participation has historically been regarded as relatively high compared to many other democracies, particularly since the post-Reformasi era. Indonesia's commitment to democratic principles is reflected in the regular conduct of general elections at national and regional levels, including legislative elections for the House of Regional Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah/DPRD). Data from the General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU) indicate that voter turnout in the 2019 general elections reached approximately 81%, signaling a strong level of public engagement (KPU, 2020). However, national aggregates often obscure local-level disparities, as participation rates vary significantly across regions, electoral districts, and socio-political contexts. Previous studies have highlighted that factors such as education level, political trust, socioeconomic conditions, electoral competitiveness, and the performance of political parties play a decisive role in

shaping voter behavior in Indonesia (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Mujani et al., 2018). At the regional level, legislative elections for DPRD are particularly important because regional representatives serve as the primary link between local communities and policymaking processes. DPRD members are responsible for budgeting, legislation, and oversight functions that directly influence regional development outcomes. Despite this strategic role, public interest in legislative elections tends to be lower than in presidential or gubernatorial elections, as legislative contests are often perceived as less visible and less impactful by voters (Dalton, 2017). In Indonesia, several empirical studies suggest that voter participation in legislative elections is influenced by pragmatic considerations such as candidate proximity, patronage networks, and local identity politics rather than programmatic policy preferences (Aspinall, 2014; Fossati, 2019). These dynamics underscore the importance of examining electoral participation at the district and electoral-district (dapil) level to capture context-specific realities.

Kabupaten Donggala, located in Central Sulawesi Province, presents a particularly relevant case for analyzing voter participation in legislative elections. As a region characterized by socio-economic diversity, post-disaster recovery challenges, and varying levels of political mobilization, Donggala reflects broader structural issues affecting political participation in peripheral regions of Indonesia. Electoral District (Dapil) 5 of Donggala Regency encompasses areas with distinct geographical, economic, and demographic characteristics, including rural and semi-rural communities where access to political information and public services remains uneven. Studies on regional elections in Eastern Indonesia indicate that such conditions often correlate with fluctuating voter turnout and differing patterns of political engagement compared to urbanized regions (Buehler & Tan, 2007; Mietzner, 2020). Therefore, analyzing participation in DPRD legislative elections within this specific dapil provides valuable insights into the localized dynamics of democratic participation. The 2024 legislative elections were conducted in a broader context marked by increasing public scrutiny of political elites, the expansion of digital political communication, and growing concerns over voter fatigue due to the simultaneous conduct of multiple elections. While digital platforms have expanded access to political information, they have also contributed to misinformation and political polarization, which may affect citizens' willingness to participate in formal electoral processes (Tapsell, 2021). Furthermore, reports from the KPU and civil society organizations suggest that logistical challenges, voter list inaccuracies, and limited political education continue to affect electoral quality at the local level (KPU, 2024). In Donggala's Dapil 5, preliminary observations indicate that voter participation remains inconsistent across polling stations, raising questions about the effectiveness of electoral socialization, the role of political parties, and the responsiveness of candidates to local issues.

Despite the extensive body of literature on voter participation in Indonesia, empirical research focusing specifically on legislative elections at the dapil level remains limited. Many studies prioritize national elections or executive contests, leaving a gap in understanding how local socio-political contexts shape participation in DPRD elections. This gap is particularly evident in regions such as Donggala, where historical marginalization, development disparities, and post-crisis governance challenges intersect. Without a detailed analysis of voter participation at this level, policy interventions aimed at strengthening local democracy risk being overly generalized and insufficiently responsive to local needs. Based on these considerations, this study focuses on voter participation in the 2024 legislative election for the Regional House of Representatives in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency. The central research problem addressed in this study concerns how voter participation manifested in this electoral district and what underlying factors influenced citizens' decisions to engage or abstain. Specifically, this research seeks to examine the level of electoral participation and analyze the socio-political, institutional, and contextual factors that shaped voter behavior in the 2024 DPRD legislative election in Dapil 5 Kabupaten Donggala. By addressing this problem, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on local democratic governance and provide empirical evidence to inform strategies for enhancing electoral participation in regional Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political participation has long been recognized as a central pillar of democratic governance, with electoral participation constituting its most institutionalized and measurable form. Classical democratic theory conceptualizes voting as both a civic duty and a mechanism through which citizens exercise political sovereignty (Dahl, 1989). From this perspective, voter turnout functions not only as an indicator of democratic legitimacy but also as a reflection of citizens' trust in political institutions and belief in the efficacy of democratic processes. Contemporary political science literature further emphasizes that sustained electoral participation is essential for ensuring accountability, responsiveness, and inclusiveness within representative systems (Norris, 2011). Consequently, the study of voter participation has evolved into a multidimensional field that integrates sociological, psychological, institutional, and contextual explanations.

Early theoretical approaches to voter participation were dominated by the sociological model, which emphasizes the role of social structure and group affiliation in shaping political behavior. Seminal work by Lipset (1960) argues that socioeconomic status particularly education, income, and occupation strongly influences political participation by shaping individuals' political awareness and access to resources. Individuals with higher levels of education tend to exhibit greater political interest and are more likely to participate in elections due to enhanced cognitive skills and political efficacy. Subsequent empirical studies across different democratic contexts have consistently confirmed the relevance of socioeconomic variables, although their explanatory power varies depending on institutional and cultural settings (Franklin, 2004). In contrast, the psychological model of voting behavior, most notably advanced by the Michigan School, highlights the importance of individual attitudes, party identification, and political efficacy. According to this perspective, citizens' decisions to vote are shaped by long-term psychological attachments to political parties and short-term evaluations of political actors and issues (Campbell et al., 1960). Political trust and perceptions of government performance are particularly influential in determining whether citizens view electoral participation as meaningful. In developing democracies, where party systems are often weakly institutionalized, political efficacy and trust become even more critical determinants of turnout (Norris, 2011).

Rational choice theory offers an alternative explanation by framing voting as a cost–benefit calculation. Downs (1957) posits that individuals will participate in elections when the perceived benefits of voting outweigh the associated costs, such as time, effort, and information acquisition. Although widely criticized for underestimating the normative and expressive dimensions of voting, rational choice models have contributed significantly to understanding abstention, especially in contexts where voters perceive elections as non-competitive or outcomes as predetermined. In legislative elections, where individual votes are less likely to influence outcomes and candidates are less visible, the perceived benefits of participation may be lower, leading to reduced turnout (Franklin, 2004). More recent scholarship adopts an institutional and contextual approach, emphasizing the role of electoral systems, political parties, and governance quality in shaping participation. Electoral rules, district magnitude, and ballot complexity have been shown to significantly affect voter turnout, particularly in legislative elections (Blais, 2006). Proportional representation systems tend to encourage higher participation by increasing the likelihood that votes translate into seats, whereas complex ballots may discourage participation among less-educated voters. Additionally, the effectiveness of electoral management bodies and the credibility of electoral processes are critical factors influencing citizens' willingness to participate (Norris, 2015).

Within the Indonesian context, studies on voter participation reflect the hybrid nature of Indonesia's democratic experience, characterized by competitive elections alongside persistent clientelism and elite dominance. Aspinall and Mietzner (2019) argue that while electoral participation in Indonesia remains relatively high, much of it is driven by mobilization strategies rooted in patronage networks rather than programmatic engagement. Legislative elections, particularly at the regional level, are often shaped by personalistic politics, candidate-centered campaigns, and local identity considerations. These dynamics complicate conventional assumptions about voter participation as a purely rational or ideological act. Empirical studies on legislative elections in Indonesia indicate that voters frequently possess limited knowledge about DPRD candidates and legislative functions, which affects both turnout and vote choice (Mujani et al., 2018). This lack of political literacy is exacerbated in rural and peripheral regions, where access to political information and civic education is uneven. Fossati (2019) further demonstrates that ideological orientations play a secondary role in shaping voter behavior, with pragmatic considerations such as candidate familiarity and material incentives exerting greater influence. As a result, voter participation in legislative elections often reflects localized social relations rather than broader policy preferences.

Regional-level analyses highlight significant variations in voter participation across Indonesia's diverse socio-political landscapes. Research on Eastern Indonesia suggests that historical marginalization, infrastructural limitations, and governance challenges contribute to fluctuating turnout rates (Buehler & Tan, 2007). In districts affected by socio-economic vulnerability or post-crisis conditions, electoral participation is often contingent upon the effectiveness of political mobilization and the perceived relevance of elections to local development outcomes. These findings underscore the importance of context-specific studies that move beyond national-level aggregates to examine electoral participation at the electoral district (dapil) level. The 2024 simultaneous elections introduced new dynamics that warrant scholarly attention. The convergence of legislative and executive elections intensified voter fatigue, increased informational burdens, and heightened logistical challenges, particularly in remote regions. Scholars argue that while simultaneous elections may enhance efficiency, they also risk diluting voter focus on legislative contests, thereby potentially reducing meaningful participation in DPRD elections (Tapsell, 2021). Moreover, the growing influence of digital media has transformed political communication, offering new opportunities for engagement while simultaneously fostering misinformation and political cynicism.

Despite the growing body of literature on voter participation in Indonesia, a notable gap remains in studies that systematically examine legislative election participation at the sub-district or dapil level, particularly in regencies such as Donggala. Most existing research prioritizes national trends or executive elections, leaving the dynamics of local legislative participation underexplored. This gap is significant given the strategic role of DPRD members in regional governance and development. By focusing on Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency in the 2024 legislative election, this study seeks to contribute to the literature by providing a localized, empirically grounded analysis of voter participation and its determinants, thereby enriching the broader discourse on democratic consolidation at the local level in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design to examine voter participation in the 2024 legislative election for the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency. A qualitative approach is deemed appropriate because the research seeks to capture the meanings, perceptions, and contextual factors underlying citizens' electoral participation rather than merely measuring turnout rates. Qualitative descriptive research allows for an in-depth exploration of social phenomena within their natural settings and is particularly useful for studies that aim to understand processes, experiences, and institutional dynamics in localized political contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By adopting this approach, the study is able to analyze how political, social, and institutional factors interact to shape voter behavior at the electoral district level. The research site is Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency, Central Sulawesi Province, which was selected purposively due to its socio-political diversity and its relevance to understanding regional patterns of legislative electoral participation. This electoral district encompasses both rural and semi-rural areas with varying levels of access to political information, public services, and political mobilization. The 2024 legislative election provides a critical temporal context, as it was conducted simultaneously with other national and regional elections, potentially influencing voter engagement and participation dynamics. The unit of analysis in this study consists of individual voters, electoral stakeholders, and institutional actors involved in the electoral process at the local level.

Data collection in this study relies on both primary and secondary sources to ensure analytical depth and triangulation. Primary data were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews with key informants who were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research objectives. These informants include members of the local election management body, village-level election officers, community leaders, political party activists, and voters residing within Electoral District 5. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in probing respondents' experiences and perceptions while maintaining consistency across interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). In addition to interviews, non-participant observation was conducted during and after the election period to capture contextual factors such as campaign activities, voter mobilization efforts, and interactions at polling stations. Secondary data were collected from official documents and reports issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and other relevant institutions. These documents include voter turnout statistics, electoral regulations, and post-election evaluation reports. Furthermore, academic journals, policy reports, and credible online sources were reviewed to contextualize the empirical findings within broader theoretical and empirical debates on voter participation. The integration of primary and secondary data strengthens the validity of the study by enabling cross-verification of findings from multiple sources (Yin, 2018).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, which involves systematically identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. Interview transcripts and observational notes were coded inductively to allow themes to emerge from the data, while also being informed by theoretical constructs related to political participation, political efficacy, and institutional trust. The analytical process followed several stages, including data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and thematic interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach facilitates a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing voter participation and enables the researcher to connect empirical observations with established theoretical frameworks. To ensure the trustworthiness of the research findings, this study applies criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was enhanced through triangulation of data sources and methods, as well as member checking, whereby selected informants were invited to review and clarify the interpretations of their statements. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the research context, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar settings. Dependability and confirmability were ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting research decisions, data collection procedures, and analytical steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation

in the study was voluntary, and informants were given the right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. Given the political sensitivity of electoral research, particular attention was paid to protecting participants from potential risks, including social or political repercussions. The study adheres to established ethical guidelines for social and political research (Israel & Hay, 2006). Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to generate a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of voter participation in the 2024 DPRD legislative election in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency. By integrating qualitative insights with institutional data, the research aims to contribute empirically and theoretically to the literature on local democratic participation and electoral governance in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that voter participation in the 2024 DPRD legislative election in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency was shaped by a complex interaction of institutional, socio-political, and contextual factors. While official data from the General Elections Commission indicate that voter turnout in the district remained within the provincial average, qualitative evidence suggests that participation was largely procedural rather than substantive. Many voters exercised their right to vote without a clear understanding of legislative functions, candidate platforms, or the broader implications of their electoral choices. This pattern reflects what Dalton (2017) describes as "thin participation," in which electoral engagement exists formally but lacks deliberative depth. One of the most prominent findings concerns the role of political awareness and civic education in shaping voter participation. Interviews with voters and community leaders indicate that limited political literacy significantly affected citizens' motivation to participate meaningfully in the legislative election. Several respondents reported voting based on candidate familiarity, kinship ties, or social influence rather than programmatic considerations. This finding aligns with Mujani et al. (2018), who argue that Indonesian voters often lack sufficient information about legislative candidates, particularly at the regional level, resulting in participation that is driven more by social proximity than ideological alignment. In Dapil 5, this condition was exacerbated by the limited reach of political education initiatives, especially in rural villages where access to campaign information and civic outreach remained uneven.

The findings also highlight the central role of political parties and candidates in mobilizing voter participation. Political parties in Dapil 5 primarily relied on traditional mobilization strategies, including door-to-door campaigns, informal networks, and the use of local brokers. While these strategies were effective in encouraging turnout, they did not necessarily foster informed participation. Several informants from election management bodies noted that campaign activities were largely candidate-centered, with minimal emphasis on legislative roles or policy agendas. This reinforces Aspinall's (2014) argument that clientelistic practices continue to shape electoral behavior in Indonesia, particularly in legislative elections where personal networks often substitute for institutional trust. Institutional factors related to election administration also influenced voter participation. Interviews with polling station officers and election supervisors revealed that logistical arrangements during the 2024 election were generally adequate; however, issues related to voter list accuracy and polling station accessibility persisted in certain areas of Dapil 5. Some voters reported difficulties locating their assigned polling stations or finding their names on the voter list, which discouraged participation, particularly among elderly and first-time voters. These findings corroborate Norris's (2015) assertion that electoral integrity and administrative efficiency are crucial determinants of public confidence and participation in democratic processes.

Although such issues did not lead to widespread abstention, they contributed to perceptions of institutional inefficiency that may undermine long-term electoral engagement. Socioeconomic conditions emerged as another significant factor influencing voter participation. Respondents from lower-income households expressed skepticism regarding the tangible benefits of participating in legislative elections, citing limited improvements in public services and local development outcomes. This perception reflects a rational evaluation of political participation, consistent with Downs' (1957) cost-benefit framework, in which voters weigh the expected utility of voting against its perceived costs. In Dapil 5, the perceived disconnect between legislative institutions and citizens' everyday concerns reduced the motivational incentives for participation, particularly among economically vulnerable groups. The simultaneous nature of the 2024 elections further shaped participation dynamics. Many informants indicated that voters prioritized presidential and executive elections over legislative contests, perceiving the latter as less consequential. This finding supports Tapsell's (2021) argument that simultaneous elections can dilute voter attention and reduce the salience of legislative races. In Dapil 5, this effect was evident in voters' limited recall of DPRD candidates and campaign messages, suggesting that legislative participation was overshadowed by higher-profile electoral contests.

Despite these challenges, the study also identified several factors that supported voter participation. Community leaders and religious figures played a crucial role in encouraging electoral engagement by framing voting as a civic and moral obligation. In areas where such figures actively promoted participation, turnout levels tended to be higher, and voters demonstrated greater awareness of electoral procedures. This finding underscores the continued importance of social capital and informal institutions in sustaining democratic participation at the local level, particularly in regions where formal political institutions have limited reach. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of this study reinforce the multidimensional nature of voter participation. Neither socioeconomic status, political attitudes, nor institutional arrangements alone can fully explain participation patterns in Dapil 5. Instead, voter participation emerges as the outcome of interactions between individual-level factors, such as political efficacy and trust, and contextual factors, including electoral administration, party mobilization strategies, and local social structures. This supports integrative models of political participation that emphasize the interplay between resources, motivation, and institutional opportunity structures (Norris, 2011). Mappatoba, M., Wirawan, H., Salam, R., Hattab, S., & Daswati, D. (2025).

In comparison with previous studies conducted in other regions of Indonesia, the findings from Donggala's Dapil 5 highlight the persistence of regional disparities in democratic participation. While national turnout figures suggest a relatively healthy democracy, localized analyses reveal underlying vulnerabilities related to political literacy, institutional trust, and participatory quality. These findings contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating that legislative elections at the dapil level remain an underexplored yet critical arena for understanding democratic consolidation in Indonesia. Overall, the results suggest that voter participation in the 2024 DPRD legislative election in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency was characterized by moderate turnout but limited substantive engagement. While citizens largely fulfilled their procedural role as voters, structural and contextual constraints limited their ability to participate in a more informed and deliberative manner. Addressing these challenges requires not only improvements in electoral administration but also sustained investments in civic education, party institutionalization, and local governance responsiveness. By situating these findings within broader theoretical and empirical debates, this study underscores the importance of localized electoral research in advancing a more nuanced understanding of democratic participation in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that voter participation in the 2024 DPRD legislative election in Electoral District 5 of Donggala Regency was characterized by moderate turnout accompanied by limited substantive engagement. Although most eligible voters exercised their right to vote, their participation was largely shaped by pragmatic and social considerations rather than informed evaluations of candidates' legislative roles or policy platforms. Factors such as low political literacy, the dominance of candidate-centered and clientelistic mobilization strategies, and socioeconomic skepticism toward the effectiveness of legislative institutions significantly influenced voter behavior. These findings indicate that electoral participation in the district remains procedural, reflecting compliance with democratic norms rather than active civic deliberation. Moreover, institutional and contextual factors played a crucial role in shaping participation patterns. Administrative challenges, uneven voter education efforts, and the simultaneous nature of the 2024 elections contributed to the marginalization of legislative contests in the eyes of voters. While community leaders and informal social networks were able to sustain voter turnout in certain areas, their influence did not consistently translate into enhanced political understanding. Overall, this study highlights the importance of localized analyses in uncovering the nuanced realities of democratic participation beyond national-level statistics. Enhancing the quality of voter participation in regional legislative elections requires integrated efforts to strengthen civic education, improve electoral governance, and reinforce the accountability and relevance of DPRD institutions to citizens' everyday concerns.

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