

Pre-voters' Political Education Activities at the Election Smart House Amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract. Pre-voters are a group that will prepare to become novice voters in the next few years; it is important to prepare them to become intelligent and rational voters, one of which is through the existence of the Election Smart House. The research design employed a qualitative descriptive method. The researcher describes in-depth and comprehensively the activities of pre-voter political education at the Election Smart House of the Pekanbaru City of General Elections Commission during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Research informants include the commissioner of the General Election Commission of Pekanbaru City, the Elecivicction Smart House of Pekanbaru City manager, and Pancasila and Civic Education teachers teaching at Senior High Schools in Pekanbaru City. The results showed that during the Covid-19 pandemic, from 2020 until now, the activities in the Election Smart House were not very active. It was noted that during the pandemic in the last two years, there were no visits from students to the Election Smart House of the Pekanbaru City owned by the General Elections Commission or visits from the City's Election Smart House to high schools in Pekanbaru. Therefore, to overcome this situation, the Election Smart House manager initiated a creative idea by procuring Voter Education Podcasts in the Election Smart House by inviting resource persons and broadcasting them through the Pekanbaru City KPU (General Election Commission) YouTube channel. This activity is one way to educate the public without violating the health protocol and an effort to keep the Election Smart House as the center of community political education, especially students as pre-voters.

Keywords: *Political Education; Pre-voters; Election Smart House; Covid-19 Pandemic*

INTRODUCTION

Political education refers to the efforts made by educational institutions, both formal and informal, to form and grow a political personality consistent with the political culture of those who work in these institutions - to every citizen (Ruslan, 2000). Citizens become aware and can gain their own awareness by forming and growing political awareness at all levels. Forming and growing the ability for political participation will make people happy to actively participate in politics, solve general societal problems with all possible forms of participation, and result in positive changes.

Political education can be described as a combination of political personality, political awareness, political participation, educational institutions, political culture, and humans or citizens. Political education is an effort to improve citizens' political knowledge in order for them to participate fully in their political system. Political education is intended for citizens to increase national and state understanding by involving all citizens and community citizens. Hence, political education is viewed as an effort to increase citizens' knowledge, understanding, and political awareness, with the goal of increasing

their active participation in the political process. The Election Smart House offers one type of political education, focusing on democracy and elections.

The Election Smart House is a form of the initiative launched by the General Elections Commission (KPU) to increase public political participation. The Election Smart House is intended for all segments of voters, but the researcher focuses on pre-voters in this study, specifically, a group of people who plan to vote in the next five years (Manik & Budhiati, 2015). Because this group is still in school, it is also critical to involve the school, particularly Pancasila and Civic Education teachers, in developing political education for students as pre-voters via the Election Smart House. Civic education is a component of political education that aims to educate and prepare students to become responsible citizens who understand and fulfill their rights and obligations (Hariyanti, 2015). One of the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House programs in 2019 is the socialization of the Election Smart House to schools in Pekanbaru and an audience to the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission's Election Smart House (Hariyanti & Sari, 2021). The research focused on describing the Election Smart House program, whereas this study focused on describing the Election Smart House's activities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Activities at the Election Smart House have become less active since 2020, caused by the spread of the coronavirus until it has become a pandemic until now. Even the socialization and audience programs are no longer carried out because community activities are limited by the government, such as restrictions on gathering to avoid the spread of the coronavirus.

Political education for the general public should not be hindered or halted because politics, elections, and democracy is daily issues. In 2024, Indonesia will hold simultaneous elections for president and vice president, members of the central and regional parliaments, members of the regional representative council, and regional heads and deputy regional heads. Therefore, the general public must gain knowledge, information, and data about politics, elections, and democracy to assess the candidates for election, filter every campaign activity offered, and make informed and rational decisions.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study used a qualitative design with a descriptive method because it describes in detail the services provided by the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission's Election Smart House, including the materials presented and the facilities provided to visitors, as well as the institution's activities during the Covid-19 pandemic. The study was carried out at the office of the Pekanbaru City

General Election Commission. The commissioner of the socialization and voter education division, the manager of the election smart house, and several high school Pancasila and Civic Education teachers in Pekanbaru City served as informants for this study. The research informants were chosen using a non-probability sampling technique with a purposive sampling approach. Observation, interviews, and documentation were used to collect data. Data analysis entails reducing data, presenting data, drawing conclusions, and verifying results. At the same time, source triangulation was used to test the validity of the data.

DISCUSSION

The Election Smart House is a voter education concept implemented by utilizing space from a special building to carry out all community education project activities. Furthermore, this facility serves as a gathering place for the election activist community to build a movement. The Election Smart House's management guidebook states that the Election Smart House's goals are to increase voter participation and serve as a hub for election information. Meanwhile, the Election Smart House specifically aims to educate the public on the importance of elections and democracy by: (1) introducing the fundamental values of elections and democracy (pre-voters); (2) increasing understanding of the importance of democracy

(all segments); and (3) instilling an awareness of democratic values (all segments).

Pre-voters are an interesting segment to discuss because they are a group that has not yet become a voter but has been prepared to become a voter in advance. Pre-voters are nearly identical to novice voters in the following ways: (1) a lack of experience in the previous general election process ([Wisnu Dani Prasetyo, Toni Harsan, 2019](#)); (2) a lack of knowledge about elections because general election socialization targets novice voters ([Hariyanti, 2015](#)); (3) the pre-voters group is still in school because the voting age in Indonesia is 17 years and over; and (4) Pre-voters are groups that are preparing to enter the novice voter group and require political literacy about elections and democracy in order to become smart and responsible voters and avoid becoming victims of black campaigns such as money politics, political hoaxes, or abstentions.

The Election Smart House is equipped with several rooms as a learning tool for elections, including: (1) a showroom containing material/information about elections such as election history, election participants at the central and regional levels, and voter participation rates in each election; (2) an audio-visual room intended to show films and election documentation; and (3) a simulation room used to provide visitors with a real experience of how the process works and flow of voting at the polling station uses props

that have been prepared at the polling station; and (4) a discussion room for visitors to use after they have gone around observing and studying electoral information (Manik, Husni Kamil, Sigit Pamungkas, 2015). The Election Smart House, such as the Election Smart House of the Pekanbaru City Election Commission, is not only intended to be a center for election information but also a medium for political education in general.

In 2018, the Pekanbaru City Election Commission established the Election Smart House. The Election Smart House is designed with a special room to the right of the office lobby of the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission. The election Smart House includes the following topics: (1) election history; (2) the importance of elections and democracy; (3) electoral system; (4) election stages; (5) election participants (election of legislative members and president and vice president); (6) election process; (7) profile of election administrators; and (8) electoral knowledge test. This material has been regulated in the General Election Commission of the Republic of Indonesia's guidebook for the management of the Election Smart House. Therefore, the manager of the Election Smart House at the regional General Election Commission only needs to follow up with their respective creativity to design and organize the material more attractively in the Election Smart House room.



Figure 1. The Election Smart House of Pekanbaru City

This material is an ideal starting point for pre-voters and novice voters interested in learning about elections and democracy. Furthermore, the Election Smart House was given information about election data and facts in Pekanbaru City, such as the number of members of the Pekanbaru City Regional House of Representatives and electoral districts in the city.



Figure 2. Local Political Data in the Election Smart House of Pekanbaru City

The inclusion of local political data aims to make visitors aware of general election-related material and local political data in their

area because people are sometimes lulled by national political issues and news that are widely broadcast on television. They are, however, ignorant and do not receive information about local political news and developments, even though political leaders are closest to the people in the regions. In addition, visitors to the Election Smart House can read books and watch shows or documentaries in the form of election film screenings on televisions installed in the Election Smart House room.



Figure 3 Facilities for reading books and election documentation in the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House

The Election Smart House features a simulation tool for voting at the polling station. This effort is made to give visitors a realistic picture of the expected situation and conditions when voting at the Polling Station. As a result, when they vote at the polling station for the first time, they will be less confused, especially pre-voters and novice

voters, for whom this is a new and unfamiliar experience.



Figure 4 Voting Simulation Room and Equipment at the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House

The Election Smart House is aimed at the general public and all segments of society. The Pekanbaru City Election Smart House provides the following services: activity publication, public invitations, event calendars, and community discussions. First, there is the publication of activities, such as the publication of the election smart house through print and electronic media, social media, and outdoor media. Second, the General Election Commission may issue public invitations to various elements of society, such as educational institutions, communities, and organizations representing society segments. Third, there is an event calendar, where the Election Smart House organizes various activities to attract visitors by capitalizing on certain momentum or commemoration days. Fourth, community discussions, in which the Election Smart House can serve as a forum for

communities concerned about elections to discuss electoral and democratic issues.

However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic situation, the form of services and activities at the Election Smart House is not very active. This situation is due to government policies that restrict community activities such as gatherings and an appeal to keep a safe distance to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The Covid-19 virus or coronavirus disease first appeared in Wuhan, China, at the end of 2019. Since then, it has spread worldwide to become a global pandemic, as declared by WHO on March 11, 2020. On March 2, 2020, the first case of Covid-19 was discovered in Indonesia. Until now, Indonesia is still in a pandemic status. The government has issued many regulations and policies to prevent the spread and treatment of Covid-19. People are forced to live in new ways (new normal) due to the pandemic, such as wearing masks, washing their hands, keeping their distance, and avoiding crowds (Agung, 2020; Zandrato, 2020). This situation has indirectly hampered political education activities at the Pekanbaru Election Smart House. During the Covid-19 pandemic since 2020, only one visit to the Election Smart House has been recorded, namely a discussion about elections and a visit by Sultan Syarif Kasim Hidayatullah State Islamic University students on August 27, 2021. There were no more face-to-face service activities at the facility after that. In this situation, the commissioners and

managers of the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House tried to be innovative by transforming the face-to-face political education pattern into a virtual political education pattern. It was conducted via podcast activities in this location and broadcast on the Pekanbaru City Election Commission's YouTube channel. The podcast was held in Pekanbaru by inviting several competent speakers and political figures. This activity is fascinating and provides a solution to the current pandemic situation.

Based on interviews with Pekanbaru City General Election Commission Commissioner, Yelly Nofiza, and documentation of political education activities on the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission's YouTube channel, it is clear that the political education podcast began in November 2020. From November 24, 2020, to December 2, 2020, the Pekanbaru City Election Commission held a webinar titled "The General Election Commission Goes to Campus" at four major campuses in Riau Province: Riau University, Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University, Lancang Kuning University, and Muhammadiyah Riau University. The webinar, held on each campus, was held online via a *zoom meeting* platform by presenting speakers from the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission commissioner and was attended by dozens of students from each campus. The material presented covered the fundamental values of

elections and democracy, the concept of elections in Indonesia, identifying violations in elections, and becoming a smart voter. Furthermore, the following is an overview of election podcast material that is interesting to listen to on the terrace of the Election Smart House, Pekanbaru City General Election Commission:

- 1) The role of the Riau Province General Election Commission in the implementation of Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Riau (6 February 2021)
- 2) Talkshow with the Mayor of Pekanbaru (17 February 2021)
- 3) Public information disclosure (27 February 2021)
- 4) Application of the Electronic Recapitulation Information System (Sirekap) in the 2020 Simultaneous Elections (13 March 2021)
- 5) Riau Women's Dynamics in Democracy (18 March 2021)
- 6) Guessing the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House with the Commissioner of the Riau Province General Election Commission (31 March 2021)
- 7) Election Organizer Ethics (10 April 2021)
- 8) Continuous Monitoring of Voter Lists (13 April 2021)
- 9) Reflection on Kartini's Day on the Hero of Democracy in Pekanbaru (21 April 2021)
- 10) Simultaneous General Election and Regional Head Election: How Is the General Election Commission's Preparation? (28 April 2021)
- 11) Legal Evaluation of Election Organizers in the 2020 Regional Head Election
- 12) The Strategy of the General Election Commission of Riau Province in Overcoming the Problem of Voter Data in the 2024 Simultaneous Elections
- 13) Preparation for Structuring Electoral Districts (Dapil) for the 2024 Election (28 October 2021)
- 14) Talkshow with the Chairman of the Pekanbaru City Regional House of Representatives (10 December 2021)
- 15) How Is the Synergy between the General Election Commission and the National and Political Unity Agency (Kesbangpol) of Pekanbaru City to Face the 2024 Simultaneous Elections? (17 December 2021)
- 16) Participatory Supervision Cadre School (SKPP) from the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), What Is It? (28 December 2021)
- 17) The Role of Women in Politics (31 December 2021)

Based on the above description, it is clear that the Election Smart House is not only a tool for voter education but also for political education in general. The public is not only educated to be intelligent and rational voters but also prepared and shaped to become

politically literate citizens capable of participating actively in government. Voting at Polling Stations during elections is one concrete example of citizen participation. Political participation is the people's most real power in determining who will lead the country. The Election Smart House provides political education to citizens so that they know how to deal with the government (Iskandar & Marlina, 2019; Rozuli & Haboddin, 2018). However, based on the data above, it is also discovered that, since 2020, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Election Smart House no longer makes visits to schools or student audiences in the Pekanbaru City Election Smart House. It resulted in a lack of communication and collaboration with schools to strengthen political education and the absence of direct voter education activities received by students as pre-voters as in the previous year.

According to the 2019 Pekanbaru City General Elections Commission's annual report, the managers of the Election Smart House visited schools such as kindergarten, junior high, high school, vocational school, and college prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. There were also return visits or student audiences to the Election Smart House. Several factors contribute to the absence of student visits or audiences at school. First, the Covid-19 pandemic prompted the government to issue policies and regulations requiring that the teaching and learning process be moved

from schools to their homes, effectively ending school activities. Second, because the government encourages people not to congregate, maintain distance, and avoid face-to-face meetings, many governments and community activities are now conducted virtually. Third, the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission's limited budget due to the lack of special funds for the management of the Election Smart House. Nowadays, the Election Smart House has been managed using grants and socialization funds, but it is well known that voter education and socialization take many forms, not just through the Election Smart House, which is where the funds have been distributed beforehand. Voter education for students can take the form of outreach to schools during the stages of the election, as well as visits to local radio stations (Aprilia & Azmi, 2021). Fourth, there is a lack of collaboration between the Pekanbaru City General Election Commission and the school party, especially Pancasila and the Civic Education Teacher Organization (MGMP PPKn). Civics is an essential component of political education.

Politics in the classroom not only improves students' political literacy but also teaches them to listen to the opinions of others, even if they do not agree with them. A good step toward preserving democracy is to empower differences through freedom of speech (Mullins, 2016; Persson et al., 2016). Politics is the core of Civic Education, with

Pancasila as a value (Winataputra, 2015). Pancasila and Civic Education are multidisciplinary topics because they cover politics, law, socio-culture, and education. Political education is a component of Pancasila and Civic Education subjects, and civics is a component of political education in schools. Students are citizens who must be educated about politics because they will enter the phase as novice voters, who have been described as irrational voters in many studies and frequently become political objects. To address this issue, it is critical that prevention efforts be undertaken, one of which is to provide political education to students as prospective voters or pre-voters as early as possible. For example, the first point that must be justified is the justification of political views because many people regard politics as something bad, dirty, and full of controversy. Politics is a virtue when done correctly, so politics is used for good. Therefore, politics is a complicated process. The value of equality of political rights for all citizens is one of the most fundamental values in democratic election implementation. Everyone has the same political rights in a democratic political system, regardless of educational background, economic level, or socio-cultural status. Everyone is perceived to have the right to make decisions, express opinions, and criticize the government (Kurniadi, Y U., 2020; Yoldaş, 2015). The next point that must be resolved is the question of who is in politics.

Most people believe that only politicians deal with politics. This one is an incorrect viewpoint. Politics is everyone's business because politics is art or tactic for controlling others without them realizing it. The preceding statement refers to the art of dominating others while remaining benevolent. Individuals or groups can engage in politics. A politician is an individual political actor. Politicians with similar perspectives and goals can band together to form Political Parties (Handoyo & Lestari, 2017). These two examples are critical for the younger generation to understand so that they do not become skeptical of politics. The younger generation must be educated early to become politically literate. Hence, it is extremely unfortunate that Pancasila and Civic Education teachers are not involved in providing political education about elections and democracy, especially given their proximity to and frequent interaction with students, both pre-voters and novice voters.

As a result, the following actions can be taken to address the shortcomings of implementing political education for students as pre-voters and novice voters. First, there is a collaboration between the Election Smart House management and the school, particularly the Pancasila and Citizenship Education teachers organized in the Pancasila and Civic Education teacher organization. This collaboration will, at the very least, make it easier for the General Elections Commission to conduct voter education in schools. This

effort allows the Commission to create a joint project to improve students' political literacy, similar to the general election class program conducted by the Padang City General Election Commission in 2015. Second, local governments request to assist in the management of the Election Smart House as a public asset to increase public political participation. Local governments can empower the Election Smart House as a center for community political learning through the National and Political Unity Agency (Kesbangpol), the agency tasked with providing political education to the community.

The Election Smart House aims to provide knowledge of the basic values of elections and democracy for pre-voters in particular. Moreover, it also aims to present information, data, and knowledge of elections and other democracies in a more real way by presenting interesting material in the room by showing election documentation and simulation rooms by presenting real experiences for visitors, especially students as pre-voters in voting while at Polling Stations. Furthermore, the Election Smart House, as a tool for political education, contributes to efforts to ensure the integrity of the election. It is important to remember that election integrity is a requirement for a democratic country. Elections marred by violations and fraud endanger the legitimacy of the elected regime and erode citizens' faith in democratic

institutions. The quality of elections held is critical to the process of transition and consolidation of democracy (Rafni & Suryanef, 2019; Rahmatunnisa, 2017). Elections are the means by which people's sovereignty is implemented; at the very least, elections serve five functions: (1) as a means of political legitimacy; (2) as a means of circulation of political elites; (3) as the most tangible means of public political participation in government; (4) as a means of public political education; and (5) as a means of political punishment for politicians and political parties who betrayed the people's mandate in the previous government. A general election is a tool for electing people's representatives. As a result, if the General Election is not held in a competitive, honest, and fair manner, it can be said that democracy has been lacking. Legitimate government is built on democratic elections. If no democratic elections are held, the government will lose legitimacy and public support (Surbakti, 2011). Given the importance of elections in a democratic country, voters must make political decisions wisely, intelligently, and rationally. Hence, they do not make the wrong choice and are tempted by money politics, ultimately making people miserable in the next five years.

CONCLUSION

Political education through the Election Smart House is a strategic step in educating students as pre-voters to understand and

practice the fundamental values of elections and democracy. At the very least, the ability to distinguish between politics, politicians, political parties, and political systems. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Election Smart House's activities were diverted online, such as holding political education socialization webinars or political education podcasts on the Election Smart House's terrace. Several recommendations for the management of the Election Smart House can be made, including collaboration between the facility's management and the school, particularly Pancasila and Citizenship Education teachers organized in the Pancasila and Civic Education Teacher Organization, and collaboration between election organizers and local governments to empower the Election Smart House as a center for public political education.

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