**STRENGTHENING BEGINNERS 'CHARACTER EDUCATION IN FACING THE 2020 GENERAL ELECTION**

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| ABSTRACT: Regional Head General Election (Pilkada) is an important part of the implementation of democracy in the regions. Pilkada can be a moment to determine candidate candidates for leaders who are desired by the people, with integrity, accountability and credibility. However, unfortunately in the ongoing process of the regional head elections that have taken place after the reformation era, in fact it has been infiltrated by many interests and presents problems. Starting from money politics, goods politics, and various other transactional politics, in addition, when elected, many policies made by regional heads are ineffective and beneficial for certain interest elites, while the community is always positioned as a subordinate group. Not to mention the massive number of regional heads entangled in corruption, gratification, conflict and so on. The problems plaguing many regional heads in Indonesia have more or less led to a decline in public confidence in the elections. Reflecting on the results of the performance of the 2015 simultaneous regional elections, the number of golput is around 30 percent. This figure is predicted to continue to increase in the 2020 regional elections in line with the increasing number of problems plaguing regional heads in a number of regions in Indonesia.  Beginner voters are a new generation of voters who have never been involved in the general election process before. Most of the new voters come from students who are familiar with advances in information technology and have social networks, especially first-time voters who live in urban areas. With the current ease of access, novice voter groups are very vulnerable to being the impact of political games in regional elections. Character education for novice voters is a panacea for protecting their thinking and behavior from pragmatic politics, and teaching them the substantive meaning of the elections as a whole. This paper analyzes how character education can protect first-time voters in regional elections.  **KEY WORDS:** Character Education, Beginner Voters, Simultaneous Regional Election 2020 |

**Preliminary**

General elections as a means of democracy have been used in most countries in the world, including Indonesia, in determining the head of government (Suprojo, 2013). Election allows all parties to be accommodated what they want and aspire to in relation to the figure of the desired head of government, with the hope that a better life will be realized.

The community (citizens) is the main component that determines the success of the election. Basically ELECTION is a people's party, which means that the main actor in this case is the people. In this case, ranyat is not viewed from the person's background. All citizens have the same rights and have the same value in the General Election. Likewise teenagers who are better known as new voters in the world of politics (Hasyim et al., 2020; Setyawan & Azmi, 2020).

Beginner voters are those who are voting for the first time in the election. The teenagers in question, namely those who are 17 years old or already married, will have the same citizenship responsibilities as citizens in general. In the world of politics, first-time voters are the easiest target to be won over by successful teams to win a candidate's supporters. This is determined because the level of knowledge of first-time voters is still minimal related to the world of politics.

Beginner voters, of course, have to open themselves up to have an insight into the nationality, especially related to the General Election including the Regional Head Election which will soon be held in a number of regions. Insights are important because a sufficient number of first-time voters can contribute to changes in the next 5 years. An anti-political attitude and abstention will actually harm the state because it loses its support for change. Likewise, on the other hand, first-time voters must also have a protective shield and strong principles in terms of protecting themselves from deviant political behavior. As we know, the success teams in winning a candidate will carry out various strategies to get support from the public, including first-time voters (Hartono & Putri, 2017).

The strategies that are used are of course not always good, but they tend to 'spoil' the very innocent personality of the first-time voters. "Money politics" is one of the strategies often used by the success teams to tie the masses, including novice voters, to their preferred form. This kind of strategy could have two effects on first-time voters. First, it will damage the personality of the novice voters so that they will become money oriented and do not vote based on their conscience. Second, it will create a closed attitude and do not want to know about the General Election or Regional Head Election, so that they choose to abstain.

These two effects are of course very detrimental to our nation which will continue to produce a generation that fails politically. Of course, this must be addressed immediately, namely by planting the values of national character that can protect first-time voters from the above impacts. In accordance with eighteen (18) national character values, there are at least 4 characters that must be absorbed, possessed, and practiced by novice voters (Setiawati Nanda Ayu, 2017). The four characters referred to are religious, democratic, national spirit, and love for the country. It is hoped that the planting and strengthening of national character in first-time voters can eradicate bad influences that can endanger the nation's future generations.

**Results and Discussion**

Various studies on the practice of clintelism (money and goods politics) in general elections have been carried out. (Robinson and Hadiz 2004,2013; Hadiz 2010; Winters 2011), most of these works see that political and economic life in Indonesia is dominated by the predatorship of the oligarchic elite and their efforts to expand network access and obtain material benefits. One of the efforts to gain power, many politicians partner with oligarchic elites and receive “black money” which will be exchanged for voter support.

However, the practice of clintelism is not only seen as a sign of pathology, this is because not only clientelistic politics can dominate election results and are the key to political success but also determine how state institutions work and the character of government (Aspinall, E., & Berenschot, W. 2019). From various cases we can see how the government and people's representative institutions do not represent the interests of the community.

Starting from the failure of residents to access their rights, such as the difficulty of village communities in protecting their land from expanding oil palm and mining concessions (Cramb and Mc Carthy 2016), the control of large forest enterprises in Indonesia is dominated by large entrepreneurs when compared to the people with a ratio of 96: 4, increasing forest / land conflicts belonging to the people that continue to increase until the disappearance of agricultural land belonging to the people of up to 353 hectares / day due to pressure on the conversion of community production lands (KPK 2018).

Other problems such as the difficulty of people achieving justice and the right to access to health, education, access to development infrastructure, (Berenschot & van Klinken, 2019) to welfare (Paskarina, C., Asiah, M., & Madung, OG (Eds.) 2016) . In addition, the low level of trust, reputation and accountability shown by the government has encouraged pragmatism and public distrust of the state.

Based on the results of the Indo Barometer survey in 2020, it shows that state institutions such as the MPR, DPR, DPD and Polri are at the lowest level in terms of public trust, even intermediary institutions such as political parties have almost no established grassroots power. The tendency of people to abstain (not vote) in elections is getting bigger so that voters are friendly to transactional politics.

Seeing the above problems, of course, must be addressed immediately, so that the consolidation of democracy that seems madeg due to bad practices that occurs formally and informally does not hinder the flow of change and optimism towards the common ideals of the Indonesian state, namely a just and prosperous society as stated in Pancadila and The 1945 Constitution. Especially for first-time voters, although the number is only 20% to 30% of the total number of voters in the 2019 election, the contribution of these votes can determine the future direction of the nation. Therefore the inculcation of national character values that can protect first-time voters from the above impacts is an important point to develop.

In fact, the cultivation of values and character building has been carried out from childhood to adulthood. Characters that are formed in a person such as attitude, behavior, motivation, and skills are the result of the process of forming or developing every day from the living environment such as in the sphere of family, school, to the community to digital environment such as social media etc. How far and how well the character values implanted in the environment will affect the success and success of the desired character.

A number of literature, most of whom see the internalization of character education as early as possible up to the level of formal education (Oktarina & et all, 2015; Wijanarko, 2011), it is hoped that the cultivation of values carried out in layers can have an impact on knowledge, attitudes and decisions taken in his life.

However, the literature linking character education with novice voters in the context of regional elections has not developed much, even though the space for strengthening character education is very important to produce novice voters who understand the values of truth, exemplary, and dare to advocate for these values in order to realize goodness. in the Pilkada as a whole.

The Ministry of National Education has identified 18 values that come from religion, Pancasila, culture, and national education objectives, namely: (1) Religious, (2) Honest, (3) Tolerance, (4) Discipline, (5) Hard work, ( 6) Creative, (7) Independent, (8) Democratic, (9) Curiosity, (10) National Spirit, (11) Love the Fatherland, (12) Respect Achievement, (13) Friendly / Communicative, (14) Love of Peace, (15) Loves to Read, (16) Caring for the Environment, (17) Caring for Social Affairs, (18) Responsibility (Kemdiknas: 2011). Of the 18 character education mentioned above, there are 4 characters that have direct correlation with first-time voters in the context of facing the Pilkada. The five characters referred to are religious, democratic, national spirit, and love for the country.

Figure 1

Characters that influence Beginner Voters

**Religious Value**

Religious value is a process of appreciation and implementation of religious teachings in everyday life (Ngaimun Naim, Ch Character Building 2012). Every human attitude and behavior cannot be separated from the internalization of divine values. Theological values and doctrines taught will affect a person's level of belief, especially in making important decisions in his life.

By devoting oneself to God, one is indirectly connected to all the good and forbidden teachings. That way, everyone has a strong foundation in regulating patterns of attitudes and behavior based on something true from religious teachings. In the context of the elections, the practice of exchanging money and goods from politicians to first-time voters is very damaging to the substance of representation / representation. This fast and pragmatic walk is avoided as early as possible by novice voters by practicing and carrying out religious functions and religious teachings that they profess.

The implementation of worship on time and carried out together in houses of worship, praying together, fasting, reading the holy book, and maintaining the akidah morality allows novice voters to be awake and aware to always call for the truth at every step. The above activities can be carried out in a family environment, and schools with regular habituation allow the process of religious character education to be strengthened so that the opportunity for tolerance for bad practices of money politics in the implementation of regional elections can be minimized as early as possible by novice voters when choosing candidates.

**Pancasila Democratic Value**

democratic education is a process to develop all human potential that appreciates plurality and heterogeneity as a consequence of cultural, ethnic and religious diversity. The main values emphasized in democratic education are equality and tolerance (Rosyad, A. M., & Maarif, M. A. 2020). In the context of Indonesia, democratic values are integrated into the pure values of Pancasila.

In the context of regional elections, channeling the right to vote in regional head elections is a perfect form of manifestation of people's sovereignty. In this arena the people can carry out a process of political evaluation and control of the regional head and the political forces that support him. (Gaffar, 2012).

Especially novice voters who are new to the political process, being silent and apathetic to the electoral process will encourage the low legitimacy of the elected leader, besides deliberately allowing the seat of power to be held by people who have no credibility and take the side of the people. Therefore, the choice to participate democratically is the best choice so that the process of consolidating democracy can continue.

**The Value of Love for the Fatherland**

Love for the homeland is a feeling of pride and an attitude of self-sacrifice to protect one's territory from various disturbances and threats. In the context of Indonesia, the value of love for the country is very much needed as a driving force for the integration of national diversity. If this value is not maintained, then the opportunity for egocentrism of ethnicity, religion, race, culture, etc. can lead to division and lead to conflict. Unfortunately, the emergence of the dichotomy and excessive fanaticism from the above is not in fact balanced with a spirit of unity and kinship. Instead of the pilkada presenting a new space for division, various issues related to Sara and the dominance of identity politics as a political tool for a certain group of entities have heated up the space for public interaction. The negative sentiment that is built continuously will encourage the weakness of the substance of the pilkada and lead to abstention.

In anticipating this, the spirit of loving the country must be echoed in a real way to first-time voters. The initial thing is to foster a feeling of pride in one's own homeland, a sense of belonging, respect, high respect and loyalty, being willing to sacrifice for the interests of the nation and country and loving the customs and culture of the people (Nurmantyo, 2016: 9) . Internalization of these values can be channeled through self-discipline and tolerance for differences and diversity. In addition, an attitude of prioritizing collective interests is more important than individual interests.

**The value of the National spirit**

the practice of elite predators and oligarchy cronies against the domination and monopoly of Indonesia's natural resources and ecumenism has certainly eroded national values. The colonial practice of this new model must be resisted with a high national spirit. Unfortunately, the powerful political actors are unreliable, on the one hand the movement of social activism and freedom has always been hindered in its development.

In the context of first-time voters, the true national spirit can be shown by participating in every activity related to defending the country. This activity can be followed starting from formal learning activities and extracurricular activities, besides building a national community and holding regular discussions is another part of understanding these values well.

In the context of the pilkada, first-time voters take part in community activism by overseeing the general election so that it runs according to the rules and regulations, besides that novice voters can actively invite all voters to participate in giving their personal rights in the election, besides that novice voters can also become a driving force to advocate for alternative actors who care and side with the community.

**Closing**

Character education for novice voters is a panacea for protecting their thinking and behavior from pragmatic politics, and teaching them the substantive meaning of the elections as a whole. This paper tries to link character education with first-time voters in the context of regional elections. Of the 18 character education, there are 4 characters that have direct correlation with first-time voters in the context of facing the Pilkada. The five characters referred to are religious, democratic, national spirit, and love for the country. The strengthening of the four character values above greatly influences the characteristics and attitudes to the behavior of novice voters in determining their choices in the Pilkada.

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