

## The Role of Academic Community Service in Increasing Voter Participation in Regional Head Elections in the Madura Islands Region

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### Abstract

Low voter turnout in regional head elections does not invalidate the election results, but it does reduce the quality of direct democracy. This community service program is an effort by university academics to increase voter participation in the regional head elections, which will be held directly and simultaneously in November 2024. The community service program focuses on the Madura Islands, specifically the Kangean and Sapeken Islands, which are among the furthest regions from Madura. The community service program is conducted in remote villages in the Kangean Islands, such as Batu Putih Village, Cangkaramaan Village, Tembayangan Village, Pajennangger Village, Saobi Village, Sadulang Village, and several other villages in the Arjasa, Kangayan, and Sapeken Districts. The community service program uses a dialogic communication approach, conducted door-to-door, or directly visiting prospective voters at their homes. The results show that voters in the islands and remote villages are happy to receive political education and outreach activities from academics. Benefit this community service program, can also be implemented by local governments, election organizers and supervisors, both the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). So that in the future, government institutions, organizers and supervisors as well as political parties can carry out political education directly at the homes of citizens/voters.

**Keywords:** *Voter participation; regional head elections; voters in Madura.*

### Abstrak

Rendahnya partisipasi pemilih pada pemilihan kepala daerah tidak menggugurkan hasil pemilihan, namun mengurangi kualitas demokrasi yang diselenggarakan secara langsung. Pengabdian ini dilakukan sebagai upaya akademisi dari perguruan tinggi untuk meningkatkan partisipasi pemilih pada pemilihan kepala daerah yang diselenggarakan secara langsung dan serentak pada November 2024. Kegiatan pengabdian difokuskan di wilayah Kepulauan Madura, yaitu Kepulauan Kangean dan Sapeken, yang merupakan salah satu wilayah terjauh dari wilayah Madura. Kegiatan pengabdian dilakukan di desa-desa terpencil di wilayah Kepulauan Kangean seperti Desa Batu Putih, Desa Cangkaramaan, Desa Tembayangan, Desa Pajennangger, Desa Saobi, Desa Sadulang, dan beberapa desa lainnya, yang berada di Kecamatan Arjasa, Kangayan dan Sapeken. Kegiatan pengabdian menggunakan pendekatan komunikasi dialogis yang dilakukan langsung door to door, atau mendatangi langsung calon pemilih di rumah masing-masing. Hasil pengabdian menunjukkan bahwa, pemilih di wilayah kepulauan dan desa-desa terpencil senang mendapat kegiatan sosialisasi dan pendidikan politik dari kalangan akademisi. Hal tersebut itu diharapkan dapat juga dilakukan oleh pemerintah daerah, atau penyelenggara dan pengawas pemilihan, baik KPU maupun Bawaslu. Sehingga ke depan, lembaga pemerintah, penyelenggara dan pengawas serta partai politik dapat melakukan pendidikan politik secara langsung ke rumah-rumah warga/ pemilih.

**Kata Kunci:** *Partisipasi pemilih; pemilihan kepala daerah; pemilih di Madura.*

### 1. Introduction

Democracy faces a significant challenge in the area of public participation. This issue is fundamental to democracy. Democracy, which is based on public involvement throughout its processes,

becomes less meaningful when public participation is low. Legally, the results of a democratic process with low participation cannot be annulled. However, in practice, democracy with minimal public participation becomes insipid or sluggish. This is a

challenge for all parties involved in the democratic process, from election contestants, the organizing committee, supervisors, and the general public.

Low voter/ public participation also occurs during the democratic process, particularly in regional head elections. For example, voter participation in regional head elections in Indonesia has shown a low trend. This can be seen in various regions that have held elections in the past 10 years. Several regions that held elections between 2014 and 2024 showed low public participation. This phenomenon is not true for all regions in Indonesia, but many regions also experienced low levels of public participation in direct regional head elections. The table below provides examples of some regions in Indonesia with the lowest levels of public participation during regional head elections between 2014 and 2024.

**Table 1. Low Participation in Regional Head Elections in Indonesia in the Last 10 Years.**

No	Area	Years	Number of Participation
1	Medan City, North Sumatera	2014	51.8 %
2	Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatera	2014	55.1 %

3	Padang City, West Sumatera	2014	53.7 %
4	North Sumatera Province	2024	55.6 %
5	DKI Jakarta Province	2024	57.6 %
6	Surabaya City, East Java	2024	55 %

*(Source: Processed from various sources by devotees, 2025)*

Public participation in regional head elections in Madura has also experienced dynamics over the past 10 years. Data collected by the community service agency (Pengabdian) shows that the level of public participation in regional head elections in four regencies in Madura Sumenep, Pamekasan, Sampang, and Bangkalan varies. For example, in Bangkalan Regency, voter participation in the 2018 regional elections was 65 percent, increasing to more than 71 percent in the 2024 elections. However, this figure is still below the General Elections Commission's target of 75 percent. Meanwhile, voter participation in the 2018 regional elections in Pamekasan Regency only reached 73 percent, far below the Pamekasan Regency General Elections Commission's target of 85 percent.

Meanwhile, in the 2024 regional elections, voter participation in Pamekasan Regency rose to 80 percent. However, it

remains below the Pamekasan Regency General Elections Commission's target of 87 percent. The voter participation rate in Sumenep Regency in the 2024 Regional Elections was 74.58 percent, down from 75.85 percent in the 2019 Regional Elections. This figure is below the target set by the Sumenep Regency General Elections Commission of 80 percent. The highest participation was in Sampang Regency, both in the 2018 and 2024 Regional Elections. In the 2018 Regional Elections, voter participation was 85 percent, and in the 2024 Elections, it rose to 85.5 percent. This figure is above the Sampang Regency General Elections Commission's target of 77.5 percent.

**Table 2. Voter participation in regional head elections in four districts in Madura.**

No	Area	Years	Number of Participation	Years	Number of Participation
1	Sumenep Regency	2019	75.85 %	2024	74.58 %
2	Pamekasan Regency	2018	73 %	2024	80 %
3	Sampang Regency	2018	85 %	2024	85.5 %
4	Bangkalan	2018	65 %	2024	71.5 %

	Regency				
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(Source: Processed from various sources by devotees, 2025)

There are several causes of low voter participation in regional head elections, namely. First, the small number of regional head candidate pairs, even in some regions with only one candidate pair (single candidate), without any competitors, so that the candidate is up against an empty box (Aba et al., 2023). Second, the practice of money politics is carried out by regional head candidate pairs or winning teams. Voters who do not receive money are reluctant to come to the polling station (Yusuf et al., 2024). Third, low public trust in political institutions, including regional heads who have been elected in previous regional head elections, who do not keep promises, or development programs as conveyed during the campaign as regional head candidates (Hamid et al., 2025). Fourth, the timing of the regional head elections is simultaneous with other elections, so voters feel bored and tired (Hardiyanti & Fawaidi, 2025). Fifth, poor administrative governance and implementation of the regional head elections. This can be seen from the many citizens who are still not registered as voters. Apart from that, there are also those who are registered as voters, but the election location

is very far from where they live, so voters do not want to come to the TPS (Hidayat & Febriansyah, 2024).

The involvement of many parties is necessary to increase public participation. One such group is academics from universities. This community service represents one form of the academic role of universities in an effort to increase public participation in the 2024 regional head elections. The community service activities are deliberately focused on remote island regions, which are vulnerable to declining public participation. This is partly due to the scarcity of voters in island regions receiving political socialization and education from regional head candidates, election committees, and election supervisors. Therefore, this community service activity is crucial in increasing public participation in regional head elections. Through this community service activity, voters are expected to understand their rights and obligations in the democratic celebration of regional head elections. Voter involvement in regional head elections is based on knowledge and awareness that public participation is a key asset in building a more mature and adult democracy in the future.

## **2. Implementation Method**

This community service activity was conducted by visiting service locations in the Madura Islands, specifically the Kangean and Sapeken Islands. Activities carried out during the service location included visiting the families of prospective voters at their homes. Then, a direct, personal, face-to-face dialogue was conducted with the heads of the voters' families. The dialogue took place in a relaxed, familial atmosphere, informally, with no doctrine or lectures given by the community service workers, either lecturers or students. Every day, the community service workers and their team went to randomly selected homes to meet the heads of the families who were prospective voters. Residents who were at home and willing to receive the community service team's presence were welcome. On a single day, the community service workers visited approximately 10 homes to conduct open, informal dialogue with the heads of the families of prospective voters. This activity was carried out in 2024, prior to the simultaneous regional head elections across Indonesia.



**Figure 1. Community Service Activities in a Remote Location, Batu Putih Village, Kangean Island, Arjasa District, Madura Islands (Source: Devotees, 2024).**

This activity involved lecturers and students from universities, Wiraraja University, Madura, and Brawijaya University, Malang, consisting of two lecturers and four students from various faculties and study programs. To facilitate communication with residents of the Kangean and Sapeken Islands, the students involved in this activity were specifically students from the Kangean and Sapeken Islands. The students objectively understood the geographic and demographic conditions of the voters. This included areas often inaccessible to election committees and supervisors. In these areas, socialization related to political education or political socialization has never been conducted during general elections, presidential elections, or regional head elections. This remote area, rarely touched by committees

and supervisors, as well as regional head candidates, was the target and location of the research. Implementing community service activities in remote areas presents its own challenges, primarily due to the remote access and hilly roads leading to the location, with some roads in poor condition. Moreover, as November enters the rainy season, the community service participants must be willing to get soaked while working in the middle of the forest and rain falls.



**Figure 2. Dialogic Communication Community Service Activities with Residents in the Madura Islands Region (Source: Devotees, 2024)**

Community service activities involving direct visits to homes fall into the category of dialogic communication. Direct, dialogic communication is communication without barriers, whether physical, psychological, or technical (Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Dialogic communication approaches are included in cultural studies and theories because they involve social aspects and involve humans directly (Chen et

al., 2020), including the use of language that is mutually understood by the parties in the dialogue (Stewart, 1978). Dialogic communication is a collaborative problem-solving approach, involving various parties (Innes, 2007). Dialogic communication is ethical and practical as an important step in building relationships, including raising awareness of a particular issue (Kent & Taylor, 2002).



**Figure 3. Dialogic Communication Community Service Activities with Residents in Sapeken Village, Sapeken District, Sumenep Regency, Madura Islands Region (Source: Devotees, 2024).**

Direct dialogic communication, without the use of intermediaries such as information technology or social media, has its own advantages, particularly in terms of reducing distortion and noise in the two-way transmission of messages. The process of

giving and receiving messages occurs directly without any delays or technical disruptions that can occur when communication is conducted through media, whether conventional or digital. Dialogic communication that occurs face-to-face also involves psychological aspects, such as feelings of like, comfort, displeasure, or other feelings expressed through body language, facial expressions, and various other expressions. Allows the communicating parties to understand the responses received directly. Not possible when communication is conducted through media or intermediaries.

### 3. Results and Discussion

The community service program was carried out for seven days or one week in November 2024, covering three sub-districts in the Sumenep Islands region, Madura, East Java, namely Arjasa Sub-district, Kangayan Sub-district, and Sapeken Sub-district. Each sub-district selected three villages as the location of the community service. Arjasa Sub-district is in Angkatan, Sawah Sumur, and Pajennangger Villages. Meanwhile, Kangayan Sub-district is in Saobi, Cangkaramaan, and Batu Putih Villages. Meanwhile, in Sapeken Sub-district, it is in Paliat, Sakala, and Sasiil Villages. The

implementation of community service in each village varies; some are carried out in one day for one village, some are carried out in one day for two villages. Depends on the distance of the village and the conditions in the field. Each village selected 10 houses to be the target of community service activities.

During the community service activities, there were no technical obstacles or objections from the residents who were visited directly at their homes. Heads of families welcomed the community service workers openly and warmly to their homes. The community service workers first introduced themselves, the purpose of the community service activities, and the institution from which they came, as well as opening the conversation with the residents they visited. Then the conversation flowed into the topic of community participation and involvement as voters in the political contestation of regional head elections. Researchers chose to listen to what their complaints and objections have been so far, as voters who have repeatedly cast their votes in regional head elections. Several findings can be presented from this community service activity, including residents' complaints.

First, citizens never received direct political outreach and education from the

election committee or election supervisors regarding their obligations and rights as voters. They also learned about what they could and could not do as voters. They only knew about election's day, commonly referred to as polling day, through conversations with fellow citizens. Furthermore, information about voting times and voter turnout was provided by the Voting Organizing Group (KPPS) officers tasked with implementing the election at the polling stations (TPS). One of the KPPS's duties is to distribute invitations to voters.

Second, citizens often experience difficulties in carrying out voting. There are several conditions that cause citizens to have difficulty casting their votes or casting a ballot. (1) The home address is often far from the Polling Station (TPS). However, not all citizens have vehicles to use to go to the TPS. (2). Some of citizens whose polling stations where they voted were also moved from the nearest TPS to a TPS location that is completely far from their residence. (3). There is no availability of pick-up and drop-off facilities or transportation facilities from the election committee, for citizens whose polling stations where they voted are really far from their residence. Reduces the motivation and desire of citizens to participate in the regional head elections.

Furthermore, it increases the number of abstentions and decreases the level of voter participation.

Third, residents acknowledged that the election process often takes up their time working in the rice fields, fields, gardens, and at sea. Regardless of the day, the election still disrupts their work schedule. Even though election's day is a holiday, this does not impact residents who work as farmers, fishermen, or other workers in the village. Their jobs are informal and do not have a fixed workday or working hours, so the government-imposed holiday on election day does not affect them. Results in the loss of income for residents who miss a day of work. Their income and earnings are derived from their regular daily work. Therefore, if they miss a day of work, they will lose their income, a particular complaint for residents.

Fourth, residents expressed disappointment with elected regional head candidates who often forgot their campaign promises. After being elected and inaugurated as regional heads, the elected regents and deputy regents failed to deliver on their promises. One example is the uneven and poorly constructed road construction in the island region. Many roads are in disrepair and riddled with potholes, having been neglected for years. It was one of the

promises made by the regional head candidates during their campaigns and meetings with residents. In reality, after being elected, the promised road construction has not been realized. Also contributed to residents' lack of motivation and reduced desire to vote during the regional head elections. Residents feel they are only exploited during the elections, but once they are over, their business with the residents is over. Residents do not want this to happen again every time there is a regional election contest or political momentum.

Fifth, residents admitted to being motivated to vote and come to the polling stations to cast their votes if they received money from the candidate/regent and/or vice-regent or from the campaign team/ winning team of the regent and/or vice-regent candidates. It was considered a compensation for them not working for a day and coming to the polling stations to cast their votes. Most of the residents interviewed admitted to voting for the candidate who gave them money, whether from the candidate or their campaign team. Was also a form of commitment given to the candidate or their team who gave money. Residents admitted that they would not betray the commitment and agreement made to the candidate or their campaign team.

Responding to complaints conveyed by most of the citizens met by the servants, the servants provided responses and input as a form of political education to the citizens. It could provide understanding and awareness regarding the rights and responsibilities of citizens in political activities. Some of the things put forward by the servants were, that the responsibility to improve the condition of the nation is a shared responsibility, not only the responsibility of officials at the top, both in the district and provincial governments, as well as the central government, but the responsibility lies with the citizens, including those in the islands, remote areas, even those in areas that are not reached.

The responsibilities held by all citizens are correlated with the contributions they make, directly or indirectly, whether consciously or unconsciously. A largely unconscious contribution is in the form of taxes. These taxes are not limited to corporate taxes or taxes paid directly, but also come in various forms, such as taxes or excise taxes on cigarettes, taxes on food and beverages, and daily necessities. Any business or economic activity undertaken by citizens contributes to state revenue, particularly in the form of taxes. Therefore, ignoring political participation is detrimental to the participation already provided.

The next explanation given by the devotee was that no matter how many citizens do not vote, a regional head will still be elected and inaugurated, and will run the government according to their wishes. Therefore, the presence of citizens who do not vote will not change anything. However, if citizens participate in voting, and when the elected regional head wins and is inaugurated, then there needs to be awareness among citizens to criticize and provide input to the elected head, either through their campaign team, or through social media or other communication tools. In this way, the regional head will be reminded of the political promises made, especially regarding development in the island region.

Some of the explanations delivered by the community service workers were acceptable to some, while others were not. Those who did not accept the explanations remained skeptical that their participation in the regional head elections would change their fate or improve development in their area. It was because this had happened repeatedly, not just once or twice. Those who accepted the community service workers' explanations were those who were open to change and new ideas in politics. One reason they accepted them was their willingness to try and not give up on their efforts. They

believed that change would not happen if citizens did nothing. It was precisely by making an effort that the opportunity for change would emerge.

The results of community service programs using a dialogic communication approach cannot be measured quantitatively. Furthermore, a week-long activity cannot completely change the conditions in a region or area that has long faced socio-political problems. Nevertheless, there are at least two metrics that can be used to assess whether the community service activities have yielded results. These two metrics are also discussed in the discussion section on community service results.

First, the target audience's acceptance of the service team's presence when they visited them. The friendly and open attitude shown by potential voters or the community members targeted by the service activities demonstrates two things. The community members were received very well, openly, and without suspicion or misgivings. Another point is that the community or potential voters in the island region are open to potential changes. Both of these traits demonstrate the maturity of the people in remote areas of the Madura archipelago. Furthermore, communities in remote areas

need the presence of state officials and public officials, even at all levels.

Audience or target acceptance during communication is a positive indicator of good political communication (Alfiyah & Rasaili, 2023). Stated to Nancy Longnecker, who stated that good acceptance from the target is a good initial sign when the communication is established (Longnecker, 2023). Therefore, to conduct face-to-face communication, many skills are needed by the communicator, so that the message delivered can be received well, effectively, and efficiently (Edwards & Smethurst, 2025). Audience or target/recipient acceptance indicates that the target is ready to accept any differences that will be conveyed by the communicator to them (Aririguzoh, 2022). In the case of dialogic communication, it is determined by two things: the target's acceptance of the communicating party and the target's trust in the communicating party.

The positive reception from the target audience is inseparable from the existence or origin of the community service team, namely, universities. Universities, or campuses, have long been perceived by the public as well-positioned and beneficial to society, as educational institutions. Campuses are seen as separate and distinct from political institutions, such as political

parties, government institutions, the House of Representatives, and others. Public perception of universities remains very positive, with high hopes that universities will become institutions that can improve the capacity, education, and capabilities of human resources (Saragih et al., 2023). Thus, the presence of lecturers and students from universities has received a positive response from the public, as parties with duties and responsibilities in educating the nation.

Second, smooth communication. The community service activities, conducted in a dialogic atmosphere, proceeded smoothly without any obstacles, both technical and substantive. Demonstrates the success of these community service activities. The community service team was able to hear, receive, and understand what the community members or potential voters conveyed, and their responses, including questions and comments, were clarified by the community service team. The two-way, dialogic communication was not boring, but rather relaxed and mutually responsive. Allowed for lengthy discussions, up to several hours, for one family targeted by the community service.

The smoothness of the communication process is also inseparable from the communication patterns used by the

research team with the target. Direct communication between the sender and the recipient involves many aspects, such as gestures or body movements, facial expressions, and various psychological aspects that involve the recipient's feelings, as conveyed by Glen McGillivray. According to McGillivray, the actor delivering the message, when in front of the recipient, visualizes physical and psychological things. Makes a big impression on the recipient of the message, who is in front of the sender, so that their feelings are also influenced by the behavior displayed by the sender (McGillivray, 2023). Direct and dialogic communication involves all elements present in the sender and recipient. Occurs through a process of several stages.

The first stage is listening. In general, many understand listening as the process of listening carried out by the target or recipient of the message, towards the actor delivering the message. In community service activities, the opposite is more important: the actor delivering the message listens first to what the target recipient has to say. Provides the broadest possible opportunity to receive input from the target recipient to the actor. The actor's listening process is a form of acceptance of what the target conveys (Bodie, 2023). Listening is a common

technique used to collect data in the field (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2021). Starting communication by listening is the opening step in communication.

The next step is to provide empathy and sympathy for what the target/target of the service conveys. Empathy and sympathy are demonstrated by listening to what the target has to say. Furthermore, empathy is also demonstrated by not interrupting or cutting off the target's conversation, or allowing them to say whatever they need to say. In this case, the service provider also serves as a place to accommodate the complaints and concerns expressed by people who are in a position of being ignored, left alone, struggling to make ends meet, and struggling to fulfill responsibilities as a family. According to Fabrizio Macagno et al., empathy is given as a way to feel the emotions of the interlocutor, which encourages a better dialogue process (Macagno et al., 2022). Dialogue involving empathy and sympathy is one of the best communication strategies (Kent, 2022). Empathetic communication builds more effective dialogical communication (Jian, 2021). The most important thing to ensure communication is effective and influential, one effort made is to build empathy and sympathy during dialogical communication.

It is not enough to show sympathy and empathy for the target of service; it is even more important to respond to complaints or what they convey. Responses can be statements that capture all the complaints and concerns conveyed, or they can also provide reactions to what is conveyed. Creates an interactive dialogue, demonstrating that the service provider understands and pays attention to the entire conversation. Repetition of what has been said is not necessary to ensure that everything has been heard and listened to. According to Patricia Canto-Farachala and Miren Larrea, responding in dialogic communication is a form of activity that demonstrates that communication takes place on a basis of equality and equity (Patricia & Arrea, 2020). Equality and equity in communication demonstrate that each party involved in dialogic communication is equally important (Y. Kim, 2023). Responses in dialogic communication enliven the atmosphere of interaction that occurs between the individuals involved (Wells et al., 2020). The importance of responding in dialogic communication extends beyond the communication process itself to the core of the dialogic communication activity. Dialogic communication is called dialogic communication because there are two or

more responses in the communication activity.

Another important process in dialogic communication is that the communication actors, in this case, the community service team, do not patronize or dictate to the communication targets. Although the educational level of the target audience is lower than that of the community service team, this is not a good reason to dictate or patronize them. Because actors who dictate, let alone patronize, the community service targets are not part of good communication. According to George Thomas, good communication activities do not dictate or patronize, but invite reading together, thinking together, and analyzing together (Thomas, 2021). Dictating and patronizing are bad forms of communication activities (Jensen et al., 2024). Patronizing and dictating only become obstacles to communication (H. Kim & Williams, 2021). Dialogic communication must eliminate all factors that become obstacles. One action that hinders good dialogic communication is patronizing. Therefore, communication activities carried out by community service providers do not need to dictate or patronize.

Dialogic communication conducted by the service team involves offering solutions to the problems faced, which were

raised and conveyed at the beginning of the communication. Again, in this case, offering solutions does not force the solutions thought by the service team to be accepted by the target of the service. The form of the offer is only the offer made during the dialogic communication. One example is the participation and involvement of citizens during the voting period for regional head elections, and also active involvement by citizens once the regional head has been elected, in the form of providing input, suggestions, and information on what is happening in the field on a regular, intense, and continuous basis. Because in reality, many things and events in the field are unknown to officials, stakeholders, including regional heads. Certainly requires direct public participation.

#### **4. Conclusion and Suggestions**

Community service activities that involve directly visiting the target audience have advantages in communication. The actions taken by the community service provider are precisely targeted, truly reaching the intended audience. There is no bias in these activities, as the actions are directly targeted. Differs from activities through media, whether mainstream or social media, which may not directly reach the intended

target. However, the target audience is limited and not as broad as those reached by mainstream media or online media. For the recipient, receiving a message directly has a greater impact than messages received through mass media or social media, because the recipient can meet the sender directly. Allows them to respond to the message, and that response is delivered immediately, not delayed for a long time.

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