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The Political Preference of Students in the Indonesian General Election, 2019

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Election as an embodiment of democracy is expected to bring leaders who serve people's interests, but what happens is often the opposite. Therefore, this research raises the issue of what consideration voters use when making choices in elections. The research was conducted on students at the State University of Semarang and it aims to uncover the things that are primarily considered in selecting when voting and how students responded to the result of the Indonesian general election 2019. The approach used is a qualitative approach and the data was collected by interviewing and documentation studies. The results showed that in choosing the president, the thing taken into consideration is the figure of the candidate pair, namely the track record of the candidate pair. In selecting legislative members, the main consideration is the non-involvement of party officials in corruption cases. The vision, mission and programs, which are usually reliable to attract voters' interests, are not really taken into consideration, nor are the parties nominating the president.

Key words: *Political preferences, Presidential election, Legislative election.*

Introduction

In societies where democracy has been accepted as a principle in the political system, the election is considered the most appropriate way to elect political leaders. With the election, competition is considered, by the candidates, as something that arouses enthusiasm in political life (Manshadi, 2017). In the context of democracy, election embodies the essential value of bringing in a ruler who is responsive to the wishes of citizens, through a competition to obtain regular voter approval (Coppedge, et.al, 2016). With elections, people elect their representatives who will be entrusted with the mandate to administer the country.



Elections and democracy contain very important values, including providing opportunities for citizens to exercise their political rights, guaranteeing a peaceful change of leadership, realizing the welfare of society and maintaining state sovereignty. As a manifestation of democracy in Indonesia, on April 17, 2019, an election was held to elect the president and vice president and to elect legislative members for the office term 2019-2024.

The social groups that have the right to vote in an election include the student group. Students bring uniqueness in the election, which makes it is different from other voting groups. It is generally the first time that students have gotten the right to vote so they do not yet have the experience of voting in an election. Students are also a group of voters who generally are not yet members of a political party so their voting rights can be distributed anywhere without being tied to a particular political party.

Therefore, voting behaviour among students is unique and difficult to guess the direction of their choice. Students are not directly involved in the implementation of government, but they have idealism and a critical attitude towards the running of government. A study by Wang (2019), shows that there are differences in political attitude and behaviour between the younger generation, including students, and the older generation in the election. Generational differences bring differences in historical experience which then affects political choices in the election.

Election activities are ultimately intended to get leaders who are truly in accordance with people's expectations and are able to bring about the country becoming more advanced, prosperous and democratic. However, the reality shows that many elected legislative members are involved in cases of violation of the law, their performance is poor, and they are unable to realise people's expectations. One view (Achen and Bartels, 2016) states that the inability of an election to produce state leaders and policies which are in accordance with the people's wishes is because there are other forces that influence the election results, in addition to the factors that are often discussed.

This phenomenon raises the question, what consideration voters make for their choice in the general election. This article is intended to identify what those things are that are considered by students in making choices, and to analyse these considerations to provide an explanation to the question above.



Theoretical Framework

Electoral System

The discussion of the electoral system is related to the issue of what is the best way to convert the votes obtained in the election to the number of seats in representative institutions. The issue concerns the question of whether a legislative seat obtained by a party is directly proportional to the vote in an election or if it is obtained through another calculation. Regarding that issue, the *plurality system*, *majority system*, *proportional representation*, and *mixed system* are distinguished (Hague, 2016).

The *plurality system* is often called the *First Past the Post system*. With this system, the country's territory is divided into a number of districts and each district is represented by a legislative member. Whereas with the *majority system*, a candidate can win an election if s/he gets a majority vote in the district, with the argument that the elected candidate must prove that s/he can be accepted by the majority of voters.

The pluralist and majority systems create a high level of candidate recognition and the candidates are known by the voters. These systems maintain the relationship between voters and their elected representatives, allowing voters to vote for people, and not just elect political parties (Holmberg, 2009). In this system, candidates appear as individuals, both with and without party support and both with or without affiliation with the party identified on the ballot paper. Thus, in a plurality system, each vote is for candidates as individuals (Katz, 2007).

The proportional representation system is an electoral system where the legislative seats obtained by a party are proportional to the number of votes obtained in the election. With a proportional system, the voter does not recognise the identity of the person who will represent them in the representative institution and no people's representatives can be identified from their city, district, or village. Voters also cannot reject the existence of a candidate proposed by the party even when they know that the candidate is behaving poorly and is not in accordance with their expectations (Holmberg, 2009). The number of seats in the legislative is divided among parties proportionally to the number of votes obtained by each party in the election. Thus, in this system, each vote is for the group of candidates listed (Katz, 2007).

The variation that can be found in that system is the list of candidates used. This system can be implemented by using one of two types of candidate lists: first, a system that uses a closed list, where voters only choose parties and cannot express the choices for each candidate on



the list. Second, a system that uses a preferential list, in which voters can elect each candidate on the list (Herron, et al., 2018).

The mixed system is a combination of the three, maximising the strengths of each and minimising the shortcomings (Hague, et al., 2016). With a mixed system, some members of parliament are elected by a plurality system or by a majority formula and other members of parliament are elected by a proportional system (Herron, 2018).

The electoral system as described above illustrates the electoral procedure which is essential for creating a democratic representation of election activities. Election procedures will ultimately influence how candidates should campaign to be elected to office, how to interact with constituents and how to arrange programs to serve the interests of the community (Taylor, 2013).

Voting Behaviour in Elections

Theoretically, there are at least three approaches that can be used to study voter's behaviour in elections, namely the *sociological approach*, the *psychological approach*, and the *rational choice approach* (Bartels, 2010). The sociological approach is commonly called The Columbia Study, while the psychological approach is commonly called The Michigan Model. In addition, there is an approach developed by Lau and Redlawsk, namely the rational choice approach.

The sociological approach states that factors such as family, playmates, student groups, similarity in socioeconomic status, religion and other communities around one's residence greatly determine one's tendency of choice. As stated by Bartels, the sociological approach shows that there are sociological values attached to individuals that affect a person's behaviour in politics. The sociological values are in the form of religion, social class, ethnicity, region and family tradition, among others. According to this approach, one's voting behaviour tends to follow what happens in the social environment where one lives.

The most powerful explanation about choices in elections so far is the Michigan model, which refers to the proposition that citizens choose primarily according to their identification. The Michigan model argues that a person's choice in an election is largely determined by party identification, namely the affective orientation of the individual to the political party participating in the election (Kiss, 2012). According to this view, citizens have a deep psychological attachment to political parties, which then has a direct or indirect impact on voting behaviour (Dalton and Anderson, 2011). This attachment is relatively stable, develops from the beginning of life, and gets stronger over time. In this theory, one's choice in



elections is based on psychological and emotional attachments that are rooted strongly in a particular party (Kiss, 2012).

By contrast, according to the rational choice approach, the determination of choices in elections is related to economic considerations for one's welfare. This model attempts to explain voting behaviour in elections from a political-economic perspective. Decisions in choosing are rational, which are based on self-interest to maximise the benefits that can be obtained. The rational choice paradigm in elections applies the hypothesis of maximising the utility developed in the economy for political decision making (Bartels, 2010).

Those are several theories that explain voting behaviour in elections. At the empirical level, of course, it is also possible for the emergence of political phenomena that must be explained by combining the three theories to complement one another. A research result shows that the choice in the election is a function of various factors such as alignments, policy preferences, party competence, evaluation of candidates and economic evaluation (Kiss, 2012).

Regarding the voting behavior in elections, Timothy J. Ryan's (2017) study shows that there is an important segment of voters who do not learn much about politics until their political decisions are going through automatic mental processes, even though those political decisions can still be predicted. In addition, there are also certain conditions by which one's political attitude becomes better or vice versa.

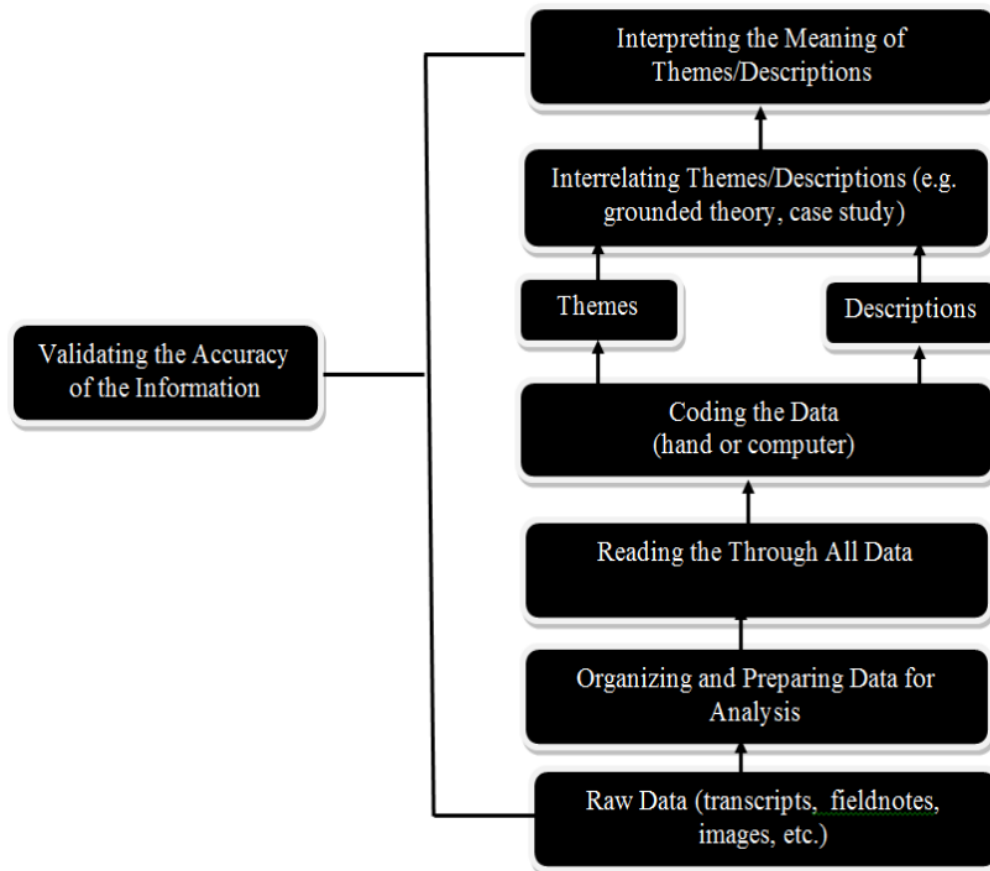
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Research Method

The research approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is flexible and the research designs can change according to field conditions, so that the role of researchers is very dominant in determining the research success. This study was conducted by interviewing 100 students at the State University of Semarang. To obtain complete information, interviews were conducted with open and unstructured questions. With open and unstructured questions, respondents have the opportunity to answer questions according to what they have experienced, thought and felt about their participation in elections.

Data analysis and interpretation were completed by transcription and categorisation, after which they were described and interpreted, to get the meaning of the data according to the purpose of the study. Data analysis was performed using a linear and hierarchical approach with the following six steps.

Figure 1. Data Analysis in Qualitative Research



Source: Creswell (Creswell, 2012)

Results and Discussion

Students' Consideration in Making Choice in Elections

It should be noted in advance that the Indonesian general elections in 2019 consisted of an election to select the president/vice president and an election to elect legislative members, held simultaneously. The presidential/vice-presidential election was attended by two contestants of candidate pairs, namely Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin, and Prabowo Subiyanto and Sandiaga Uno. In accordance with the applicable electoral law for a presidential and vice-presidential election, the candidacy pair is nominated by a party or coalition of parties that get 25 percent of the votes in the national election or get 20 percent of the seats in the DPR (Croissant and Lorenz, 2018).



The legislative election was participated in by 16³ political parties; the National Awakening Party (PKB), the Great Indonesia Movement Party (Gerindra), the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the Functional Group Party (Golkar), the National Democratic Party (Nasdem), the Garuda Party, Working Party, Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), Indonesian Unity Party (Perindo), United Development Party (PPP), Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), National Mandate Party (PAN), People's Conscience Party (Hanura), Democratic Party, Crescent Star Party (PBB) and the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI). In accordance with the applicable law, the electoral system for DPR members is carried out by integrating the electoral system, which according to Croissant and Lorenz' classification (2018), is by proportional representation the multi-member district system using the open list system.

a. Election of President/Vice President

Presidential candidate Joko Widodo was one of the presidential candidates⁴ in the 2019 election, as an incumbent, the candidate who was holding the position of President⁵ of the Republic of Indonesia for the period 2014-2019. As an incumbent candidate, the presidential candidate pair Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin was in a somewhat different position from the prospective challenger. The incumbent candidate's performance would be assessed by the people, by taking into consideration the programs that have been carried out while holding the presidential position in the still current period.

Regarding the existence of incumbent candidates in elections, Hirano and Snyder (2012) state that elections are a mechanism that allows voters to get rid of politicians who are performing poorly and displaying better politicians. Therefore, when one of the candidates is incumbent, the candidate will face tougher challenges to win the election compared to the challenger, especially when the incumbent has a poor track record, such as involvement in a serious political scandal.

However, there is also a positive side that can be exploited by incumbent candidates, where candidates can demonstrate the success that has been achieved in order to gain the sympathy of voters. As the study by Woo, et al. (2018) shows, the position as an incumbent gives advantages because the incumbent has a greater chance to create a close relationship with their constituents.

The presidential election in Indonesia shows the influence of the incumbent's existence on voter preferences. The results showed that in choosing a pair of candidates for President/Vice President, students used several considerations, especially those related to the figure of a candidate pair. Because one of the presidential candidates is an incumbent candidate, the figure aspect concerns his ability to carry out programs/activities that are beneficial to the people and the realisation of what was promised to the people in the previous office term,



2014-2019 period. In addition, caring for the people by frequently visiting them also becomes an important point of consideration with students in electing a president.

From the results of this research, it appears that in selecting the president/vice president, students consider aspects of the candidate figures and policies that have been carried out in the previous office term. This is in line with the results of other studies (Pedersen, et al., 2019), that the characteristics of candidates and policy positions together will interact and influence one's choices. The policy position will strengthen the influence of candidate characteristics on voter decisions.

Another consideration is the students' desire as voters to give incumbent candidates the opportunity to continue their programs because students realise that there are programs promised by incumbent candidates that have not been fully implemented in the previous office term. There are also students who associate their choices with the track record of a presidential candidate that is the candidate who has had no "problems" in the past. It means the candidate has never been involved in disgraceful activities or actions that are detrimental to society.

The candidates' family background and how they built their career are also considerations made by students in making choices. Preferred candidates are candidates who have a clear family background, a harmonious relationship between husband, wife, and children, and that the lives of their family members have never been involved in a despicable act. The way their career is built is also considered. The candidate (in this instance) chose to build a career from scratch as an entrepreneur, and was later elected as Mayor of Surakarta for two periods, then elected as the Governor of the Jakarta Capital Region, and subsequently elected as President of the Republic of Indonesia in the period 2014-2019.

Associated with the presence of political parties that nominate pairs of presidential candidates, students, in general, do not really consider what party is nominating a candidate pair that they choose. This means that the figure of the candidate pair becomes more important and more attractive than the political party nominating it. This is understandable because students, in general, are novice voters who are not yet members of political parties, so they do not yet have strong emotional ties with certain political parties and the political issues they raise.

Regarding the vision, mission and programs offered by the candidate pairs, students consider that the vision, mission and programs of each candidate pair are not much different from each other, and are equally aimed for people's interests. In addition, from the students' point of view, the vision, mission and programs promised by the candidates are also not necessarily realised when they have been elected president. Therefore, the candidate's vision, mission and



programs conveyed through the campaign are not taken as much into consideration by students when determining their choice.

What happened in the Indonesian presidential election turns out to be different from the results of research in other countries. Results of research conducted in the United Kingdom (Kiss, 2012) indicate that campaign exposure has a direct and indirect effects on voters. The direct effect is the effect in the form of determining choices in elections, while the indirect effect is the emotional effect in the form of. The analysis shows that as campaign exposure increases, the emotional effect of alignments also increases.

Candidate debates that air on television also do not shift students' choice towards the presidential candidate pair. Therefore, students are also not paying close attention to the political issues raised by candidates nominated by political parties. The character of such independent voters does not differ from studies conducted by the American National Election Studies (ANES), that independent voters generally do not understand the differences among candidates compared to the understanding held by partisans (Smidt, 2017).

On the other hand, although students as voters are part of a community, whether family community, society, or campus residents, students generally make choices on the basis of their respective stances. Although there is influence from family, society and other people around them, their influence is not significant.

From a theoretical perspective, as stated in the previous section, voter behaviour can at least be analysed using three approaches, which are a sociological approach, a psychological approach and a rational approach. Therefore, the results of this study will be analysed with regard to these approaches.

The explanation of students' consideration in making their choice as described above can be found especially in the psychological approach, where the decision making is more influenced by the identification from voters about the candidate pairs, and the image of the candidate pairs from the voters' point of view. Voters prefer the figures who are considered populist with activities that involve coming to the people to see the real conditions on the ground and to listen to their complaints. In addition, the candidate's positive image is also seen as a figure considered to have had no "problems" in the past, followed by programs that have been implemented by incumbent candidates which are considered quite beneficial to the society.

Students' consideration in making their choice can also be approached with a rational choice approach (rational choice). The rationality of the choice is apparent from the students' choice that pays attention to the programs and activities that have been carried out by the incumbent



candidate pairs and their resulting benefits for people's lives, as well as the presence of candidate pairs who are perceived as being more able to create public welfare in the future. This means that students, in making choices, consider the benefits or advantages that will be obtained when the chosen candidate is elected as a president.

On the other hand, ethnic, racial and religious aspects as emphasised by the sociological approach are not taken into consideration when making choices. This can be understood because the pairs of candidates who appear in the presidential election have the same ethnic, racial and religious background so that it does not represent a contrasting difference among the candidates who contest the presidential election.

In the end, the Indonesian Presidential Election 2019 was won by the incumbent candidate, Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin, with 55.5 percent of votes, beating another candidate pair, Prabowo Subiyanto/Sandiaga Uno who had 44.5 percent of votes.

b. Election of Legislative Members

Legislative member elections are conducted by combining proportional representation and multi-member district systems with the open list system. By using the open list system, voters in using their voting rights can vote for a particular political party or choose one of the candidates proposed by a political party as written in the candidate list. With the opportunity to choose the candidates s/he wants, it is hoped that it will be more satisfying for voters in a democracy. A study by Bol, et al. (2018) shows that by getting the opportunity to choose candidates, voters have more satisfaction in a democracy than when just choosing political parties.

The results of this current study also show that there were differences in students' considerations in selecting legislative candidates, which were the difference between the legislative candidates at the central/provincial level and the election of legislative candidates at the regency/city level.

In electing legislative members at the central/provincial level, students generally only chose certain political parties, without choosing the names of candidates for the legislature proposed by the party. The reason being that they did not know the figures of the legislative candidates proposed by the party. Even if someone chose a candidate's name, the consideration used was not a consideration that related to the candidate's capability, but only to something very simple, such as the photo or title, or the proximity of the candidate's residence to the voter, and some even just select the candidate's name without any certain consideration.



Judging from the perspective of the electoral system used, this is one of the weaknesses of the proportional system in which voters do not recognise the identity of the person who will represent them in the representative institutions and when there are no representatives that can be identified from their cities, districts or villages. In addition, they also do not have the ability to reject a candidate even though they know that the candidate has bad behaviour (Holmberg, 2009).

When a student chooses a political party, the main consideration used is not the party's vision, mission and programs that are in line with people's expectations, but rather considerations relating to the problem of corruption. This was based on an assumption that the vision, mission and programs promised by political parties were not necessarily carried out after winning the election. The parties they tended to vote for were parties whose figures were not much involved in corruption cases.

Paying attention to the voters' consideration in choosing political parties as stated above, it turns out there are things that are somewhat different from what commonly appears in the study of democracy. In his writings, Ezrow (2010) states the popular view of democracy as that people's expectations in a democracy are channeled through elections to elect representatives of the people, who would make policies in accordance with their expectations. In other words, democratic ideals imply that citizens' participation and voting will have implications on policies for the citizens' interests. Translating the wishes of citizens into government policy, however, is not a simple matter because it really depends on the ability and commitment of political parties to truly realise the people's expectations and not just win the election for the interests of the political party itself.

Thus, the function of representative democracy is very dependent on the ability of political parties to represent the voters' expectations. Most of the literature assumes that voters expect political parties to fulfill their promises to realise programs that have been promised to the society. As a result of research that has been conducted, for voters who have been involved in activities at the grassroots level, the most expected thing is that the political parties chosen truly fulfill their promises in the campaign (Werner, 2019).

When voters do not really consider programs of the political party in Indonesian general elections, it can be seen as a phenomenon of voters' mistrust towards political parties to realise the promised programs. On the other hand, the corruption problem is indeed becoming a serious problem in Indonesia. So, in choosing political parties, the main consideration used by voters is related to this matter. Distrust of party political promises is something that often arises in the voters' feelings. This distrust can occur as a result of public perception bias. The bias occurs relative to party identification and voter sympathy towards the government. The weaker the party identification is and the less sympathy the voters have for the government,



the more perception the political parties receive that they do not fulfill their political promises (Belchior, 2019).

A different result occurred in the election of legislative candidates at the regional/city level. For the election of legislative members at the regional/city level, there is a difference that more students are not only choosing political parties but also choosing the names of candidates for the legislative members proposed by the party. That is because the existence of legislative candidates at the regional/city level is relatively close to voters, so voters have a better introduction to them compared to legislative candidates at the provincial and central levels.

From a theoretical perspective, students' considerations in selecting political parties of election contestants can be found in the psychological approach. The psychological approach seeks to explain the decision to vote in an election by paying attention to party identification factors, candidate orientation and issue orientation.

In choosing political parties participating in the election, if students consider the existence of party officials who are not involved in many corruption cases, it can be explained through a psychological approach. In choosing political parties, students are more oriented to candidates and issue orientation. Because candidates, in general, are not very well known by students, what is then considered is the management of the political party that nominates them, which then develops a partisan attitude towards certain political parties. The actual issue that is currently the concern of various parties in Indonesia is the issue of eradicating corruption. By choosing a political party whose management is not much involved in corruption cases, voters hope that elected legislators will not commit acts of corruption and will pay serious attention to fighting corruption.

Finally, there were five parties participating in the election which received the most votes. They were the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) 19.33 percent; Gerindra Party 12, 57 percent; Party of Functional Groups (Golkar) 12.31 percent; National Awakening Party (PKB) 9.69 percent; and the National Democratic Party (NasDem) 9.05 percent.

Students' Views on the Implementation and Election Results

Regarding the implementation of the elections, students generally stated that the 2019 elections were going well. The public enthusiastically exercised their voting rights, even though some stated that the election was less efficient and there were still some frauds.

Presidential and legislative elections held simultaneously make citizens more excited about using their voting rights in elections. This can be seen from the increasing number of people's



participation in the Indonesian general elections of 2019. However, with such an election, the citizens' attention is more focused on the presidential election, while the election of legislative members is somewhat ignored and receives less attention.

Another impression felt by some students was that the 2019 election was coloured by the hustle and bustle of social media with various information or news. Among the information about elections circulating on social media, there was true information and also hoax information. Social media has been exploited too much by political contestants and their supporters to win with various forms of campaigning, either with ordinary campaigns, negative campaigns or black campaigns. Negative campaigns and black campaigns heavily coloured social media ahead of the election, but this study does not cover how the campaigns' influence on social media affected voters. Research conducted in other countries (Haas, et al., 2020) shows that campaigns can negatively affect voters' confidence when voters do not have sufficient experience in competitive elections.

Related to the role of social media, research conducted in Turkey shows that social media, especially Twitter, is a very important political element that enables students as young people to express their political choices and decisions. Therefore, their correspondence on social media is quite influential on the political decisions of government, and it has compatibility with the election results. In addition, social media, ie, Twitter is also a means for them to discuss and express themselves (Mengu, Et.al, 2015)

There are positive aspects of the existence of social media in elections. As in other countries, social media has an extraordinary ability to predict election results, and there is a significant correlation between the results of social media surveys and traditional survey results (Ceron, et al., 2014). Something similar also happened in the Indonesian general elections in 2019; the predicted election results announced on social media were not much different from the actual election results.

Relating to fraud in the implementation of elections, students generally view it as impossible to expect a truly clean election, one without cheating. Frauds that occurred in the Indonesian general elections in 2019 were neither frauds in the form of coercion by certain candidates nor vote manipulation by election administrators. However, there was fraud in the form of money politics, that is, giving "something" to people by the candidate, with the intention of directing the people to elect the candidate.

Regarding the practice of money politics, it must be recognised that eliminating the practice is not a simple matter. The practice of money politics often becomes talk, but it is difficult to prove its existence. This is because both parties, the giver and those who are given, do not feel disadvantaged by this practice. Therefore, there are those who claim that the danger of



electoral corruption lies in the fact that there are not adequate responses from various parties regarding this matter, whereas ineffective efforts to counter this type of corruption will lead to the destruction of the electoral system (Alla et al., 2019)

According to students, however, fraud in the Indonesian general elections in 2019 was still within tolerance. Therefore, even though the 2019 election was still marked by fraud, it did not make students reject the election results. Hoax news on social media gave the impression that the fraud that occurred in the election was excessive. If there are parties who feel unsatisfied, it is expected that the dissatisfaction is channelled through actions that are in accordance with applicable regulations.

Conclusion

From the results of the research and discussion as described above, it can be concluded that what is taken into consideration by students in selecting the president/vice president is the figure of the candidate pair. The aspect seen from the candidate pair figure is its image as populist leader, because they will often come in to the middle of society to see the problems experienced by the people; especially in the case of incumbent candidates, are seen as attached to development programs considered beneficial to the people in the previous term; and their image in society as a leader who is clean and does not carry the burden of problems in the past. The other aspects of consideration are the existence of political parties that nominate candidate pairs, the vision/mission/programs proposed by the candidate pairs, and the debates between candidate pairs on television, which although these aspects are taken into consideration, they do not significantly affect the decision in electing the president/vice president.

In electing candidates for legislative members, with an open list system, although voters have the opportunity to choose political parties along with the names of proposed legislative members, in general they only choose political parties without choosing the names of candidates nominated by these parties. This is because voters generally do not know the figure of each candidate proposed by political parties. Even if someone chooses a candidate's name, it is not accompanied by substantial considerations. In selecting parties participating in the election, there are several considerations used by students, especially the non-involvement of party figures in corruption cases. Other considerations are that the party carries the chosen presidential candidate pair, consideration of the party's age, and evidence of its performance for the society.

Regarding the implementation of the election, students consider that elections are still coloured by fraud. The fraud, however, is still within the limits of tolerance. Therefore, the results of the election should be accepted by all parties with sincerity because the election has



been carried out in accordance with applicable regulations. Even if there are things that cause dissatisfaction with certain parties, the dissatisfaction should be channelled according to the applicable legal provisions without any actions that are detrimental to the people's interests.



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