

Strategies of the General Election Commission in Reducing Voter Abstention and Increasing Public Participation in Regional Head Elections: A Case Study of the 2024 Local Election in Bima City

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Abstrak: *This study aims to analyze the efforts of the Bima City General Elections Commission (KPU) to reduce voter abstention and enhance public participation in the 2024 Regional Head Election (Pilkada). A descriptive qualitative method was employed, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the KPU of Bima City implemented various strategies, including face-to-face public outreach, voter education programs, the use of social media, the installation of campaign information materials, and the engagement of religious leaders, community figures, and Democracy Volunteers. Although the number of registered voters increased by 9,398 compared to the 2018 Pilkada, the voter turnout rate slightly declined from 84.13% to 84.04%. Supporting factors for voter participation include community-based outreach and the involvement of local leaders, while inhibiting factors consist of low political literacy, voter apathy, and high mobility among young voters. This study recommends strengthening area-based outreach strategies and allocating a dedicated budget for research on abstention behavior to improve voter participation in future elections.*

Keywords: *KPU, voter abstention, political participation, 2024 regional head election.*

1. Introduction

Indonesia, as a democratic nation, positions its citizens as the holders of the highest sovereignty in accordance with the principle of government of the people, by the people, and for the people. National and local elections (Pemilu and Pilkada) serve as essential mechanisms for realizing this principle, as the electoral process is conducted directly, universally, freely, confidentially, fairly, and transparently, as mandated by Law No. 7/2017 and various regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU). However, one persistent challenge is the phenomenon of voter abstention (golput), which refers to individuals who intentionally refrain from exercising their voting rights for technical, ideological, or pragmatic reasons (Yeboah-assiamah et al., 2014); (Stokes, 2018). This phenomenon directly affects the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and serves as an indicator of low levels of political participation at the local level.

Public participation in a democratic system extends beyond mere attendance at polling stations on election day (Fung, 2015); (Miles, 2015). It also encompasses community involvement in policy formulation, implementation, and oversight. The concept of oral democracy emphasizes the importance of deliberative spaces that allow citizens to engage in dialogue and express their aspirations directly (Ishaka, 2024); (Rifai & Haeril, 2024); (Husain et al., 2024). Similarly, the concept of open democracy asserts that a high quality democracy must ensure openness, inclusivity, transparency, and equitable representation in all decision making processes. Inclusive public participation strengthens governmental legitimacy and enhances the overall quality of democracy (Green et al., 2003); (Rallings & Thrasher, 2007); (Ladner et al., 2014); .

Furthermore, political communication theory provides an important analytical lens for understanding how political messages influence public behavior and electoral participation. Political communication is not merely the transmission of information but also involves the construction, dissemination, and reception of messages capable of shaping public opinion (Green et al., 2003); (Paper et al., 2009); (Nickerson, 2015). With rapid advancements in digital technology, social media has become a strategic channel for reaching voters, particularly younger generations. Social media facilitates two way political communication, enabling citizens to act not only as recipients of information but also as active disseminators of political messages (Rifai & Haeril, 2025).

In the context of political behavior, social change theories explain the evolving dynamics of values, norms, and collective behavior (Blondel et al., 1997); (Gronke & Miller, 2014.). Social change arises from the interaction of internal factors, such as culture and values, and external factors, including technological development and public policy (Oostveen, 2023.). Young people serve as primary drivers of social change due to their openness to technology and democratic values (Lassen, 2004); (Mullin, 2007); (Caren, 2007); (Green & Gerber, 2020). These shifts contribute to the emergence of a more critical and participatory society with heightened political awareness (Gimpel & Schuknecht, 2003); (Giammo & Brox, 2008); (Mcdonnell & Scholarship, 2019).

The phenomenon of voter abstention in the 2024 Bima City Pilkada can be explained through three primary categories, namely technical, ideological, and pragmatic abstention (Yusri & Amrizal, 2019). Technical abstention occurs due to administrative barriers, such as unregistered voters or the absence of voting invitations. Ideological abstention reflects a form of political protest against a system perceived as failing to represent public interests. Pragmatic abstention arises from the belief that an individual vote has limited impact on electoral outcomes. These categories highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of abstention, which requires targeted and contextually appropriate interventions.

The General Elections Commission (KPU), as the electoral management body, holds a strong legal mandate to reduce abstention rates and enhance voter participation. Law No. 10/2016 on Pilkada, specifically Article 84 paragraph (1), requires the KPU to conduct public outreach on electoral stages and procedures in order to improve voter awareness. Article 86 paragraph (1) further mandates collaboration with local governments, civil society organizations, and the media to increase voter participation.

A recurring challenge in Indonesian Pilkada is persistently low voter participation accompanied by high abstention rates. Both the government and the KPU continue to face difficulties in formulating effective measures to reduce abstention in national and local elections. In the context of the Bima City Pilkada held five years earlier, voter participation played a crucial role in conferring legitimacy upon elected regional leaders. Strong participation also reflects democratic maturity at the local level. Therefore, continuous efforts, including improved electoral facilitation, are necessary to strengthen public participation.

In Bima City, abstention rates in previous Pilkada elections indicate a concerning trend. Several contributing factors include insufficient public outreach, distrust toward candidates, limited civic literacy regarding the importance of elections, high mobility among young voters who often reside outside the region on election day, and the presence of residents working abroad. These issues require special attention from the Bima City KPU as the institution responsible for electoral administration.

Table 1. Recapitulation of Vote Counts in the 2018 Bima City Mayoral Election

District	Final Voter List (DPT)	Voters Who Cast Ballots
Asakota	22,653	18,276
Mpunda	21,513	18,311
Raba	26,829	23,266
Rasanae Barat	21,097	17,304
Rasanae Timur	12,861	11,143
Total	104,953	88,300

Source: KPU Bima City (2018).

These data, obtained from an analysis conducted at the Bima City KPU Office, indicate that out of 104,953 registered voters in the 2018 Pilkada, a total of 88,300 voters exercised their voting rights. This figure represents an overall voter turnout rate of 84.13%, which is categorized at the national level as high electoral participation, given that the minimum turnout benchmark established by the Indonesian KPU is 77.5%.

A closer examination of voter turnout across administrative districts reveals significant variation. Raba District recorded the highest turnout, with 23,266 voters out of 26,829 registered voters, while Asakota District had the lowest turnout, with 18,276 voters out of 22,653 registered voters. Although overall turnout in the 2018 Bima City Pilkada can be classified as relatively high, this inter district disparity underscores the need for more context specific outreach strategies and voter segmentation by electoral management bodies, particularly the Bima City KPU.

Several factors contributed to abstention and lower voter participation. Some individuals were unable to vote due to death shortly before election day, while high population mobility, particularly among residents working outside the city, resulted in many voters being absent during the election. In addition, technical issues such as duplicate entries in the Final Voter List (DPT) created administrative problems and reduced public trust in the electoral process (Amahami, 19 May 2025).

To address these challenges, the Bima City KPU implemented a range of strategies aimed at reducing abstention, including face to face outreach, segmented voter education, the use of social media platforms, the installation of electoral information materials, and the involvement of community leaders, religious figures, youth leaders, cultural practitioners, and

Democracy Volunteers. These strategies align with preventive, curative, preservative, and adaptive approaches designed to deliver comprehensive political education, increase public awareness, and expand the dissemination of electoral information. Such collaborative efforts are expected to foster a more participatory, inclusive, and integrity driven electoral environment.

To further reduce abstention, voter outreach must be intensified and strategic communication strengthened, particularly with regard to local elections and the importance of voter participation in ensuring their success. Enhancing public literacy about the electoral process can foster a stronger sense of civic responsibility, positioning community members as active contributors to the successful implementation of regional elections in Bima City.

2. Result

In the implementation of the 2024 Regional Head Election (Pilkada), the Bima City General Elections Commission (KPU) adopted the theme “*Matupa, Mataho Maraso*” as the guiding principle for all stages of the electoral process. This theme functions not only as a slogan but also reflects the broader vision of the Bima City KPU to deliver a high quality local election grounded in the principles of enlightenment, integrity, and transparency within the democratic process.

According to Mr. Suaeb, Chair of the Bima City KPU, the tagline carries profound meaning. *Matupa* signifies an enlightening election that educates not only election organizers but also the electorate. *Mataho* denotes goodness, symbolizing integrity throughout the entire electoral process, while *Maraso* represents cleanliness, embodying a commitment to ensuring elections that are free from fraud or ethical violations. He emphasized that the Pilkada must serve as momentum for producing leaders who are intelligent, capable, ethical, and clean (KPU Bima City, 19 May 2025).

Aligned with this overarching theme, the Bima City KPU formulated a series of outreach strategies to ensure that the Pilkada is not only participatory but also educative. These initiatives aim to reduce abstention rates and enhance public awareness regarding the importance of exercising voting rights. The strategies include direct outreach conducted by the

Bima City KPU and segmented voter education programs tailored to different demographic groups.

Voter Education and Electoral Outreach by the Bima City KPU

In fulfilling its mandate as an election management body, one of the key efforts undertaken by the Bima City General Elections Commission (KPU) to reduce voter abstention (golput) is the implementation of electoral outreach programs. Electoral outreach refers to activities conducted by the KPU to disseminate information regarding the Regional Head Election (Pilkada), including election schedules, polling locations, and voting procedures. The primary objective of these initiatives is to ensure that all segments of society are informed about and understand the electoral process, thereby encouraging citizens to exercise their voting rights.

Based on an interview with Mr. Suaeb, Chair of the Bima City KPU, the main strategy for reducing abstention is the optimization of outreach and voter education programs. He emphasized that prior to the voting stage, grassroots level election organizers were instructed to provide substantive political education. This education is aimed not only at delivering basic information, such as election dates or the number of candidate pairs, but also at fostering political awareness among citizens.

Outreach is positioned as a strategic approach to building political awareness within the community. It is carried out through both direct and indirect methods, including face to face sessions in which KPU officers actively engage with communities through neighborhood forums, door to door outreach, and visits to educational institutions, village activities, community groups, and civic organizations. During these activities, information is delivered directly by commissioners or technical staff and supported by visual materials such as brochures and information boards. According to Ms. Yety Safriaty, Head of the Division for Election Technical Implementation at the Bima City KPU, face to face outreach represents an essential method for improving public understanding of the voting process. Through simulations and on site technical demonstrations, citizens are guided on proper ballot marking procedures, the function of Form

C6, and voter flow at polling stations, thereby preparing them to vote more confidently on election day (KPU Bima City, 20 May 2025).

In addition to face to face outreach, the use of social media and electronic media serves as a crucial strategy for reaching voters more widely and effectively. The KPU utilizes various digital platforms, including its official website (<http://kota-bima.kpu.go.id>), the Facebook page "KPU Kota Bima," the Instagram account @kpukotabima, and the YouTube channel "KPU Kota Bima," as channels for disseminating electoral information. In an interview with Mr. Amirulmukminin, Head of the Division for Voter Education, Community Participation, and Human Resources, social media was identified as an essential tool for delivering political education to the public. Disseminated content includes digital posters, infographics, short videos, and live streamed broadcasts, all uploaded through the official Bima City KPU accounts (KPU Bima City, 19 May 2025).

Furthermore, the installation of Electoral Outreach Media (APS) serves as another strategy to expand the reach of electoral information. Various visual materials, such as banners, billboards, and posters, are placed in strategic locations in both urban centers and peripheral areas to convey messages encouraging voter participation, informing the public about election schedules, and promoting political awareness and neutrality. According to Ms. Yety Safriaty, the placement of APS complies with KPU zoning regulations. She noted that APS distribution is conducted evenly across the city and is integrated with face to face outreach to ensure that messages are effectively received by all community groups.

The involvement of community leaders and religious figures also constitutes a key strategy employed by the Bima City KPU to enhance voter participation and reduce abstention during the 2024 Pilkada. This approach is based on the understanding that such figures possess strong emotional and social proximity to local residents, which increases the credibility and acceptance of the messages they convey. According to Mr. Suaeb, raising public awareness is not solely the responsibility of election organizers but requires collaboration with candidate pairs, political parties, religious leaders, cultural figures, and other relevant stakeholders.

Voter Education Conducted by the Bima City General Election Commission (KPU)

Voter education represents a strategic initiative of the Bima City General Election Commission (KPU) to cultivate an informed, critical, and responsible electorate. Unlike general outreach activities that primarily deliver technical information, voter education emphasizes political awareness and democratic values. To achieve this objective, the KPU employs a segmentation-based approach, targeting first-time voters, young voters, women, persons with disabilities, digital communities, marginalized groups, community leaders, and religious figures.

First-time voters reported substantial benefits from educational activities conducted directly in schools and through simulation-based learning. As expressed by Risty Nafisah, "The voter education provided by the KPU was very helpful, especially for someone like me who is voting for the first time." For young voters, digital content proved particularly effective. According to Rismansyah, "The KPU made extensive use of social media for voter education, and it was highly effective. Short videos and informative posts helped us understand the regional election. Young people felt included and were no longer indifferent."

Women voters also responded positively. Yuli Wahyuningsih stated that forums dedicated to women such as PKK activities and religious study groups were instrumental: "These approaches helped many women understand that their vote is as valuable as men's and should not be underestimated." For persons with disabilities, voter education was facilitated through inclusive media and disability-friendly polling stations. As highlighted by Dedi Pranata, a representative of the disability community, "The KPU did not only provide information but also offered specific educational support for persons with disabilities."

Community leaders likewise played a significant role. Suwardin, one of the local leaders, remarked, "Voter education is most effective when community leaders are involved. The KPU has done this well. We were given clear materials, which we then conveyed to the community."

In addition, the Bima City KPU engaged Democracy Volunteers (Relawan Demokrasi/Relasi) as strategic partners to broaden the reach of voter education. As emphasized by Amirulmukminin, Head of the Division for Voter Education, Community Participation, and Human Resources, "Democracy Volunteers are our partners in disseminating voter education."

They operate directly within communities from Islamic boarding schools, campuses, and schools to youth and women's groups."

Through these comprehensive strategies, the Bima City KPU successfully implemented inclusive voter education and outreach programs, strengthened political literacy, and contributed to reducing abstention rates during the 2024 regional election, thereby fostering a more participatory and integrity-based democratic process.

The Effectiveness of KPU Programs in Increasing Voter Participation in the 2024 Regional Election

The General Election Commission (KPU) of Bima City implemented a series of strategic programs that were found to be effective in increasing public participation in the 2024 regional election. Face-to-face outreach served as one of the core methods because it enabled direct interaction, clear information delivery, and technical simulation of the voting procedures. According to the Chair of KPU Bima City, Suaeb, direct engagement helps build a deeper understanding among voters, while community leader Suwardin emphasized that this method provides space for citizens to ask questions and comprehend the electoral process more thoroughly.

In addition, digital platforms and social media were utilized to reach young voters and internet users. Amirulmukminin, Head of the Division for Voter Education, Community Participation, and Human Resources, highlighted that educational content such as short videos, infographics, and informative posts was highly effective in capturing public attention. This observation is supported by Dinda Febriyanti, an active internet user, who noted that KPU's creative content significantly facilitated the dissemination of election-related information among younger generations.

The installation of election information media (APS) also proved effective, as it delivered visual messages in strategic locations. Yety Safriaty, Head of the Technical Division for Election Administration, explained that APS materials were distributed evenly, including in areas with historically low participation rates. Citizens such as Fitriani acknowledged that the information conveyed through these materials was concise and easy to understand. Another

significant initiative was the involvement of community and religious leaders. Chairperson Suaeb stressed that these figures possess strong moral authority, which helps ensure that educational messages are more readily accepted. Religious leader A. Kisman further asserted that faith-based approaches strengthened voters’ confidence to participate in the election.

KPU also implemented a segmented voter education program targeting eight key groups: first-time voters, youth, women, persons with disabilities, internet users, marginalized communities, community leaders, and religious leaders. According to Amirulmukminin, this segmentation allowed for more precise and contextually tailored dissemination of information. Furthermore, the involvement of Democracy Volunteers (Relasi) expanded the reach of voter education and enhanced communication with local communities.

Overall, these programs were considered effective because they integrated direct, digital, visual, segmented, and participatory approaches through collaboration with influential community figures and volunteer networks. This combination of strategies enabled KPU Bima City not only to increase voter participation but also to strengthen the quality of political awareness during the 2024 regional election.

Table 2. Comparison of Voter Statistics in the 2018 and 2024 Elections

District	Registered Voters (2018)	Valid Voters (2018)	Registered Voters (2024)	Valid Voters (2024)
Asakota	22,653	18,276	25,422	21,332
Mpunda	21,513	18,311	23,965	19,854
Raba	26,829	23,266	29,245	24,760
Rasanae Barat	21,097	17,304	21,523	17,770
Rasanae Timur	12,861	11,143	14,199	12,410
Total	104,953	88,300	114,351	96,126

Source: KPU Bima City (2018 and 2024)

Based on the table above, voter participation in the 2018 and 2024 regional elections shows noteworthy dynamics. In 2018, the Final Voter List (DPT) consisted of 104,953 registered voters, with 88,300 valid voters, equivalent to a participation rate of 84.13%. In 2024, the DPT increased to 114,351, with 96,126 valid voters, resulting in a participation rate of 84.04%.

Despite an absolute increase of 9,398 voters, the percentage rate declined slightly by 0.09%. Nevertheless, this figure remains high, exceeding the national participation benchmark set by KPU RI at 77.5%.

Variations also occurred at the district level. Asakota District, which previously recorded a low participation rate in 2018, experienced a significant improvement in 2024, with valid voters increasing from 18,276 to 21,332 indicating the success of targeted strategies. Conversely, districts such as Mpunda and Rasanae Barat experienced slight declines, though the changes were not substantial. According to Amirulmukminin, despite the minor decrease of 0.09%, Bima City maintained the second-highest participation rate in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), following Dompu. He associated the slight decline with the increased mobility of young people, many of whom pursue education outside the region or work abroad. Similarly, Yety Safriaty explained that several previously low-performing areas showed significant improvement, demonstrating the positive impact of KPU's strategies.

In conclusion, voter participation in the 2024 Bima City regional election remained stable at a high level, despite the absence of significant growth. The ability of KPU to maintain this participation rate underscores the effectiveness of its outreach and education programs, although further evaluation is needed in districts where participation remains stagnant or has declined.

Supporting Factors for Public Participation

The strong institutional commitment of the Bima City General Elections Commission (KPU Kota Bima) constitutes a primary factor in enhancing voter participation. The Chair of KPU Kota Bima, Mr. Suaeb, emphasized that participation should not be assessed solely in numerical terms but also through the quality of citizens' awareness in exercising their voting rights in a rational manner. This commitment is reflected in various innovations, including digital based outreach, the production of educational content, the involvement of Democracy Volunteers (Relawan Demokrasi), field based activities, and targeted visits to traditional communities and peripheral areas. A community member, Mr. Suwardin, acknowledged that information

disseminated through the KPU's social media platforms improved his understanding of the electoral process.

The involvement of community leaders and religious figures serves as another key supporting factor. According to Mr. Suaeb, their engagement carries emotional and cultural significance, as their close proximity to local residents increases acceptance of electoral messages. In an interview with the Head of the Division for Voter Education, Community Participation, and Human Resources of KPU Kota Bima, Mr. Amirulmukminin stated that Democracy Volunteers help extend outreach efforts to hard to reach voter segments, such as women, persons with disabilities, and first time voters. A female Democracy Volunteer, Ms. Suci Ramadani, noted that voter education targeting women is conducted directly to ensure that they understand their strategic role in local elections.

The utilization of social media further broadens access to rapid and interactive information. Ms. Yety Safriaty, Head of the Technical Division for Election Management, highlighted that social media has been particularly effective in reaching younger voters through creative yet educational content. Consistent with this view, Mr. Amirulmukminin observed a positive impact reflected in increasing political awareness among young voters, who have become more proactive in seeking information, engaging in outreach forums, and disseminating electoral messages. A young voter, Mr. Rismansyah, also expressed that voting is now perceived as a civic responsibility that is central to shaping the region's development trajectory.

Overall, the high level of participation in the 2024 Bima City local election was supported by the strong commitment of the KPU to implementing innovative outreach efforts, both face to face and digital, alongside the active involvement of community leaders, religious figures, and Democracy Volunteers who effectively reached diverse voter segments. The strategic use of social media significantly improved access to information, particularly among young voters whose political awareness continues to increase. The synergy between the KPU and community actors has strengthened voter education and sustained voter participation at a consistently high level.

Inhibiting Factors of Public Participation

The level of public participation in the 2024 Bima City regional election continued to be constrained by several key factors. First, low political literacy remained the most significant limitation, as reflected in the limited understanding among citizens regarding electoral stages, candidates' visions and missions, and the distinction between local elections (pilkada) and legislative elections. According to Yety Safriati, Head of the Technical Division for Election Administration, issues related to political literacy are highly complex. She stated, "Many people do not even know the difference between pilkada and legislative elections." Similarly, Rusmadi, a member of the Asakota District Election Committee (PPK), explained, "We often encounter residents who vote simply because their neighbors asked them to, without knowing who the candidates are." This lack of political literacy weakens rational decision making among voters.

Political apathy and disappointment toward previous leaders also contributed to declining participation. Many residents perceived politics as a domain of unfulfilled promises, which fostered distrust toward electoral processes. Amirulmukminin, Head of the Division for Voter Education, Community Participation, and Human Resources, noted that many citizens believed candidates only engaged with the public during campaign periods and became absent afterward. This sentiment was reinforced by PPK Asakota officer Rusmadi, who stated, "People say, why should we vote? Our previous leader produced no results." Such expressions indicate the presence of unresolved political dissatisfaction that discourages electoral engagement.

Another inhibiting factor was limited time availability combined with economic pressure. A portion of the community chose to continue working or trading on election day in order to maintain their daily income. As emphasized by Yety Safriati, many residents prioritized earning a living over voting. She noted, "There are still many who prefer to trade on election day because economic needs come first." A local vendor, Kusniati, similarly shared, "I could not go to the polling station because I had to work. If I close my stall, I lose my income for the day." This economic constraint highlights the need for more flexible and inclusive approaches in planning future election days.

In summary, the factors inhibiting voter participation include low political literacy, political apathy rooted in disappointment with previous leadership, and economic pressures that

limit voter availability. These findings underscore the importance of more targeted political education, deeper and sustained public outreach, and efforts to rebuild public trust in order to ensure stronger voter engagement in future elections.

3. Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Bima City General Elections Commission (KPU Kota Bima) has implemented a set of comprehensive strategies to enhance voter engagement. These strategies include face to face outreach, segmented voter education programs, the utilization of social media and electronic platforms, the installation of informational campaign materials, and the involvement of community leaders, religious figures, and Democracy Volunteers. The use of the tagline “*Matupa Mataho ro Maraso*” symbolizes the institution’s commitment to delivering an electoral process that is participatory and integrity based. These efforts contributed to a voter turnout rate of 84.04 percent in the 2024 local election, although this figure reflects a slight decline compared to the 84.13 percent turnout recorded in 2018.

The primary supporting factors behind this achievement include strong institutional commitment, innovation in outreach methods, the involvement of socially influential community figures, the active role of Democracy Volunteers, and increasing political awareness among young and first time voters. However, the study also identifies several persistent challenges, including low levels of political literacy among certain segments of the population, political apathy resulting from dissatisfaction with previous leadership, limited time availability and economic pressures that lead some citizens to forgo voting, and the high mobility of young voters residing outside the region.

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