

Inclusive Political Education for Persons with Disabilities as an Effort to Increase Voter Participation

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Abstract

The political participation of persons with disabilities is one of the key indicators of achieving an inclusive democracy. During the 2024 General Election in Central Java Province, data from the Central Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU) indicated that 187,501 voters with disabilities were registered in the Permanent Voter List (Daftar Pemilih Tetap/DPT). To enhance political participation and ensure the fulfillment of the political rights of voters with disabilities, the Central Java Provincial KPU implemented various initiatives, including political education, electoral socialization, and improvements in the accessibility of electoral services. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The findings reveal that inclusive political education plays a significant role in enhancing political awareness, improving understanding of voting rights, and strengthening the confidence of persons with disabilities to participate actively in the democratic process. The study concludes that sustainable inclusive political education is essential as part of strengthening civic education and promoting inclusive democracy for persons with disabilities, ensuring that their political participation improves not only quantitatively but also qualitatively within democratic life.

Keywords: inclusive political education; persons with disabilities; inclusive democracy.

Introduction

Democracy is fundamentally concerned with the state's ability to place all citizens in an equal position to participate in political and governmental life. Within modern democratic systems, political participation is regarded as a fundamental element that determines both the legitimacy of political authority and the quality of governance. Democracy should not merely be understood as a mechanism for the peaceful transfer of power through general elections, but also as a system that guarantees the fair and equal participation of all citizens in public decision-making processes. Consequently, the success of democracy depends largely on the state's capacity to create an inclusive political space that enables every segment of society to participate without discrimination based on social status, economic background, gender, or

physical and mental conditions. One of the primary indicators of democratic quality is the extent to which the state guarantees equal political participation for all citizens without discrimination, including vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities. In this context, the protection and fulfillment of the political rights of persons with disabilities constitute an essential component of achieving an inclusive and equitable democracy (Dahl, 2006).

From the perspective of participatory democracy, every citizen possesses an equal right to engage in political processes as an expression of popular sovereignty. Carole Pateman argues that political participation serves not only as a procedural instrument of democracy but also as an educational process that cultivates political awareness and civic

responsibility (Pateman, 1970). Accordingly, the political participation of persons with disabilities should not be viewed as an act of social charity but rather as a constitutional right inherently possessed by every citizen. Persons with disabilities hold an equal position within the democratic system and are entitled to equal opportunities to express their political aspirations, make political choices, and actively participate in public affairs. Nevertheless, in practice, persons with disabilities continue to experience political marginalization due to various social and structural barriers. They frequently encounter limited access to political information, inadequate accessibility to public spaces, and insufficient involvement in decision-making processes. These conditions prevent persons with disabilities from fully exercising their citizenship rights. A high-quality democracy should establish an inclusive political system that respects the diversity of its citizens. In this regard, the political exclusion of persons with disabilities indicates that democracy has not yet been fully realized in its substantive sense, as certain segments of society still lack equal access to political opportunities and participation.

The political rights of persons with disabilities have been normatively guaranteed through various national and international legal instruments. At the international level, the United Nations, through the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), affirms that persons with disabilities have the right to participate fully and effectively in political and public life without discrimination. The Convention recognizes persons with disabilities as holders of human rights who possess equal status with all other citizens. The principles of non-discrimination, accessibility, equality of opportunity, and full participation constitute the fundamental basis for protecting the political rights of persons with disabilities in many countries, including Indonesia. The adoption of the CRPD also signifies a paradigm shift from a charity-based approach toward a rights-based approach in addressing disability issues.

In Indonesia, the protection of the political rights of persons with disabilities is

regulated through several national legal frameworks. Law Number 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities stipulates that persons with disabilities have the right to be free from discrimination, the right to accessibility, and the right to participate in political and governmental affairs. Furthermore, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections guarantees equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to vote, to be elected, and to participate in electoral administration. These legal provisions demonstrate the constitutional obligation of the state to ensure that every stage of the electoral process is equally accessible to citizens with disabilities (Lord & Stein, 2008).

The existence of these legal guarantees demonstrates that protecting the political rights of persons with disabilities is not merely an administrative obligation but also an essential manifestation of respect for human rights and the principle of political equality. From the perspective of political equality, every citizen possesses equal rights and opportunities to influence political processes without discriminatory treatment (Dahl, 2006). Consequently, the state bears the responsibility to eliminate barriers that restrict the political participation of persons with disabilities, including physical, social, communicative, and institutional obstacles. Political equality cannot be achieved solely through legal recognition; rather, it must be realized through genuinely inclusive democratic practices.

Beyond the regulatory dimension, the fulfillment of the political rights of persons with disabilities is closely associated with the development of a democratic culture that values diversity and inclusiveness. Inclusive democracy requires recognition of differences and respect for the right of every citizen to participate in public life. Within this framework, persons with disabilities should not be regarded as individuals dependent upon social charity but as citizens possessing equal rights, capacities, and political potential. Therefore, strengthening inclusive democracy requires a transformation in societal perspectives on disability, shifting from an approach centered on limitations toward one

that recognizes persons with disabilities as active agents in democratic development.

Accordingly, the fulfillment of the political rights of persons with disabilities constitutes an essential element in strengthening the quality of democracy in Indonesia. Inclusive democracy can only be realized when all citizens, including persons with disabilities, enjoy equal access, opportunities, and treatment in political life. Legal guarantees protecting the political rights of persons with disabilities must therefore be accompanied by strengthened democratic awareness, respect for human rights, and the development of an accessible and non-discriminatory political system. In this context, the political participation of persons with disabilities serves not only as an indicator of procedural democratic success but also as a reflection of the state's commitment to achieving substantive democracy grounded in social justice.

During the implementation of the 2024 General Election in Central Java Province, the political participation of persons with disabilities remained suboptimal. According to data from the Central Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU), a total of 187,501 voters with disabilities were registered in the Permanent Voter List (Daftar Pemilih Tetap—DPT). These comprised 80,258 voters with physical disabilities, 10,398 with intellectual disabilities, 44,851 with mental disabilities, 21,051 with speech impairments, 10,087 with hearing impairments, and 20,856 with visual impairments. These voters were distributed across all 35 regencies and municipalities in Central Java Province.

Pursuant to Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, the General Election Commission (KPU), as the official electoral management body, is mandated to provide political education for voters. During the 2024 General Election in Central Java, the KPU implemented various voter education and electoral socialization programs. Furthermore, General Election Commission Regulation (PKPU) Number 9 of 2022 concerning Public Participation in General Elections and the

Elections of Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Deputy Regents, and Mayors and Deputy Mayors stipulates that voter education should enhance public knowledge, understanding, awareness, and participation in electoral processes. The regulation emphasizes that voter education must reach all segments of society, including vulnerable and marginalized groups such as persons with disabilities, through accessible, participatory, and non-discriminatory approaches. This policy reflects the state's normative commitment to promoting the political participation of persons with disabilities within democratic life. Inclusive political education should not merely function as a formal component of electoral programs but should instead become an integral part of the continuous empowerment of citizens. From the perspective of civic education, political education plays a strategic role in developing citizens' civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions, thereby enabling them to participate actively in democratic life (Branson, 1999; Lickona, 1991). Consequently, political education for persons with disabilities should be designed according to their specific needs through participatory, accessible, and rights-based approaches. Thus, improvements in the political participation of persons with disabilities should not be measured solely by voter turnout but also by enhanced political awareness, a deeper understanding of democratic processes, and greater confidence to participate actively in public affairs and political decision-making.

Previous studies have primarily focused on electoral accessibility and the fulfillment of voting rights for persons with disabilities. However, research examining inclusive political education as a sustainable civic education strategy for strengthening the quality of political participation among persons with disabilities remains relatively limited. Therefore, this study seeks to address this research gap by analyzing the implementation of inclusive political education for persons with disabilities during the 2024 General Election in Central Java Province as part of strengthening inclusive democracy and civic education.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study is significant because it examines how inclusive political education influences the political participation of voters with disabilities. The research not only investigates the quantitative level of electoral participation among persons with disabilities but also analyzes how political education, electoral socialization, and accessible electoral services were implemented by the General Election Commission (KPU) to support the fulfillment of their political rights. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute both academically and practically to the advancement of inclusive democracy and to the development of a more accessible, participatory, and sustainable model of political education for persons with disabilities.

Literature Review

One of the most important strategies for enhancing the political participation of persons with disabilities is through inclusive political education. Political education plays a strategic role in developing citizens' awareness of their rights, responsibilities, and obligations within democratic life. In the context of a democratic state, political education should not be understood merely as the dissemination of information regarding electoral procedures or voting mechanisms. Rather, it should be viewed as a process of cultivating citizens' critical awareness, enabling them to understand the political system, evaluate public policies, and actively participate in social and governmental affairs. Political education thus serves as an essential instrument for fostering a democratic society whose citizens embrace the values of freedom, equality, justice, and public participation. From the perspective of civic education, political education constitutes a fundamental means of developing democratic citizens equipped with civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions (Winataputra, 2020).

The concept of civic education is theoretically rooted in the ideas of John Dewey, who viewed education as a process through which citizens acquire democratic experiences. Dewey argued that democracy should not merely be understood as a system

of government but also as a way of life that must be learned through social experience and active participation in community life (Dewey, 1916). According to Dewey, education should cultivate citizens who are critical, rational, and capable of participating responsibly in public affairs. Democratic education must therefore provide opportunities for meaningful social experiences through which individuals learn cooperation, tolerance, communication, and collective decision-making.

Dewey's perspective positions education as the principal instrument for building a democratic society. Democracy cannot develop substantively unless citizens acquire participatory experiences within social life. Consequently, political education should be implemented through dialogical, participatory, and experience-based approaches that reflect real societal conditions. In the context of persons with disabilities, Dewey's approach emphasizes the importance of directly involving individuals with disabilities in political education, public discussions, democratic simulations, and other inclusive spaces for civic participation. Persons with disabilities should not merely serve as passive recipients of political information; rather, they should be provided with opportunities to experience democratic processes firsthand as an integral component of citizenship education.

In addition to Dewey's contributions, the concept of civic education is further strengthened by the work of Thomas Lickona, who emphasizes the importance of developing civic character through three fundamental components: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic disposition. According to Lickona, citizenship education is intended not only to develop intellectually competent citizens but also to cultivate moral character and social responsibility within democratic life (Lickona, 1991). Civic knowledge encompasses citizens' understanding of the political system, legal framework, constitutional rights, and democratic values. Civic skills refer to the ability to think critically, express opinions, solve problems, and participate effectively in public life. Meanwhile, civic disposition relates to the development of democratic

attitudes, respect for the rights of others, tolerance, and commitment to the common good.

Lickona's perspective underscores that political education should not focus exclusively on cognitive development but must also foster democratic attitudes and civic character. In the context of persons with disabilities, inclusive political education should strengthen self-confidence, independence, and the awareness that they possess the same rights and capacities as other citizens in political life. Political education that merely provides information about electoral procedures without fostering participatory awareness will result in political engagement that is purely formalistic. Therefore, inclusive political education should be directed toward developing active, critical, and politically empowered citizens with disabilities who possess the confidence to articulate and advocate for their political aspirations.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of inclusive political education for persons with disabilities during the 2024 General Election in Central Java Province. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. The informants consisted of officials of the Central Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU) who were responsible for voter outreach, voter education, and public participation. Secondary data were obtained from electoral regulations, official reports, and various documents related to the administration of the 2024 General Election. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis, while data credibility was established through source triangulation by comparing interview findings with official documents and other relevant documentary evidence.

A qualitative approach was selected because this study seeks to develop a comprehensive understanding of the

phenomenon of inclusive political education for persons with disabilities within the context of the implementation of the 2024 General Election in Central Java Province. In addition, the study aims to examine how inclusive political education was implemented by various stakeholders, including the General Election Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), political parties, and civil society organizations, in promoting the political participation of voters with disabilities. The descriptive method was employed to systematically describe the implementation of political education, electoral socialization, the accessibility of electoral services, and the political participation of persons with disabilities throughout the electoral process. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the social realities, lived experiences, and barriers encountered by persons with disabilities in exercising their political rights (Moleong, 2018).

In this study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument. The researcher was directly involved in all stages of the research process, including data collection through interviews and document review, data interpretation, and the formulation of the study's conclusions.

Result and Discussion

The findings indicate that the Central Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU) implemented various electoral outreach and voter education programs for persons with disabilities to enhance their political participation in the 2024 General Election. These programs emphasized the principle of inclusivity and aimed to improve knowledge of political rights, understanding of electoral processes, and awareness of the importance of exercising the right to vote. Nevertheless, their implementation remained largely focused on disseminating technical electoral information and was concentrated around the election period. This condition suggests that the political education provided has not yet fully developed into a systematic and sustainable civic education process. Therefore, the

existence of these programs cannot automatically be regarded as an indicator of success; instead, their effectiveness must be evaluated based on program coverage, material accessibility, program continuity, and their influence on the political knowledge, awareness, and participation of persons with disabilities. According to an official of the Central Java Provincial KPU, numerous voter education and electoral outreach activities targeting persons with disabilities had been conducted; however, the majority of these initiatives were concentrated during the period immediately preceding the electoral stages.

One of the principal initiatives in inclusive political education was implemented through the "KPU Goes to Public" program. The first activity was held on 9 June 2022 at the Central Java Provincial KPU Office as part of a voter education program targeting first-time voters. Although the program focused on first-time voters, women, and persons with disabilities, it represented an important initial step toward establishing a more inclusive voter education framework in preparation for the 2024 General Election. From the perspective of political education, this initiative played a significant role in expanding public knowledge of democracy and electoral processes from an early stage, including among persons with disabilities. Continuous political education is considered essential for enhancing political awareness and increasing citizens' participation in democratic life.

The second activity took place on 7 September 2022 at the Gisikdrono Village Hall, West Semarang District, specifically targeting voters with disabilities. This program emphasized the importance of the voices of persons with disabilities in determining the future of the nation and the state. It underscored that every vote carries equal value in a democratic system, including the votes of persons with disabilities. Such an affirmation represents a crucial element in strengthening the political self-confidence of persons with disabilities, enabling them to recognize their equal position within democratic society rather than perceiving themselves as marginalized participants in political processes. Political education delivered through direct engagement with disability communities reflects a

community-based approach to fostering political awareness. This approach is particularly important because persons with disabilities often have communication needs and learning methods that differ from those of the general population. Therefore, inclusive political education should adopt participatory, communicative, and accessibility-oriented approaches that accommodate the diverse needs of disability communities.

The third initiative was conducted on 10 May 2023, specifically targeting voters with disabilities through an online platform. The implementation of this virtual activity demonstrated an adaptation of political education methods to reach a broader range of persons with disabilities who may experience different conditions and mobility limitations. The program also involved organizations representing persons with disabilities in the political education process. The participation of disability organizations indicates that inclusive political education was not implemented solely through a top-down approach by electoral management bodies but also involved disability communities as strategic partners in strengthening public political awareness. Such a participatory approach is essential because it enables persons with disabilities not only to receive political information but also to become active participants who share their experiences, needs, and political aspirations within democratic spaces.

In addition to voter education and electoral outreach programs, efforts to strengthen the political participation of persons with disabilities were reinforced through regulatory measures and technical policies governing the administration of the 2024 General Election. This demonstrates that the protection of the political rights of persons with disabilities was pursued not only through educational approaches but also through strengthening electoral systems and governance to become more accessible and inclusive.

The General Election Commission issued General Election Commission Decision (Keputusan KPU) Number 66 of 2024

concerning Technical Guidelines for Voting and Vote Counting in General Elections. According to an official of the Central Java Provincial KPU, this regulation represents a concrete commitment by the electoral management body to ensuring the availability of disability-friendly services during the voting process at polling stations (Tempat Pemungutan Suara—TPS). The regulation provides detailed technical guidance regarding services for voters with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and physical disabilities, covering communication procedures, assistance mechanisms, priority services, and the provision of assistive devices during voting. These technical provisions demonstrate that accessibility has become an essential component of election administration based on the principles of equality and respect for human rights.

The regulation further stipulates that voters with disabilities are entitled to receive assistance and services tailored to their individual needs. For voters with visual impairments, Polling Station Working Committee (Kelompok Penyelenggara Pemungutan Suara—KPPS) members are required to provide services using communication approaches that are respectful and easy to understand. For example, KPPS officers are instructed to gently touch the voter's shoulder or hand when initiating communication, guide the voter to a seat, and explain the location of objects using the clock-face orientation method to facilitate spatial understanding. These provisions demonstrate careful consideration of the communication and orientation needs of voters with visual impairments, enabling them to exercise their voting rights more independently and comfortably.

Furthermore, the regulation stipulates that voters with visual impairments participating in both the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Election and the Regional Representative Council (DPD) Election may use Braille voting templates provided at polling stations. The provision of these assistive devices constitutes a significant component of electoral accessibility because it enables voters with visual impairments to cast their ballots

more independently without relying entirely on accompanying assistants. The availability of such facilities also reflects efforts to safeguard the principles of ballot secrecy and voter independence in exercising political rights.

For voters with hearing impairments, the regulation establishes communication procedures that KPPS officers must follow to ensure effective service delivery. Officers are instructed to attract the voter's attention politely—for example, by waving a hand or gently tapping the shoulder—and then communicate slowly with clear lip movements to facilitate understanding. In situations where officers are unable to understand the sign language used by the voter, they are permitted to seek assistance from another KPPS member or an individual capable of interpreting sign language. These provisions indicate that communication accessibility constitutes an essential aspect of protecting the political rights of voters with hearing impairments.

For voters with physical disabilities, the regulation also provides detailed technical guidance concerning services and mobility assistance for wheelchair users and individuals with other mobility limitations. KPPS officers are instructed to first ask whether the voter requires assistance during the voting process or while moving to the polling station. Officers are also encouraged to adjust their body position when communicating with wheelchair users to ensure face-to-face interaction on an equal level. These provisions demonstrate careful attention to the comfort, safety, and dignity of persons with disabilities throughout the voting process.

In addition to regulating communication and mobility services, the regulation also establishes procedures for assisting voters with disabilities who experience difficulties in casting their ballots independently. Under these provisions, voters with disabilities may be assisted either by KPPS members or by another individual trusted by the voter, upon the voter's request. For voters who remain capable of marking the ballot independently, assistants are only permitted to guide them to the voting booth, while the act of voting itself

must be performed independently by the voter. However, when a voter is unable to cast a ballot independently, the assistant may mark the ballot according to the explicit instructions of the voter. The regulation further requires assistants to maintain the confidentiality of the voter's political choice and to sign an official assistance form. These provisions demonstrate that services for persons with disabilities remain firmly grounded in the fundamental electoral principles of direct, universal, free, secret, honest, and fair elections. Accordingly, the provision of assistance does not diminish the political independence or freedom of voters with disabilities in determining their electoral choices.

The various political education and electoral outreach initiatives implemented by the Central Java Provincial KPU demonstrate sustained efforts to strengthen the political engagement of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. Through voter education programs, the KPU Goes to Public initiative, disability-specific outreach activities, and efforts to enhance public understanding of political rights and inclusive democracy, the KPU has sought to foster political awareness among persons with disabilities as citizens possessing equal political rights. Furthermore, the strengthening of the regulatory framework through General Election Commission Decision Number 66 of 2024 reflects a strong institutional commitment to providing more accessible and disability-friendly electoral services at polling stations. The regulation not only governs the administrative aspects of voting procedures but also establishes comprehensive technical guidelines concerning communication services, voter assistance, Braille voting templates, priority services, and the protection of the independence and secrecy of the political choices of persons with disabilities.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that political education for persons with disabilities continues to be largely short-term in orientation and concentrated around the electoral cycle. Similarly, accessibility regulations remain primarily focused on technical services provided during voting activities at polling stations. These findings

suggest that current approaches remain largely confined to the procedural dimensions of electoral administration and have not yet fully evolved into sustained efforts to strengthen democratic citizenship. Therefore, a transformation toward continuous inclusive political education is required—one that extends beyond electoral moments and is institutionalized as an integral component of civic education for persons with disabilities.

Sustainable inclusive political education should be implemented collaboratively by electoral management bodies, organizations of persons with disabilities, educational institutions, and civil society organizations through continuous citizenship education programs that extend beyond the core stages of the electoral process.

Such a sustainable model of inclusive political education is essential for developing civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions, thereby enabling persons with disabilities not merely to participate as voters during elections but also to become active, critical, and engaged citizens who contribute meaningfully to democratic life in its broader sense.

Conclusion

The various voter education initiatives and efforts to strengthen accessibility regulations implemented by the Central Java Provincial General Election Commission (KPU) demonstrate a commitment to promoting a more inclusive democracy for persons with disabilities. An inclusive democracy is determined not only by the procedural conduct of elections but also by the extent to which all citizens, including persons with disabilities, are provided with genuine opportunities to exercise their political rights freely, independently, and with dignity. Inclusive political education and accessible electoral services constitute two interrelated components that play a crucial role in enhancing the political participation of persons with disabilities, both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study indicate that, in practice, political education for persons with disabilities is still predominantly implemented in the form of short-term electoral outreach activities that are closely tied to the electoral cycle. Similarly, accessibility regulations remain largely focused on technical services provided at polling stations. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of sustainable inclusive political education as an integral component of strengthening civic education and advancing inclusive democracy for persons with disabilities.

Accordingly, this study affirms that improving the quality of political participation among persons with disabilities requires synergy between inclusive political education, strengthened regulatory frameworks, and the provision of accessible electoral services. These efforts should be implemented continuously rather than being limited solely to the core stages of the electoral process. Ultimately, a high-quality democracy can only be achieved when all citizens, including persons with disabilities, are afforded equal recognition, access, and opportunities to participate actively in political processes and public decision-making.

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