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## The Forming of First-time Voters' Political Preference in Indonesia

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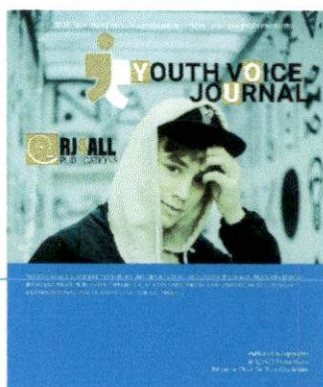
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## The Forming of First-time Voters' Political Preference in Indonesia.



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### **Abstract**

This paper aims to examine the dynamics of first-time voters in shaping their political preferences as they are recognizing as the new segment in the political field.

Based on qualitative research was conducted in Makassar, Indonesia, this work examines the issue of first-time voters by looking at how they shape their political preferences and how it will affect their potential form of political behaviour later. Through in-depth interviews, forty-five students who are come from different high schools that categorized as first-time voters were recognized dominantly influencing by their parent's preferences.

This study found three important sources as the forming factor of the first-time voter political preference. If previously, their preferences were assumed to be close and dominate by their parents, this paper shows that parents are seen no longer as the most dominant factor. It is because there are two sources which are the school activities and social media coming also as the important ones. Both of them has its unique aspect that could be utilized by the first-time voters to improve their political preferences. It is occurring based on the opportunity provided as well as the potential possibilities for increasing their political knowledge comfortability.

Two sources, the school activities provided basic things and a few simple political practices while social media provides various information and virtual activities that importantly could increase the first-time voter's political preferences where at the end will contribute to their political behaviour form.

**Keywords:** First-Time Voters, Parents, Political Preference, Social Media, Civic Education

## Introduction

As a country that adheres to a democratic system in which the community plays an important role, Indonesia always strives to ensure that the principle associated with the importance of people's sovereignty is properly implemented. This is related to the mandate of the Indonesian constitution in chapter one Paragraph two, which stated the importance of a government based on the people's sovereignty. Therefore, the government is expected to always strive to realize the people's desires, one of which is active participation in the political space, including elections.

Furthermore, elections are an important event in a democratic system and an avenue for society to determine the right and most desirable candidate to occupy relevant political positions in the government, which is expected to affect people's lives in the future (e.g Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2008). Substantively, the right candidates need to be selected based on the objectives of holding the elections. Therefore, society as a determinant need to actively participate in elections and have a good understanding and knowledge of the factors that need to be considered when selecting a candidate.

Conversely, community involvement in elections is truly based on independent and rational attitudes in considering various aspects before making a choice. This means that the voters are expected to have a good understanding and preferences for politics and various aspects related to elections (e.g IDEA 1999). These various attributes led to the observations of the first-time voters' segment as part of the society eligible to vote for the first time.

As part of society that has just exercised its voting rights because they have reached the formal requirements stipulated by law, first-time voters are often perceived as vulnerable in their understanding of the dynamics of political developments. This condition causes society to regard them as a segment of voters that are still less independent because of their instability in making adequate preferences. Furthermore, their involvement in politics, including general elections, especially on the level of knowledge and political preferences, is considered to be dependent on their parents (e.g Zukin et.al, 2006) Initially, the first-time voters' segment was regarded to be more predictable in their political attitudes, because their preferences tend to be similar or reflect their families or parents' choices. In this case, they are the main sources of reference in shaping their political preferences. Therefore, first-time voters are often regarded as a representation of their parents' political behavior.



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Based on the qualitative research carried out on the first-time voters' segment in Makassar, Indonesia, all informants were interviewed through an in-depth interview process. There were 45 students as informants from nine senior high schools from various public and private schools in Makassar. All informants are students who involve in the student organization in their school. The interview was using a list of question as a guideline during the interview process.

Based on that research, there is a tendency that parents are not the main source of information in shaping the political preferences of first-time voters. This is because the voters' segment has also discovered other sources of information besides their parents (Ohme 2019; Ekstrom and Ostman 2013; Pasek et.al 2006). Moreover, two factors that seem to create room for the formation of basic preferences for first-time voters are school activities and social media.

### **First-time Voters and the Importance of Political Preference**

As a constituent of society, first-time voters' involvement is also relevant in democratic events such as elections. This contradicts the general trend in which young people belonging to the first-time voters' segment are perceived to be less involved in conventional politics (Noris, 2003). However, this segment actively participates in demonstration and other non-conventional activities (Noris, 2003). Irrespective of the fact that they are young, they are perceived as being unable to understand politics, and their participation is important for the realization of the people's sovereignty. In Indonesia, besides fact that this is guaranteed by law, their number is extremely relevant. Based on the data obtained in 2019, a total of 5,035,887 individuals spread across various regions in the country were categorized under the first-time voters' segment (Andayani, 2019). In Makassar city, 42,460 young persons out of relatively 901,087 voters have the right to vote in the regional head elections held in 2020 (Ardiansyah, 2020).

Based on this figure, first-time voters have considerable potentials in determining election results. Therefore, their participation is important to ensure their rights are accommodated in democratic events as required by candidates in need of support to win the elections. In addition, the involvement of new voters needs to be based on appropriate political awareness to ensure that their involvement contributes significantly to the democratic process and not as a segment that is assumed to strongly associate with adult voters' influence, such as parents (e.g Yustiningrum and Ichwanuddin,

2015). Therefore, to ensure proper involvement, these first-time voters are expected to make appropriate preferences that serve as the basis for their political attitudes regardless of whether it is similar to their parents. Based on the fact that preference is an important aspect that influences a person's political behavior, including first-time voters, it is necessary to understand the formation process and its potential effect.

### **Parents as an influencer of First-time Voters political preferences**

First-time voters' participation is an important factor in a democratic system, including in Makassar City. One interesting aspect of this segment is related to the effort to understand the reasons parents are an important factor that affects their political preferences. However, their participation is often not perceived as a form of segmentation that shows a fundamentally different trend. The existing assumptions indicate that their preferences are related to the political orientation of their parents (Boonen, 2015; Coffé and Voorpostel, 2010; Zukin et.al, 2006). First-time voters in Makassar realized that they had no previous experience participating in practical political activities such as elections. This makes them feel they need trustworthy information or input. This leads them to their parents as a trusted source of information and becomes one of the most critical factors that form the basis of their understanding in the early period of their desire to participate in the electoral process. Considering the necessity to choose from a variety of existing candidates, these novice voters also need reinforcement. Based on the fact that their parents are believed to be more experienced because they have participated in the electoral processes several times, first-time voters are therefore right in acquiring this information from them. This is even stronger when their parents are related or affiliated with political institutions, thereby causing them to be sufficiently knowledgeable about political dynamics and the various possibilities around them.

The tendency of acquiring knowledge regarding early political dynamics through their parents becomes the basis for developing a certain identity for first-time voters (Meyer et.al, 2019; McDevitt and Spiro, 2014). However, this has an impact on the political orientation of first-time voters. This condition seems to be possible because it is related to the learning process adopted in their social environment, including the recognition of some initial political factors. This condition is particularly possible for the first-time voters in Makassar that have parents with fairly good political understand-



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ing. In addition, this generally creates an avenue for open discussion between parents and their children. Parents' political attitudes and understanding are transferred to first-time voters, especially issues concerning politics and the manner it needs to be addressed.

Based on these conditions, first-time voters in Makassar generally tend to be passive learners that receive only one-way information. Their parents occupy the dominant position because the avenue for open discussion does not place both parties equally in the learning process. This is closely related to the general opinion that first-time voters see their parents as people that are knowledgeable about politics and have lots of experiences (e.g Serek et.al, 2012). In this relationship pattern, first-time voters are regarded as an extension or an object of their parents' political orientation. Moreover, in this circumstance, the first-timers are not perceived as people that need to acquire a variety of information from trusted parents, which in turn enables new voters to independently foster their political interest and attitudes through their perceived preferences according to their wishes.

According to them, parents' dominant position towards their political tendencies is inseparable from societal values. In the Makassar and the Bugis ethnic group tradition, which is the background of these first-time voters, parents are perceived as an entity that has authority over their children (Musi and Syamsuardi, 2017; Lineton, 1975). As children, they are even considered as valuable assets of their parents (e.g Idrus and Sukirman, 2018). Therefore, parents have the social tendency to direct their children in certain circumstances, including politics, which is considered normal in the relationship between them. Socially, parents are highly respected by their children. This is because they are believed to be good entities and are always expected to properly direct their children to improve their living conditions, including their political attitudes. Consequently, parental directive related to politics needs to be embraced by new voters as being morally right. The children's acceptance of information and parental political tendencies within the dominated interaction framework is often associated with efforts as well as polite behavior in daily life interactions with their parents. Besides, the parental directive is an indisputable condition considered as being morally right and needs to be adopted by the children.

Therefore, the situation in which children embrace their parents' political orientation as a result of their discussion is perceived as an attempt to respect them because they are trying to improve their living conditions. Moreover, it is paramount for children to obey their parents, respect the



values of decency and social ethics because morally, these attitudes are for the child's good. This parental directive becomes a form of kindness that needs to be embraced for their good. Conversely, ignoring directives from parents is regarded as disrespectful and perceived as a form of resistance to parental authority, which is a potential disruption of the social order and the relationship between them. In this context, the inculcation of parental political orientation in new voters is perceived as normal.

This obedience is the reason behind the tendency of the political attitudes of first-time voters. The development of political preferences for first-time voters is perceived under the framework of their obedience to their parents based on cultural values, and this is regarded as something appropriate. However, assuming first-time voters show similar political attitudes with their parents, this is due to the construction of social values and not as a rational consideration of various information simultaneously obtained by them.

These various conditions gave birth to the general assumptions regarding the similarities in both first-time voters and their parents' political behaviours (Kim and Lim, 2019; Kudrnáč and Lyons, 2017; Quintelier, 2013). It causes a tendency that this voters' segment to be under-worked and receive less attention from the candidates. Politicians tend to see this segment does not need to receive special treatment to win their support because this is also realized through an approach to adult voters, in this case, the parents. It means, they only need to influence the parents successfully, and automatically will get the support of these first-time voters. This is assumed to be related to social values' influence on children's compliance with their parents (e.g Lestari et.al, 2010). Irrespective of the fact that the parents play an essential role, it seems that in general there is a tendency for a change in which the political orientation of their parents no longer dominates first-time voters. Even though parents did not attend, first-time voters in the city of Makassar showed signs of this shift. This certainly raises the question of this shift's possible occurrence, despite being closely related to the values of politeness and respect for parents, which are considered socially important.

Based on the results of previous studies, it is presumed that parents still play a role, especially those from families that possess good political understanding. However, the shift occurred because parents were no longer the only and most dominant source of first-time voters' political preferences. This condition is not only because some parents lack a good understanding of politics or have suffi-

ciently intense political dynamics interactions. It is also applicable to those with good political understanding. This is because new voters tend to find other sources of information to learn political issues without relying on their parents.

### **School as Other Room for Political Touched**

The discussion about politics for first-time voters seems to show a condition where parents no longer occupy a dominant position (e.g Šerek & Umemura, 2015). Although society is still aware of the importance of the role of parents, this research shows that the avenue for political discussion has been transformed from a space that parents originally dominated to various sources of information for new voters. One of the sources that turned out to be important for first-time voters is related to their initial introduction and understanding of politics obtained from the activities carried out at school.

The learning processes in schools helped these first-time voters discover a meeting room with an initial political understanding through the Citizenship Education subject. In this research, first-time voters that were indeed high school students showed the importance of this lesson which helped provide information for developing an initial understanding of politics.

Based on these lessons, they tend to at least gain an initial understanding of the conception of rights and obligations of a particular community, which is an important aspect in shaping one's political awareness. This led to their initial understanding of their position as citizens and the importance of their role in maintaining the existence of the state. In addition, they started to realize that their position as well as that of other people, including adults, in this case, their parents are equal. This also led to the initial understanding that the political arena concerning the existence of citizens does not only belong to adults rather it is also their space as citizens. Therefore, politics is a space that needs to place them on an equal footing with adults.

Civic education has opened the door for them where their presence is regarded as important as those in the political dynamics. This is an important source for new voters to be recognized as part of the entire political dynamic at the local and national levels, which was initially considered the



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space belonging to adults or their parents. This awareness becomes the starting point for them to interact with other people to practice their involvement in student organizations.

These first-time voters have room to practice their understanding of politics in the student organizations, even though it is still simple. However, their involvement as administrators and members of the organization helps them to exhibit their responsibilities and roles in a particular community where mostly their peers. This creates an opportunity for them to be able to explore their position in society and their ability to maintain and realize the goals of their community. This becomes a practice space that is a miniature of life as a citizen, where they feel comfortable due to most of the community are their peers.

Through this organization, they practice various schemes that are also reflected in the state's practical political activities. Under this organization, a few practical political activities held in student organizations such as the election of a chairperson, getting involved in the policy processes, including the responsibilities that need to be carried out to maintain the existence of the group, they can understand the importance of their position in the political dynamics of the society.

Generally, student organizations have just created a simple avenue that is not yet as complex as the political space. However, the effects of their participation in school organizations are in the context of friendship and social interpretation among the organizational community. First-time voters are starting to realize their role in determining an election's outcome as a consideration for their involvement. In this context, an initial awareness is the consequences of first-time voters' choice. However, because their choice's risk has an insignificant effect on the context of their interests as actors involved in politics, their attitudes are based on simple considerations of friendship and social closeness that do not require complex political preferences. Furthermore, they have personally understood the causal aspects of their position and citizens' involvement in the system. This is the initial basis that leads to the curiosity of a wider political space in society.

A fairly good initial understanding and information about politics fosters independence. This encourages them to discover more information from the sources around them. This situation paves the way for further interaction with other sources of political information. The current condition involves the development of information technology also offers various ways to acquire information about politics, including social media.

### **Social Media as Source and the Availability of Equal Space**

The initial awareness that first-time voters have of their position has encouraged them to acquire information to strengthen their political preferences actively. This awareness led the voters to move away from the tendency of dominating relationships with their parents. This caused them to sought more flexible spaces that created an avenue for them to discuss equally as citizens. This is because first-time voters independently realized various information to help their basic understanding of politics through various activities at school. Moreover, they no longer depend only on their parents. They attempt to discover information to develop their initial understanding. This desire is met with social media development, which is driven by the information technology around them.

This led to massive alternative sources of information for first-time voters. They believe that the media helps them to be regarded as equals in the political environment. This is one of the reasons technological developments drive the utilization of social media, which is a source of information that is massively used by the novice voters' segment.

In its development, social media is one of the important choices made by first-time voters in seeking information (Ohme et.al 2017; Šerek & Umemura 2015; Pasek 2006). It is easier for them to acquire information regarding political dynamics daily. Subsequently, first-time voters regard social media as a broad avenue for accessing information. They tend to use it to develop their knowledge of politics. Besides, social media also creates a space that places the people involved in an equal condition without anyone being dominant, which leads to inferiority. Therefore, first-time voters explore various thoughts and understandings without feeling dominated by certain political attitudes when dealing with their parents. In addition, they freely raise arguments and engage in discussion, thereby discovering certain information they need without worrying about having to submit to a certain dominant political attitude that makes them seem they have no choice. First-time voters do not need to worry about their violations of certain social values supposing they have different attitudes. Furthermore, they also feel that they have access or are involved in the dynamics of social media, however, they are also permitted to leave that space, assuming they feel it is no longer in line with or match their wishes or the form of information they desire.



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This indicates a feeling of freedom and independence from first-time voters compared to the relationship pattern developed in the course of the discussion with their parents. Conversely, supposing the discussion is held in the social media space, its justification is usually not determined by only one party. Rather, it also depends on the way and manner these voters make their preferences. This is certainly different from the understanding that parents are the most important source of justification for the truth of various political information discussed. However, for first-time voters, social media provides a variety of information that creates an avenue for a free discussion space, which offers its users the opportunities to choose the information they believe is true. This causes them to feel that the initial understanding that was previously obtained provides an avenue for development through social media, thereby creating more opportunities for the independent formation of their political preferences. This platform has created an alternative space for exchanging information to shape their political preferences and awareness adequately. They feel that they already have sufficient initial preferences that serve as the basis or reason for the choice of their political stance as first-timers. Despite their lack of experience, they still try to determine the indicators used as standards in discerning their preferences and political attitudes.

In this process, first-time voters usually have discussions with their parents, although this is intended to confirm their political stance based on the preferences they believe. Initially, voters perceive it as a space to justify their attitude or at least obtain some consideration to re-determine their political stance. This means that parents still play a role, however, it is no longer the most influential factor, rather, it only serves as an avenue to confirm the preferences of first-time voters. In this condition, there is an opportunity that the results of discussions with parents still influence the political preferences of first-time voters. However, this occurs when the parents have a political background and a fairly good understanding of these dynamics. Therefore, discussions between first-time voters and their parents have the potential to affect their political preferences, provided it is still within the context of their preferred choices. This shows that irrespective of any changes, their preferences still need to be taken into account. This condition seems to be closely related to their massive interaction with social media, which quantitatively offers a lot of information, thereby causing first-time voters to be liable to several choices. This condition is felt to have developed their confidence in determining the directives of their political attitudes based on their independent preferences.

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In this context, social media has provided an avenue for them to seek information and interact and communicate with many other people (Stiglits and Xuan, 2012). First-time voters tend to be independent learners in shaping their political preferences based on the aspects they desire regardless of their parents' political attitudes. This condition creates awareness and helps them to determine the ones they intend to further understand and those they want to ignore.

This has also led to an increase in the discussion about politics among fellow first-time voters, both in person and through social media. This is a broader space to develop their political understanding compared to the student organizations. The variety of backgrounds and information acquired from this platform makes this space appear more attractive. Also, the tendency that they choose to engage in a space appropriate to their context example, age equality makes this process more familiar and enjoyable for them. Therefore, efforts to increase information in shaping their political understanding are deemed to be in line with the trends that exist in their generation, which is different from those in the age period of their parents. First-time voters felt that this discovery is as important as the others in the community. This leads to the formation of a strong bond that serves as a joint identity of the group due to their social media interactions.

Based on this condition, the position of the parents is no longer considered a dominant factor. This is also evident in the circumstance that it is not uncommon for new voters to compete against their parents' political preferences, which represents a different generation. Social media also affects the tendency to select certain identities based on age groups to justify their political preferences. In this situation, first-time voters tend to regard the interactions with parents as an attempt to reinforce their preferences either by finding common ground with them or based on their differences. Discussions with fellow voters on the social media platform are often more important than political discussions with their parents. This shows the great influence of social media on them.

Following its development, first-time voters are less likely to access weighty political information belonging only to adults or their parents. These voters have a greater desire to develop their political preferences, and they prefer to use social media to ensure the information they receive further confirms their beliefs. According to Gottfried and Shearer (2016), they possess good adaptability for information technology development. This certainly makes it easier for them to get the various information they desire.



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In addition, the enormous influence of social media on the formation of political preferences for new voters is undeniable (Ohme, 2019; Bode et.al, 2014). This research which focuses on first-time voters in the city of Makassar seems to leave a gap in a bid to develop political preferences, especially an understanding of ethical values in political dynamics. The presence of social media has indeed created an avenue for discussion that is felt to be equal under this context. However, new voters' enthusiasm and independence in discovering various information that aids in shaping their political preferences through social media still show potential weaknesses. This is mainly related to understanding ethical standards in politics, which is usually associated with surrounding social values. Furthermore, new voters that are relatively independent learners fail to understand that the importance of these ethical aspects serves as a basic foundation for transferring political preferences into attitudes or behaviors. This is because social media is not authorized to emphasize certain values, such as the ethical basis for first-time voters' political behaviour. Social media does have a lot of information about politics including ethical standards, although, this doesn't guarantee whether or not it is accepted by these voters. At this point, the role of parents is still important.

Parents are authorized based on social values in their efforts to educate their children. They always try to instill a certain form of identity related to the assumption that they always teach good morals. This is the basis for shaping the political preferences of first-time voters because they are always accompanied by efforts to internalize society's social values, which have been generally used as standards. Through this process, parents have a better stance than social media. Socially, parents are justified based on social beliefs that permit them to emphasize certain values. Based on this, the child is expected to accept the inculcation of these values in the framework of obedience to their parents, which is an important foundation for family ties. Moreover, parents are also justified to impose certain standards, including ethical values in political understanding. Social media lacks this, irrespective of the fact that it provides a lot of information and equal discussion space. It does not have the authority to compel new voters to accept a certain standard of ethical value which is an important aspect of shaping their political preferences to those of parents. Therefore, when social media is their only source of information, the aspect of planting ethical values tends to be ignored. They need to be able to discover and consciously embrace the values that exist among several choices. This condition

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is certainly not easy because they are still inexperienced, and of course, they do not have enough solid foundation to vote.

This condition causes them to be influenced by social relations' values developed through social media and the group agreements formed from these relationships. This condition indeed provides an opportunity for first-time voters to be able to discover preferences that match their thought independently. Although it simultaneously makes them vulnerable to certain attempts such as political dogma in a certain direction and interests, its future effects are unpredicted by the first-time voters, which has the potential to form a preference that has minimal political, ethical value. This is the necessary standard required to behave appropriately in their political participation, including when they cast their voting rights for the first time in an election.

## Conclusion

The first-time voters' segment has received less attention in the dynamics of political participation because they are perceived as representing their parents' political orientation. Although their numbers are quite large, their existence is often insufficiently noticed. However, it turns out that the results of this research show certain interesting findings related to the dynamics of parents' position and the formation of political preferences of first-time voters, and two other aspects.

Another finding is based on the fact that first-time voters have an initial awareness of their relevant position in political dynamics. This awareness is no longer based on the dominance of the parent's orientation. On the contrary, the formation of political preferences for first-time voters is often not based on their parents' interactions. This process is obtained from learning activities in schools, including student organizations that provide space for the growth of initial awareness of their rights and obligations as part of their existence in a community. Besides, first-time voters also acquire information for developing their initial preferences from social media. This tool provides a wealth of information that is easily accessed by first-time voters and an avenue where they are regarded as equals which is the main reason for their great interest in utilizing this platform. Furthermore, they prefer this space because it allows them to become independent learners.



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Although there was a shift in parents' role to two other sources, their existence under certain conditions is still relevant for first-time voters. Therefore, it is paramount to confirm their political preferences and behavior due to ethical values that social media lacks. Therefore, It is important for parents to increase their social media ability and other relevant sources to understand the trends of political preference formation of first-time voters.

Moreover, since the ethical aspect in politics is important, further it is very important to encourage next research related to this issue for first-time voters. The research should related to how first-time voters build their political ethics understanding through social media besides what they are obtained from parents. It is important to find out how first-time voters sorting out the information which they think important for them to set their political behavior. In addition, it is necessary to encourage policies on increasing the learning process political ethics in the school curriculum and activities. It will important to improve their preparation before entering the political field directly.

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