

Abstention in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Gubernatorial Election

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the causes of the phenomenon of abstention and the level of community participation in the election of the Governor of Jambi Province in 2020. The study adopts a qualitative approach with a literature review as the methodology. Data collection is conducted through various sources such as books, journals, magazines, newspapers, and others. The use of the Concept Map feature in NVIVO12 Plus is also part of the research methodology. The research findings indicate that the level of community participation in the election of the governor in 2020 in Jambi Province reached 1,658,525 eligible voters. Out of this number, 1,570,285 votes were considered valid, while 88,240 votes were deemed invalid. Non-participating voters (abstention) amounted to 820,779 out of a total of 2,480,612 registered voters. Kerinci Regency had the highest abstention rate, where out of a total of 198,729 registered voters in the Permanent Voter List, 88,637 individuals (44.60%) chose to abstain. Several factors, including differences in the ethnic backgrounds of the candidates, educational levels, inadequate quality of candidates, political practices, apathetic attitudes of the community, lack of information, technical constraints, and the inaccessibility of polling locations influenced the phenomenon of abstention in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election.

Keywords: Abstention; Community Participation; Gubernatorial Election; Participation Level; Polling Place





1. Introduction

The gubernatorial election in the Jambi Province in 2020 garnered significant attention due to the high number of people who did not cast their votes, known as "*golput*" (abstention). *Golput* is an abbreviation for "*golongan putih*," referring to individuals who choose not to participate in general elections. This term takes inspiration from the dominant political party during the Suharto era, namely Golkar. The phenomenon of abstention became widely known during the 1971 elections as a form of protest against the use of bureaucracy and the military by Golkar to ensure their victories (Duile, 2021).

After the fall of the New Order regime in the late 1990s, Indonesia held its first democratic election in 1999. Since then, the country has become a stable democracy, successfully conducting several elections widely regarded as free and fair (Fossati & Martinez i Coma, 2020). In the context of democracy, citizen participation in the governance process is crucial. Through participation, citizens can voice complaints and make demands heard by the broader public, making the government and politicians more accountable and responsive (Teorell & Torcal, 2007)

Gubernatorial elections, known as "*Pilgub*," are political battles for power at the provincial level (Lefaan, 2021). Despite the importance of political positions, knowledge about voter behavior in gubernatorial elections is still limited (do Amaral & Tanaka, 2016). Perceptions of justice also influence trust levels, which are closely related to the integrity and ethics of governance. Ethics involve rights and obligations as part of the social contract between individuals, institutions, and society (Susila et al., 2015).

Empirical studies on political participation have been ongoing for about 30 years. Initially, research focused more on explaining why some people choose to vote while others do not (Milbrath, 1981). Political participation is influenced by 'local rules' and is not dependent on socio-economic status or the level of social capital in an area (Lowndes et al., 2006). Although voting is the most common form of political involvement, the act of abstaining reflects a low level of political engagement. Since the level of political engagement can be a crucial signal and predictor of the direction of democracy and the expression of popular sovereignty, it is important to examine the amount of public political involvement in elections (Wardhani, 2018).

In democracies like Indonesia, political differences among individuals are considered normal. The diversity of social ranks, economic classes, education levels, regional cultures, and genders creates variations in political preferences. Gender differences, in particular, are the most subtle distinctions among these factors (Nurgiansah, 2021). The low voter participation in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election is one of the factors contributing to the public's limited understanding of voting rights and citizenship responsibilities. The willingness of the public to exercise their voting rights in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election was significantly influenced by their level of trust in the government (Nasution & Kushandajani, 2019).

Research on the phenomenon of abstention in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Governor Election is still very limited. Therefore, this study aims to fill this knowledge gap by analyzing the causes of the abstention phenomenon in the Jambi Province in 2020. The community participation rate in the gubernatorial election in Jambi Province on December 9, 2020, only reached 67.88%, falling short of the target set by the General Election Commission, which aimed for a 77.50% participation rate.





2. Literature Review

2.1. Political Behavior

Political behavior, in the context of ethical decision-making, can have both positive and negative impacts (Amah, 2022). Involvement or participation in political activities is one aspect of political behavior (Almond & Powell, 1966). However, political activities are always initiated by the expression of interests where an individual possesses political power. Conversely, political behavior is the individual's behavior acting in a personal capacity with the aim of influencing government decision-making (Huntington & Nelson, 1994).

Several studies (Agerberg, 2019b; Almond & Verba, 1963; Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Hillygus, 2005; Jennings, 1996; Nie et al., 1996; Verba & Nie, 1987; Wolfinger & Rosenstone, 1980) indicate that highly educated citizens tend to be more politically sophisticated, meaning they are more knowledgeable and politically competent, and also more active in political participation. The relationship between education and political participation may be the most established in research on political behavior. Schools play a crucial role in political socialization, contributing to better political involvement among young people (Pontes et al., 2017). The use of the internet and other electronic activities also impacts the increased political knowledge of online users and stimulates political engagement and participation (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Political behavior involves strategic decision-making, which often can harm the quality of decisions and weaken organizational performance (Shepherd et al., 2020). Political efficacy and political trust are central focuses in the study of political behavior (Craig, 1979). Political behavior theories originating from the distinctive methodology of public choice consider the role of actors in the political process, including voters, parties, interest groups, bureaucrats, and politicians (Self, 1993). Inequality in political involvement can undermine the quality of deliberation, representation, and legitimacy in the democratic process (Kittilson, 2016). Gender and racial differences also influence political participation and contributions of votes to candidate candidates (Zhang & Heerwig, 2022).

In a study (Liu, 2020), it is mentioned that Asian men and women cast an equal number of votes in elections, but there is a gender gap in other types of political actions. Some factors influencing voter behavior involve sociological, psychological, and rational choice aspects (Yustiningrum & Ichwanuddin, 2015). Studies on political behavior show that individuals with higher education tend to be more active in political activities than those with lower education (Persson, 2015). Evidence also indicates that changes in communication technology can play a significant role in influencing behavior in elections (Tolbert & McNeal, 2003).

2.2. Community Participation in Elections

Electoral reforms have provided citizens in many states the opportunity to choose among more convenient voting methods (Herrnson et al., 2019). In democratic elections, voters are called to polling places to express their preferences in supporting various parties and specific candidates. Nevertheless, there is a consistent proportion of voters who consider their choice as a form of rejection (Garzia & Ferreira da Silva, 2021). Democracy cannot function without active citizen participation (Haruni, 2022). Poor governance quality can significantly impact individuals' relationships with the state and their belief in the possibility of achieving goals through the democratic process (Agerberg, 2019a). Therefore, during elections, voters may exercise their voting rights as a form of rejection or non-participation.

In a study (Ivanchenko et al., 2019), it was concluded that emotionally balanced respondents are more likely to run for office and rarely participate in voting. Causes of community non-participation in elections can also stem from the perception that major issues

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are not addressed, leading voters to be reluctant to exercise their voting rights in future elections (Peterson & Wrighton, 1998). The research concluded that non-rural residents participate more and protest less. In contrast, in rural areas, there is more active participation and frequent protests, hindering participation opportunities for rural residents (Lin & Lunz Trujillo, 2023).

Strong national citizenship identity has a positive impact on political trust, while strong ethnic national identity has a negative impact on political trust (Berg & Hjerm, 2010). Perceptions of social inequality also play a crucial role in determining the number of voters and understanding the relationship between participation in elections (Silagadze et al., 2023). Social movement literature suggests that political trust will have significant participatory behavioral consequences only if it is associated with a high level of political efficacy (Hooghe & Marien, 2013). There are two main factors influencing community participation in elections, namely individual factors and socio-political factors (Parchami, 2007).

Elections during a pandemic become a subject of debate as they can threaten public health and impact the level of community participation in local elections. Therefore, community participation in exercising their voting rights, which is one of the indicators of the success of regional elections, needs careful attention (Marsallindo & Safitri, 2021). Forms of political participation can be grouped into four categories: apathy (withdrawing from the political process), spectator (participating actively during general elections), gladiator (active in the political process as a communicator and campaigner), and critic (participating in unconventional forms) (Suharyanto, 2014).

3. Research Methodology

This research is a qualitative study that employs a literature review approach. A literature review is a type of research in which the researcher gathers a number of books, magazines, and other literature related to the issues and objectives of the research (Danial & Wasriah, 2009). The data in this study are secondary and obtained from various literature sources, such as books, journals, magazines, thesis research results, and dissertations, as well as other sources like relevant websites and newspapers related to the research theme (Hidayah et al., 2019; Nazir, 2005).

The technique used is a descriptive technique aimed at explaining, describing, and linking the phenomenon of abstention that occurred in the Jambi Province in 2020. This is done to draw concrete conclusions about the issue of community participation in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Governor Election.

In this research, the Concept Map feature in NVIVO12 Plus is also utilized to map the causes of the high number of people who did not exercise their voting rights (abstention) in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Governor Election (Farhan HR & Nurmandi, 2022). NVIVO 12 Plus is a qualitative data analysis program that facilitates the process of collecting, categorizing, mapping, analyzing, and visualizing qualitative data. This program can be used to analyze various types of data, such as papers (memos, reports, laws, and photographic documents) and interview results (Farhan HR & Purnomo, 2023).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Community Participation in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Governor Election

In 2020, the Jambi Province held a gubernatorial election for the 2021 to 2024 term. Unlike previous gubernatorial elections, this year featured three candidate pairs competing in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Governor Election. Pair number 1 consisted of Cek Hendra from the Golkar





Party and Ratu Munawaroh from the PDI-P Party. This pair was supported by two other parties, namely Nasdem and PBB. Meanwhile, pair number 2 consisted of Fachrori Umar from the Gerindra Party and Syafril Nursal from the Democratic Party. This pair was endorsed by four parties, namely Gerindra, Democrat, Hanura, and PPP, and supported by another party, Gelora. Pair number 3 consisted of Al Haris from the PAN Party and Abdullah Sani from the PKB Party. This pair was supported by three parties, namely PKB, PAN, and PKS, and supported by two other parties, namely PKPI and Berkarya.

It is noteworthy that the gubernatorial election in 2020 was held twice, on December 9, 2020, and May 27, 2021. This was due to a lawsuit from pair number 1, who filed a complaint against the vote results to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia on December 23, 2020, after losing to pair number 3. Additionally, the gubernatorial election in 2020 was conducted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

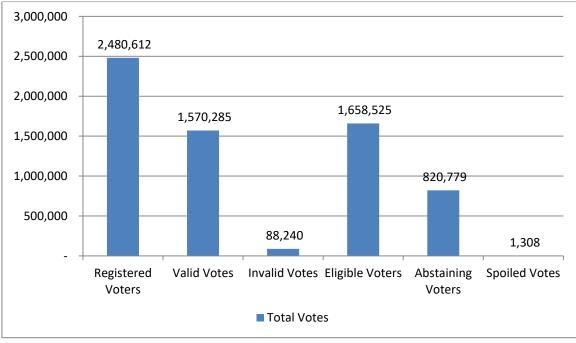


Figure 1. Total Votes in the Jambi Gubernatorial Election 2020 Sumber: (KPU, 2020)

The graph illustrates the results of the gubernatorial election in Jambi Province in 2020 for the term 2021-2024. The number of registered voters reached 2,480,612 individuals. From this total, only 1,658,525 individuals exercised their voting rights, with 1,570,285 valid votes and 88,240 invalid votes. Furthermore, in the gubernatorial election in Jambi Province, there were still people who chose to abstain, meaning they did not use their voting rights, amounting to 820,779 individuals. Voters returned a total of 1,308 votes due to damage or mistakes during marking.

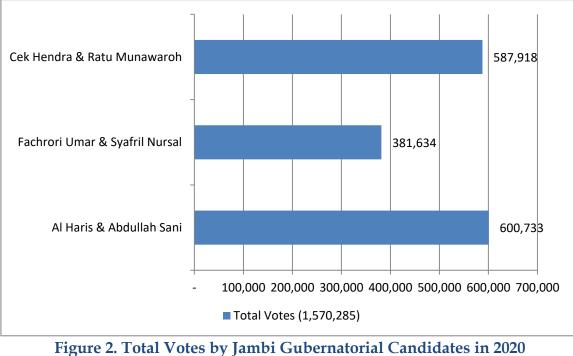
This indicates that a significant portion of the population coming to the polling stations may not always vote based on conscience but might be influenced by other factors. The number of votes returned due to damage or mistakes indicates technical constraints in the implementation of the election.

Moreover, the high abstention rate could be attributed to widespread vote-buying practices. Therefore, it is essential to enhance voter participation not only by combating the practice of vote-buying but also by encouraging people to engage in the election based on understanding





and trust in the candidates without detrimental external influences that undermine the democratic process.



Source: (KPU, 2020)

There are three pairs of candidates for governor and deputy governor who will compete in the Jambi Provincial Governor Election in 2020 for the leadership term from 2021 to 2024. Candidate pair number 1, Cek Hendra, along with Ratu Munawaroh, successfully garnered the support of 587,918 votes from the people of Jambi Province. Meanwhile, pair number 2, Fachrori Umar, along with Syafril Nursal, received 381,632 votes, and pair number 3, Al Haris, along with Abdullah Sani, secured the highest number of votes with a total of 600,733 out of the valid votes of 1,570,285.

In this context, Al Haris and Abdullah Sani's vote count is 12,815 higher than pair number 1, Cek Hendra and Ratu Munawaroh. Meanwhile, the difference in votes between Al Haris & Abdullah Sani and pair number 2, Fachrori & Syafril Nursal, is quite substantial, amounting to 219,099 votes. Thus, the vote count for Al Haris, along with Abdullah Sani, is the highest, surpassing the other two pairs of gubernatorial candidates. Therefore, Al Haris and Abdullah Sani were elected as the Governor and Deputy Governor of Jambi Province for the leadership term of 2021-2024.

However, the total votes obtained by the three pairs of gubernatorial candidates in Jambi Province are still far behind the number of votes from the people of Jambi Province who chose to abstain in the Jambi Provincial Governor Election in 2020, which amounted to 820,779 votes. This indicates that the level of participation of the Jambi community in the gubernatorial election only reached 67.88%, still below the target set by the KPU Jambi Province, which aimed for a 77.50% community participation rate.





Region	Cek Endra	Fachrori Umar	Al Haris	Total
Batanghari Regency	63.045	30.555	58.249	151.849
Bungo Regency	52.339	78.927	31.313	162.579
Kerinci Regency	29.717	50.330	26.909	106.956
Merangin Regency	34.443	16.122	116.100	166.665
Muaro Jambi Regency	62.748	27.746	65.008	155.502
Sarolangun Regency	82.902	9.556	37.027	129.485
West Tanjung Jabung Regency	69.117	31.934	45.929	146.980
East Tanjung Jabung Regency	53.401	24.862	45.660	123.923
Tebo Regency	54.519	37.224	41.342	133.085
Jambi City	74.407	38.421	126.334	239.162
Sungai Penuh City	11.280	35.957	6.862	54.099
Total	587.918	381.634	600.733	1.570.285

Table 1. Total Community Participation

Source: (KPU, 2020)

The table shows that the province of Jambi consists of 11 regencies/cities, with nine regencies and two cities. In the 2020 gubernatorial election in Jambi, each regency/city had a different number of voting rights. The city of Jambi, the capital of Jambi Province, had the highest number of valid votes, namely 239,162. In contrast, Sungai Penuh City had the fewest valid votes, namely 54,099, as it was newly formed in 2009 after splitting from Kerinci Regency.

Out of the three pairs of gubernatorial candidates in Jambi Province, they competed to gain the most votes in the 11 regencies/cities. Their focus was on areas with the highest number of voters. However, the results were surprising. Gubernatorial candidate pair number 1, Cek Endra and Ratu Munawaroh, won the most votes in 5 regencies: Batanghari, Sarolangun, Tebo, Tanjung Jabung Timur, and Tanjung Jabung Barat. Meanwhile, gubernatorial candidate pair number 2 won in 3 regions of Jambi Province, including Bungo Regency, Kerinci Regency, and Sungai Penuh City. Gubernatorial candidate pair number 3, who was elected as the governor of Jambi Province for the leadership term of 2021-2024, only won in 3 regions: Merangin, Muaro Jambi, and Jambi City.

It can be concluded that regions with the highest number of voting rights have a significant impact on the final election results. Jambi City, as the region with the highest voting rights, has a major influence on determining the victory. Merangin and Muaro Jambi regencies, despite having the fourth-highest voting rights in Jambi Province, also played a crucial role in the victory of the governor of Jambi Province.

Region	Number of Abstained Voters	Total Voters
Batanghari Regency	33,702 (16.88%)	199,630
Bungo Regency	70,463 (29.07%)	242,379
Kerinci Regency	88,637 (44.60%)	198,729
Merangin Regency	85,094 (33.18%)	256,453
Muaro Jambi Regency	121,785 (42.54%)	286,267
Sarolangun Regency	70,747 (34.68%)	203,999

Table 2. Number of Abstained Voters in Jambi Provice 2020





Region	Number of Abstained Voters	Total Voters
West Tanjung Jabung Regency	60,039 (27.64%)	217,141
East Tanjung Jabung Regency	35,472 (21.12%)	167,935
Tebo Regency	99,065 (41.77%)	237,157
Jambi City	143,371 (35.74%)	401,049
Sungai Penuh City	12,404 (17.75%)	69,873
Total	820,779	2,480,612

Abstention in the 2020 Jambi Provincial Gubernatorial Election

Source: (KPU, 2020)

The table indicates that a total of 820,779 individuals abstained from voting out of the total 2,480,612 registered voters in the Permanent Voter List for the 2020 gubernatorial election in Jambi Province. The highest abstention rate is recorded in Kerinci Regency, where out of a total of 198,729 registered voters in the DPT, 88,637 (44.60%) chose to abstain. Muaro Jambi ranks second with an abstention rate of 42.54%, followed by Tebo Regency with an abstention rate of 41.77%. Despite having the highest number of voters, Jambi City recorded an abstention rate of 35.74%, while Sarolangun Regency, Merangin Regency, and Bungo Regency have abstention rates of approximately 34.68%, 33.18%, and 29.07%, respectively.

West Tanjung Jabung Regency, East Tanjung Jabung Regency, and Sungai Penuh City have relatively lower abstention rates, with 27.64%, 21.12%, and 17.75%, respectively. Meanwhile, the lowest abstention rate in the 2020 Jambi gubernatorial election occurred in Batanghari Regency, where out of a total of 199,630 registered voters in the Permanent Voter List, 33,702 (16.88%) chose to abstain.

4.2. Causes of Abstention

The high number of people abstaining from voting in the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Jambi Province reflects a very low level of public participation. Here are several factors contributing to the low participation of the community in the democratic event of the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Jambi Province.

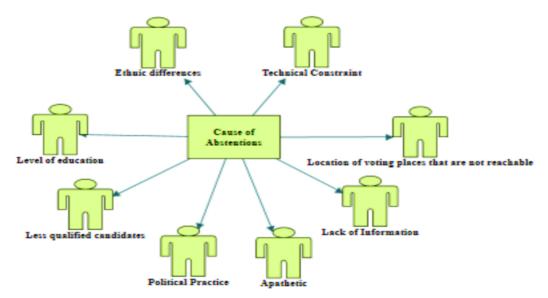


Figure 3. Causes of Community Abstention in the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Jambi Source: Processed by the Authors using NVIVO12 Plus (2023)





The image indicates several factors contributing to the high number of people abstaining from voting in the 2020 Gubernatorial Election in Jambi Province, including:

a) Ethnic Differences

The diversity of ethnicities in Jambi, with a mix of migrants and indigenous people, plays a role in the high abstention rate. According to the Indonesian Population Census data from the Central Statistics Agency, around 43.57% of the total population of Jambi Province, or approximately 3,069,771 people, are indigenous. The Javanese, constituting about 29.10% of the population, have a significant role in Jambi's politics, as seen in the candidacy of Al Haris for the 2020 Jambi Governor alongside Abdullah Sani, who is of Javanese descent.

b) Education Level

Education significantly impacts community participation in the Jambi gubernatorial election. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows the distribution of education levels in Jambi Province, with approximately 26.16% having education equivalent to elementary school, 23.41% equivalent to junior high school, 28.10% equivalent to high school, 1.78% at the D1-D3 level, 7.15% at the D4-S3 level, and 13.40% without a diploma. Different education levels can influence people's attitudes toward participating in the democratic process.

c) Low-Quality Candidates

Perceived low-quality candidates can erode public trust in parties and candidates, leading people to abstain from voting.

d) Political Practices

Political practices like vote-buying can confuse and discomfort the public, causing them to choose not to attend polling stations.

e) Apathetic Attitudes

Apathetic attitudes, especially among young voters, are a significant factor contributing to indifference toward the election process and eventual abstention.

f) Lack of Information

Many people's lack of understanding about the schedule of the 2020 Gubernatorial Election can also contribute to the high abstention rate. Ineffective outreach and information efforts can hinder community participation.

g) Technical Constraints

Technical constraints such as illness, other commitments, travel, or personal issues can hinder voters from exercising their right to vote. Time constraints imposed by daily work or migration conditions can also impact voter participation.

h) Inaccessible Polling Locations

Geographically challenging locations for polling stations can be a barrier. Long distances from home to polling stations can reduce community participation, especially in remote areas.





5. Conclusion

This research concludes that the gubernatorial election in Jambi Province in 2020 gained attention as it occurred twice, on December 9, 2020, and May 27, 2021. This was due to a legal challenge from candidate pair number 1, who filed a lawsuit regarding the election results to the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Indonesia on December 23, 2020, alleging defeat by their rival, candidate pair number 3. Furthermore, the gubernatorial election in 2020 took place amid the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to many people abstaining from voting. The community participation rate in the Jambi gubernatorial election in 2020 only reached 67.88%, while the General Election Commission targeted a participation rate of 77.50%. This means that the General Election Commission's target was not achieved, influenced by various factors, including ethnic differences, education levels, low-quality candidates, political practices, apathetic attitudes, lack of information, technical constraints, and inaccessible polling locations. Moving forward, cooperation between election organizers and all relevant parties is expected to enhance public awareness of the importance of participating in elections, especially gubernatorial elections in the future. Efforts to develop initiatives and innovations are needed to capture public attention, particularly through targeted education, especially for new potential voters.

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7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author has declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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