

THE PHENOMENON OF POLITICAL VOLUNTARISM IN GENERAL ELECTIONS: BETWEEN DEMOCRACY, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Arlan Siddha, Dadan Kurnia and Lukman Munawar Fauzi

Faculty of Social Sciences and Political Science, Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani, Jalan Terusan
 Jenderal Soedirman, Cimahi 40532, Jawa barat, Indonesia
 E-mail: arlan.siddha@lecture.unjani.ac.id

ABSTRACT. This study examines the phenomenon of political voluntarism in the 2024 General Elections in Indonesia, focusing on its role in shaping voter engagement, democratic participation, and political mobilization. The presence of political voluntarism is considered crucial in advocating ideas, values, aspirations, and has an impact on vote acquisition due to its broader nature in reaching various voter segments. There are three pairs of candidates in the 2024 General Elections, each with political volunteers engaging in various activities to support the candidates, such as “Desak Anies,” “Slepet Imin,” “Joget Gemoy,” “Demok(e)asi,” and “Tabrak Prof!”. The research methodology employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data collection techniques involve secondary data from literature studies, including books, journals, news, and social media. The results of this research indicate that the phenomenon of political voluntarism in the 2024 General Elections is considered crucial for democracy. The presence of political voluntarism can revitalize democratic values through active participation of the public in responding to issues and involvement in political contests. Public trust crisis in political parties arises from the perception that political parties are unable to mediate between the public and the state in advocating the ideas and aspirations of the community. Therefore, the involvement of the public in politics through political volunteers is present to independently champion the values and aspirations believed in. Political volunteers not only play a role in increasing political awareness in society but also operate independently from the party system.

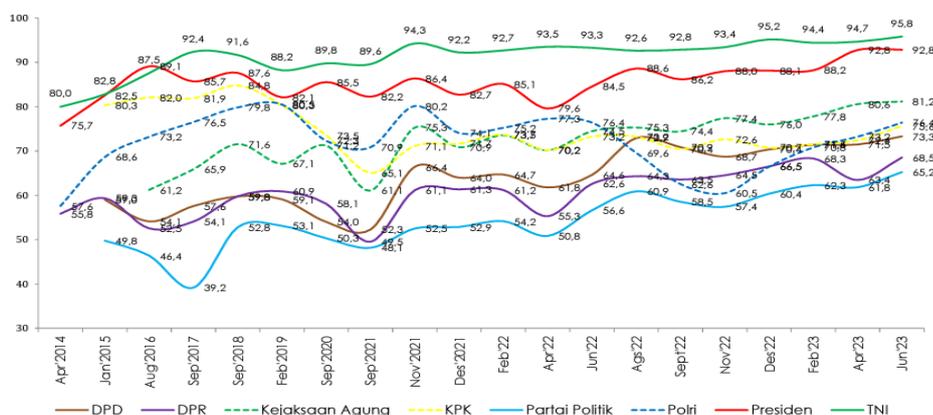
Keywords: Political Voluntarism, Democracy, Political Participation, Political Parties.

INTRODUCTION

Political voluntarism or post-New Order volunteer movements have undergone significant development. The proliferation of political voluntarism arises due to various factors, such as disappointment and distrust of the public towards political parties perceived as transactional, leading to the belief that political parties are not aligned with public aspirations (Syauket, 2022). Political voluntarism emerges in a political contest due to the weak role of parties in providing values for public leaders, resulting in the accumulation of disappointment forming a political volunteer movement. These political volunteers ultimately extend to a broader voter segmentation, as they are not bound to political party networks.

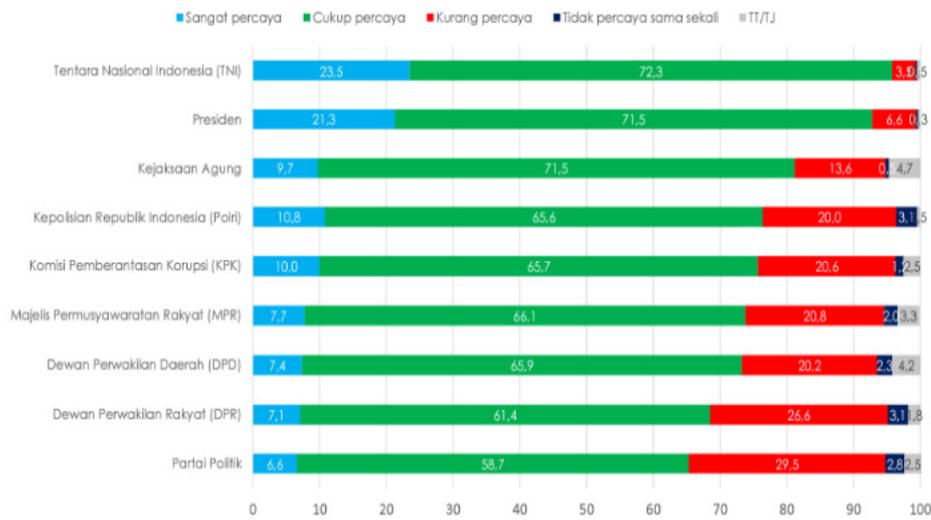
This disappointment is considered logical when considering various surveys indicating low public trust in political parties. The Indonesian Political Indicator Survey reveals that political parties consistently rank at the bottom and have not improved since the 2014 survey. The lowest point occurred in September 2017, with a displayed figure of only 39.2 percent. This is depicted in the following trend Figure 1.

From the graph, it can be observed that political parties occupy the bottom position with a percentage of 65.3 percent. The level of trust in the survey conducted by the Indonesian Political Indicator can be more clearly seen in the following Figure 2.



Source: Indonesian Political Indicator, 2023

Figure 1. Trend of Trust in Institutions



Source: Indonesian Political Indicator, 2023

Figure 2. Level of Public Trust in Institutions

The expansion of public participation is ultimately expected to give birth to independent social power, which is considered eroded by the dominance of oligarchs and the mainstream currents of political parties. In this context, political volunteers cannot be categorized as mobilized participation because it arises voluntarily from individuals or groups (Arianto, 2016). Debates regarding democracy and trust have shifted from being marginalized in the past to becoming a central topic of discussion among political theory experts in recent decades. This shift occurred after the term “state was brought back in,” leading to the development of ways to expand and implement rights, where the role of the community is crucial in fostering social trust and contributing to effective and responsive governance (Cohen, 1999).

The emergence of political volunteers can be considered a positive development, where the public’s participation is increasing. However, this phenomenon should be approached with caution to prevent the emergence of ochlocracy or mass leadership in the future (Syauket, 2022). From a political historical perspective, the term “volunteer” appeared and developed in 1755 by M. Fr Voltaire while providing services to the military at war. At that time, their duty was to serve sincerely in an altruistic manner to promote, enhance, and improve life in the social, cultural, and economic domains (Arianto, 2016).

This phenomenon then strengthened on one side during the 2024 General Elections, where the three pairs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates became increasingly intense in consolidating the support of political volunteers for each candidate. Expanding the support base beyond political parties is considered crucial, not only for support but also for monitoring and guarding the candidates’ vote

acquisition. Presidential and vice-presidential candidates consider the presence of political volunteers important, as their voluntary work extends beyond party boundaries, making a significant impact due to being perceived as more genuine and less formal. As a result, political volunteers are seen as an integral part of the winning team.

In 2014, for instance, approximately 1,248 political volunteer organizations were recorded, organizing themselves independently or with the support of others. This phenomenon in democracy can be seen as a resurgence of civil politics, signaling the presence of public participation. The resurgence can be observed through the presence of political volunteers spread across without religious, racial, ethnic, or other barriers (Arianto, 2016).

According to the Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Indonesia is still categorized as a “flawed democracy.” From 2006 to 2022, during President Bambang Yudhoyono’s administration, there was an increasing trend from 6.41 (2006) to 6.95 (2014). Under President Joko Widodo’s governance, there were fluctuations from 7.03 (2015) to the latest 6.71 (2022). This information is reflected in the following Table 1.

Several conditions are assessed in the Democracy Index by the EIU, such as the Electoral Process and Political Pluralism, Governance, Public Political Participation, Political Culture, and Civil Liberties. Indicators for these determinations are rated on a scale of 0-10, with groupings as follows: an index score >8 is termed “full democracy,” >6 is labeled “flawed democracy,” >4 to approximately 6 is termed “hybrid regime,” and an index score of approximately 4 is labeled “authoritarian”.

This article then attempts to discuss these phenomena from the perspectives of democracy,

Table 1. Democracy Index of Indonesia according to the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU)

Year	Democratisation Indonesia Index
2006	6,41
2008	6,34
2010	6,53
2011	6,53
2012	6,76
2013	6,82
2014	6,95
2015	7,03
2016	6,97
2017	6,39
2018	6,39
2019	6,48
2020	6,3
2021	6,71
2022	6,71

Source: processed from the Economist Intelligence Unit, 2022

public participation, and the observations of political parties experiencing a decline in public trust. Additionally, the article examines the impact of these political volunteers, considered a force for the candidate pairs, as an integral part of the winning team. Political voluntarism becomes crucial in the democratic process, where belief in democratic values through active participation can enhance the democratic process. Furthermore, social involvement through active participation is seen as a positive contribution stemming from the emergence of political voluntarism.

A review on Political Participation

Political participation can be defined as the activities of citizens aimed at influencing the decisions made by the government. Political participation is the involvement of citizens in determining decisions that affect their lives (Surbakti, 2010). McClosky (in Budiardjo, 2008) defines political participation as the voluntary activities of citizens through various means they can engage in during a ruler selection process, whether directly or indirectly involved in the formation of general policies.

Huntington & Nelson (in Surbakti, 2010) provide a different perspective, associating political participation with the relationship to developing countries like Indonesia. In this context, political participation is the personal actions of citizens that can influence government decision-making, either individually or collectively, effectively or ineffectively. Participation, according to Milbart & Goel (in Surbakti, 2010), can be categorized into apathy (individuals who do not participate and withdraw from the political process), spectators (individuals who never vote in a political contest), and gladiators (individuals actively involved in

political processes as communicators, specialists, activists, campaign workers, etc.).

Surbakti (in Asrizal, 2020) categorizes political participation into several categories related to community political participation: First, it is related to observable activities and not attitudes or orientations, making political participation objective. Second, political activities of the community must be carried out directly or indirectly. Third, community political activities aim to influence government decision-making, either through persuasion or pressure. Fourth, community political activities are directed towards efforts to influence governance regardless of the level of success or failure of the resulting effects. Fifth, community political activities are conducted through a normal procedure without violence.

Verba and Nie, as cited in Herdiansah (2019), delineate political participation as the engagement in activities with the purpose of choosing government representatives, either through direct or indirect means. Moreover, their perspective extends beyond electoral settings, encompassing a broader scope that includes any public endeavors capable of impacting collective decision-making or facilitating the attainment of objectives by individuals or groups.

Review on Political Voluntarism

Political volunteers in a political constellation have become one of the main pillars in institutionalizing democracy. In various ways, political volunteers often operate without structured coordination. Political volunteers have been able to build a participatory culture. In the context of political dynamics in Indonesia, political volunteers have entered the category of new social movements, mainly populated by the middle class. The presence of political volunteers coincided with the emergence of social media politics as a popular culture that emphasizes a certain character (Arianto, 2016).

Savirani (in Syauket, 2022) categorizes political volunteers into three groups, namely: First, volunteers who come from former activists actively involved in the pro-democracy movement in the 1990s, making efforts to overthrow the Soeharto regime. Second, groups including activists from various non-governmental organizations, anti-corruption movements, farmers, and indigenous communities. Third, consisting of artists and individuals in the creative sector. Although the first and second groups have political agendas, they do not have a clear mass base. The fourth group consists of investor volunteers, represented by companies that depend on the decisions of candidates by continuously financing parties and candidates due to personal interests of

their group. However, in the third group, even though they do not have a political agenda, they can attract more supporters and followers due to the popularity held by artists and individuals in the creative sector, with a mass network consisting of various layers of society.

The increase in community organizations actively influencing the political landscape is noteworthy, encompassing both non-governmental entities and volunteer groups. Their commitment is directed towards improving the democratic process through diverse initiatives, actions, community empowerment, and the monitoring of elections. Within the domain of democratic volunteer groups, a specific subset is dedicated to activities related to elections. In this context, two distinct types of volunteers become apparent: non-partisan volunteers and partisan volunteers. Non-partisan volunteers focus on enhancing the quality of elections, engaging in activities such as monitoring organizers and promoting an increase in both the quantity and quality of voters. These volunteer groups serve as an alternative oversight mechanism on election organizers, providing early warnings in the event of potential election violations (Paskarina, 2018).

Volunteers commonly become part of election campaign teams, providing additional workforce with qualities that are more flexible than those exhibited by political parties in engaging with voters. Their responsibilities encompass activities such as reaching out to voters, organizing public meetings to garner support for candidates or parties, performing administrative tasks, and managing the preparation and maintenance of equipment or logistics for candidates (Shaw, 2018). The increasing importance of partisan volunteers in the electoral arena is closely connected to the operational strategies employed by political parties. In the democratic political system, where the primary role of political parties is to enlist leaders to accomplish public objectives, these parties assume a crucial function (Dalton et al., 2011).

METHOD

This article employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The data collection technique involves secondary data through library research. Library research is a data collection technique conducted by examining books, literature, notes, and various reports related to the issue being investigated (Sugiyono, 2014). In qualitative research, researchers objectively engage with the subjective reality under study, where subjectivity applies to the reality observed from the perspective of those being studied.

The acquired data is then organized and analyzed to obtain relevant information for the purpose of this research. This method will ultimately depict the portrait of political voluntarism in the 2024 elections. Additionally, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of political voluntarism in the 2024 elections rather than breaking it down into specific interrelated variables. As a result, the analysis focuses on a broader depiction of the phenomenon rather than a detailed methodological breakdown of how each data point influences democracy, political participation, and political parties. The aim of this research is to understand the phenomenon or social phenomenon by focusing more on a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon under study rather than breaking it down into interrelated variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Voluntarism Phenomenon in the 2024 General Election

In various aspects, political volunteers do not want to wait too long for a policy or official action from the government. At this point, political volunteers are challenged to take action due to dissatisfaction with a system, policy, actions of political actors, and other issues of the state. Social and political power. The social and political power of volunteers also stems from the fact that voluntarism is a language that can convey a strong message to leaders, policymakers, and others in society.

This statement is supported by one of the interviews with vice presidential candidate Mahfud MD, who believes that political volunteers play a crucial role in winning the Presidential Election or presidential election in 2024. "Important because volunteers are a balance to supporting parties. So supporting parties work to bring the party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates. Volunteers work outside the party, and their influence is significant because they are more flexible, not too formal" (Mahrofi, 2024). One political phenomenon related to political volunteers can be seen during the 2014 Presidential Election with Joko Widodo's victory, where it became a victory not only for the supporting party but also for the supporting volunteers. One such volunteer group was named Pro Jokowi (Projo). The existence of Projo can still be seen in the 2024 Presidential Election, where several agendas related to support directions in the 2024 elections are happening.

Following the 2014 Presidential Election, there has been a shift in the trajectory of volunteer groups, with the rise of volunteers reflecting the public's inclination toward leaders originating from grassroots movements. In 2019, volunteers steered the sentiment trend towards nationalist and moderate leaders. This evolving trend among volunteers signifies a transformation in their role, moving beyond mere support to actively assuming control over the figures they endorse. Notably, within this changing trend, the assertiveness of volunteers emerges as a potent force in bolstering political endeavors, with a key advantage being their influence over specific voter segments.

The presence of volunteers is triggered, among other things, by a decline in trust in political parties. Volunteer groups emerge based on voluntary contributions with various values believed and advocated for. The emergence of volunteers is essential in improving the quality of democracy based on voluntarism with believed values. Additionally, political volunteers are crucial in increasing political awareness in society, as, on the other hand, volunteers operate independently outside the party system, making closeness to voters very likely. From this statement, it is clear that political parties need improvement due to the declining public trust, requiring internal party reforms and evaluations by public officials in key positions.

The phenomenon of political volunteers is born, not least, from the love for the supported figure. In its formation, it can also arise from spontaneity or as an extension of a party, making it challenging in the political arena to distinguish between political volunteers acting based on voluntarism or transactional motives. Political volunteers must cultivate the same spirit, have political ethics, and democratic ethics, which are then used as a common foundation that competition is a competition in

fighting for values and beliefs, leading to a healthy circulation of elites. In the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Election, there are three candidate pairs, as seen in the following Table 2.

Each pair of candidates has supporters among political volunteers. These political volunteers then engage in various activities with the aim of winning the candidate pair. Candidate pair number one, Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar, have programs “DESAK ANIES” and “SLEPET IMIN” initiated by the “Ubah Bareng” Community, where the activities include Q&A sessions with presidential candidate number one. This information is referenced in the social media account @ubahbareng as Figure 3.



The activity is carried out by supporting volunteers as a platform to absorb the aspirations of voters, including young and other age categories. The dialogical campaign with young voters, packaged in the event, provides space for questions, criticisms, and the like. According to the candidate pair, the activity signifies their commitment to engaging in a dialogue with the youth. “I want to convey to everyone that this is our commitment as presidential candidates to engage in a dialogue with young people and provide space for them to discuss matters that are important to them,” (Kompas.id, 2023).

Table 2. Presidential & Vice Presidential Candidates for the 2024 Election & Supporting Parties

Presidential Candidates - Vice Presidential Candidates	Endorsing Party & Number of Seats	Total Seats
Anies Baswedan-Muhaimin Iskandar	- Partai Nasdem (59 Seats) - PKS (50 Seats) - PKB (58 Seats) - Partai Ummat	167 Seats (29,05%)
Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka	- Partai Gerindra (78 Seats) - Partai Golkar (85 Seats) - PAN (54 Seats) - Partai Demokrat (44 Seats) - Partai Gelora - Partai Bulan Bintang - PSI	261 Seats (45,39%)
Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD	- PDIP (128 Seats) - PPP (19 Seats) - Perindo - Hanura	147 Seats (25,56%)

Source: Data Analysis Results from Various Sources, 2024

Candidate pair number two, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming, through the Gemoy Volunteers, recently held a Joget Gemoy competition. According to the volunteers, a political campaign should be a fun and creative campaign led by young people, so the activities organized should be exciting and positively oriented. “The campaign leading up to the general election is always an interesting moment for every presidential and vice-presidential candidate. We see that this light and enjoyable campaign is one effective way and also a positive activity to garner support for the Prabowo-Gibran pair.” This can be seen in the image as quoted from the social media account of the Gemoy volunteers @relawan.gemoy:



Source: Captured results from Instagram @relawan.gemoy

Figure 4. “JOGET GEMOY” Competition

The number three pair, Ganjar Pranowo-Mahfud MD, through their volunteers, organized an event called “Demokreasi,” where the event served as an opportunity for discussion, Q&A, and presentation of various programs endorsed by the candidate pair. Additionally, there was “TABRAKPROF!” as one of the legal consultation events with Prof. Mahfud MD. This information is as captured from the website sahabatganjar.com and Instagram @proganjarmahfud03, as shown in Figure 5.



Source: Captured results from the website sahabatganjar.com & Instagram @proganjarmahfud03

Figure 5. “DEMOKR(E)ASI” and “TABRAK PROF!” activities.

The Impact of Political Volunteerism on Democracy, Political Participation, and Political Parties

Political volunteerism, or political volunteers, has an impact on democracy, such as community participation where political volunteers can enhance the involvement of the community in political processes and elections (Huda & Suharno, 2023). Political volunteers can then assist and educate the community in political processes and elections. Furthermore, the involvement of political volunteers can bring about a diversification of perspectives, as volunteers from various backgrounds contribute to better representation of diverse societal groups.

Lane & Ersson (1996) state that “Democratic viability or longevity requires that there is a system of organizations that are independent of governments,” suggesting that the sustainability of democracy requires independent organizational systems apart from the government. Almond & Verba (in Dekker & Halman, 2003) also mention that voluntarism in an organization serves as a mediating function between individuals and the state, creating an effective and meaningful relationship in a political system.

Moreover, through their activities, political volunteers have an impact on empowering the community to understand their rights and obligations in a democracy (Huda & Suharno, 2023). The activities can also lead to innovation in campaigns, where innovative ideas, as discussed earlier, can enliven a creative and effective political process. In terms of political participation, political volunteers can have a significant impact on voter participation, playing a crucial role in stimulating voter participation in campaign activities, voter education, and mobilizing the community in general elections democracy (Huda & Suharno, 2023). Political volunteers also contribute to increased political awareness, as various activities are expected to enhance political awareness, leading to a better understanding of political issues and informed decision-making.

Political participation is a citizen’s obligation in a democratic state. Participation in a political process is a behavior influenced by the intention to do so. To exercise this right, several factors influencing political participation include financial resources, time, and technology, which can affect political participation. Additionally, political involvement, political interests, and political awareness are significantly related to the intention to participate (Baber, 2020).

Considering the declining trend in public trust in political parties, the emergence of political volunteers becomes noteworthy for political parties. The presence of political volunteers reflects dissatisfaction with the

party's performance and dissatisfaction or a feeling of non-representation of the public by political parties. Political parties, at some point, are not considered to reflect the values or aspirations of the people, making political volunteering an alternative to ensure the realization of these values and aspirations.

The challenge of eroding public trust in political parties prompts a need for these parties to rejuvenate their capacity to mediate between the state and society. This raises the crucial inquiry of how political parties can effectively address this predicament. According to Acetti and Wolkenstein (2017), political parties need to undertake internal deliberative initiatives, providing an avenue for party members to engage in debates on policies and the broader vision of the government. In the conducted study, deliberative reform is identified as the most fitting response, as societal demands increasingly manifest through cognitive mobilization, emphasizing a form of expression and non-hierarchical political involvement.

Furthermore, the lack of representation by political parties is another factor in the emergence of political volunteers, where there is a feeling of non-representation of aspirations by political parties on various issues such as economic, social, gender, and others. Additionally, dissatisfaction with political elites originating from political parties contributes to the emergence of political volunteers. There is a push for change where individuals involved in political volunteering feel disappointed with political parties, necessitating a direct contribution to join political volunteering. This serves as a notable point for political parties.

CONCLUSION

The involvement of political voluntarism or political volunteers in the 2024 elections can be interpreted as a manifestation of community-driven political participation, advocating values and aspirations independently of political parties. This political voluntarism represents an endeavor to sustain democracy. The erosion of public trust in political parties also highlights the increasing prominence of political voluntarism, where the pursuit of values and aspirations, coupled with the perception that political parties are ineffective in mediating between the people and the state, becomes evident. In the 2024 elections, political volunteers are perceived as more effective in reaching voters due to their independent nature and lack of affiliations with political party networks. Consequently, presidential and vice-presidential candidates acknowledge the significant

role played by political volunteers in championing interests and garnering support that can influence the electoral outcome.

REFERENCE

- Arianto, B. (2016). Fenomena Relawan Politik dalam Kontestasi Presidensial 2014. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Ilmu Politik*, 18(2), 130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22146/jsp.13128>
- Asrizal. (2020). Partisipasi Politik Masyarakat Terhadap Pemilihan Umum Perspektif Good Governance. *Jurnal Bawaslu Provinsi Kepulauan Riau*, 2(1), 130–147. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55108/jbk.v2i1.236>
- Baber, H. (2020). Intentions to participate in political crowdfunding- from the perspective of civic voluntarism model and theory of planned behavior. *Technology in Society*, 63, 101435. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2020.101435>
- Budiardjo, M. (2008). *Dasar-dasar Ilmu Politik*. Gramedia.
- Cohen, J. (1999). Trust, voluntary association and workable democracy: the contemporary American discourse of civil society. In *Democracy and Trust* (pp. 208–248). Cambridge University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511659959.007>
- Dalton, R. J., Farrell, D. M., & McAllister, I. (2011). *Political Parties and Democratic Linkage*. Oxford University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:osobl/9780199599356.001.0001>
- Dekker, P., & Halman, L. (2003). *Volunteering and Values* (pp. 1–17). Springer. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4615-0145-9_1
- Herdiansah, A. G. (2019). Political Participation Convergence in Indonesia: A Study of Partisan Volunteers in the 2019 Election. *Jurnal Politik*, 4(2), 263. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7454/jp.v4i2.225>
- Huda M.N and Suharno (2023). The role of community-based democracy volunteers in increasing the voter participation in general elections. *Jurnal Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik*. 36, (1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V36I12023.72-87>.
- INVERNIZZI-ACCETTI, C., & WOLKENSTEIN, F. (2017). The Crisis of Party Democracy, Cognitive Mobilization, and the Case for

- Making Parties More Deliberative. *American Political Science Review*, 111(1), 97–109. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055416000526>
- Lane, J.-E., & Ersson, S. (1996). *European politics: an introduction*. Sage.
- Mahrofi, Z. (2024, January 13). *Mahfud: Relawan berperan penting dalam kemenangan Pilpres 2024 - ANTARA News*. Antaranews.Com. <https://www.antaranews.com/berita/3914295/mahfud-relawan-berperan-penting-dalam-pemenangan-pilpres-2024>
- Paskarina, C. (2018). Volunteerism as an alternative early warning system in supporting election supervision. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 31(2), 128. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.V31I22018.128-139>
- Shaw, C. (2018). *The Campaign Manager: Running and Winning Local Elections*. Routledge.
- Sugiyono. (2014). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif Dan R&D*. Alfabeta.
- Surbakti, R. (2010). *Memahami Ilmu Politik*. Gramedia.
- Syauket, A. (2022). Peran Relawan Politik Dalam Konstelasi Politik Indonesia. *Jurnal Hukum Sasana*, 8(1), 47–56. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31599/sasana.v8i1.1052>