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Building Political Habits Among First-Time Voter Through Innovative Political Education in Gowa Regency

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ABSTRACT - Youth voter participation is critical to democratic consolidation in Indonesia; however, persistently low political literacy and political apathy among first-time voters continue to undermine the quality of electoral engagement and local accountability. Responding to this challenge, this study examines how a locally grounded political education initiative implemented in Sokkolia Village, Gowa Regency, contributes to the formation of a political habitus among novice voters. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that community-embedded strategies—particularly small-group deliberations and door-to-door outreach—played a substantive role in improving participants' understanding of electoral processes and fostering stronger motivation for political participation. The effectiveness of the initiative was closely associated with the involvement of trusted community leaders who acted as brokers of legitimacy, as well as the use of visual and narrative-based learning aids that translated abstract civic concepts into locally meaningful forms. The study contributes theoretically by extending Bourdieu's concept of habitus and Putnam's social capital framework, demonstrating how dense local networks and repeated interpersonal interactions can reshape political dispositions toward electoral participation in rural contexts. Practically, the study offers a replicable grassroots model for political education and highlights the potential of integrating digital media to sustain youth political engagement beyond electoral cycles.

Keywords: *Political Education, Political Habitus, First-Time Voter, Political Literacy, Social Capital*

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Introduction

Political participation is one of the main indicators in assessing the quality of democracy in a country (Fernandes et al., 2015; Ivaldi et al., 2017; Oser & Hooghe, 2018). As a system that relies on the active involvement of citizens, democracy requires substantial and quality participation from all elements of society, including first-time voters (Murfatiah & Maulana, 2025; Rahmatullah et al., 2024; Sihombing & Julia Ivanna, 2024; Suryanef & Rafni, 2020). In Indonesia, first-time voters have a very strategic role, especially considering their significant number in every election. Data from the General Elections Commission (KPU) shows that in the 2019 elections, around 30% of the total voters were first-time voters aged 17–24 years. This figure confirms that first-time voters have great potential to influence election results and the direction of public policy in the future.

However, there are major challenges in involving first-time voters in the political process. First-time voters often have low political literacy, minimal understanding of the political system, and lack awareness of the importance of their role in the democratic process (Larrain et al., 2021; Revalina et al., 2024; van Praag, 2018). This can result in passive, apathetic, or even pragmatic participation. Political pragmatism, characterized by voting decisions based on immediate gains, poses a serious threat to the quality of democracy because it obscures the true purpose of political participation, which is to vote based on the vision, mission, and work program offered by candidates.

Bourdieu, (1984), in his theory of habitus, explains that individual behavior cannot be separated from the social structure in which they exist. Habitus is a system of dispositions that shapes the way individuals think, feel, and act in a particular social context. In a political context, political habitus encompasses individuals' mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors in participating in politics. This habitus does not appear instantly but is shaped by life experiences, education, and social environment. Therefore, it is important to provide positive and in-depth experiences through political education so that first-time voters can internalize active, critical, and participatory political habits.

Sokkolia Village, Gowa Regency, is a strategic location for this research given its demographic characteristics, which are dominated by young voters. This village also represents rural communities in Indonesia, which generally have limited access to political information and political education activities. Most of the community relies on traditional media and direct interaction to obtain information. This presents both challenges and opportunities for designing political education programs that are appropriate to the local context.

Political education is one of the main solutions to overcome the challenges faced by first-time voters (Hadi et al., 2025; Latief & Tripuspita, 2024; Mahyudin, 2025). As a learning process, political education aims to improve individuals' political literacy so that they can understand their rights and obligations as citizens, recognize relevant political issues, and actively participate in the democratic process. Well-designed political education can help build political habits that support quality participation.

Habermas, (1985), in his theory of deliberative democracy, emphasizes the importance of the public sphere as an arena for dialogue and discussion on political issues. According to Habermas, democracy depends not only on formal participation, such as voting in elections, but also on the ability of citizens to discuss public interests rationally. This approach is relevant in

designing political education programs, as it provides space for first-time voters to engage in critical and fact-based discussions.

However, to reach young voters, an innovative approach that is relevant to their characteristics is needed. The younger generation tends to be more interested in interactive and technology-based educational formats. Syah et al., (2026) shows that social media can be an effective tool for conveying political messages to the younger generation. Therefore, a combination of traditional approaches, such as group discussions, and the use of digital media can be an effective strategy in political education.

In addition, political literacy is an important element in building political awareness among first-time voters. Milner, (2002) defines political literacy as an individual's ability to understand and engage in the political process. Individuals with good political literacy tend to be more critical in evaluating political information and more active in participating (Kim & Yang, 2016; Smith, 2013). Within this framework, political education should also emphasize the development of political literacy competencies, including the ability to identify misinformation, critically evaluate candidates' policy platforms, and understand the broader implications of public policies.

The success of political education depends not only on the methods used, but also on the extent to which the program can adapt to the local condition (Han, 2023; Willeck & Mendelberg, 2022; Zhang Qing, 2024). The village of Sokkolia has unique socio-cultural characteristics, such as a sense of mutual cooperation and strong bonds between residents. These values can be utilized to support the success of political education programs. For example, community-based approaches, such as small group discussions involving community leaders, can increase program participation and effectiveness.

This study examines the development and evaluation of a political education program for first-time voters in Sokkolia Village. Its novelty lies in adopting a locally grounded approach that strategically integrates traditional community-based practices with digital methods to cultivate political habitus among novice voters. Beyond improving political literacy, the study seeks to explain how political habitus is formed through dynamic interactions between individuals, structured educational interventions, and the surrounding social environment. Accordingly, it addresses two research questions: what forms of innovative political education are effective for first-time voters in Sokkolia Village, and how does the formation of political habitus unfold through the political education process. The study is expected to generate both theoretical and practical contributions.

Theoretically, it enriches scholarship on political habitus and political literacy by extending these discussions to rural community contexts that remain underrepresented in the literature. Practically, it provides evidence-informed guidance for government institutions, election management bodies, and civil society organizations in designing political education programs that are more contextually relevant and effective. Given Indonesia's ongoing democratic consolidation, empowering young voters to participate actively and responsibly is increasingly urgent; this study addresses that need by offering new insights into building a critical political habitus and proposing a replicable model for areas with comparable sociocultural characteristics.

Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the process of forming political habitus among first-time voters through innovative political education in Sokkolia Village , Gowa Regency. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth picture of the experiences, perceptions, and dynamics of internalizing political values in a specific social context. The research focuses on examining how political education programs based on local wisdom, including small group discussions facilitated by community leaders and door to door outreach activities, shape the mindset, attitudes, and actions of first time voters in engaging with the political sphere.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: participatory observation, in depth interviews, and documentation review. Participatory observation was carried out to capture real interactions between facilitators and participants during each educational session, including patterns of communication and spontaneous responses that emerged during discussions or simulations of political activities. In depth interviews were conducted with key informants, including first time voters, program organizers, and community leaders, to explore their personal experiences, challenges, and understanding of the democratic process. In addition, documentation review involved the use of official village reports, program activity records, and relevant scientific literature on political habitus and political education to strengthen the process of data triangulation.

Data analysis used thematic analysis techniques aided by qualitative software to ensure consistency and traceability of the coding process. The stages of analysis included (1) data reduction, which involved sorting and summarizing interview transcripts, observation notes, and supporting documents into units of meaning; (2) data presentation, in which initial findings are mapped into broad themes such as "internalization of democratic values" and "the role of social capital"; and (3) drawing conclusions, which focuses on how political education shapes participants' dispositions toward political participation. The entire process was tested for validity through source triangulation and peer debriefing with colleagues to enrich interpretation and minimize researcher bias.

The theoretical framework used refers to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus to understand the patterns of political dispositions that are formed, as well as Robert Putnam's theory of social capital to examine the influence of social networks and trust in supporting the success of the program. Thus, the results of this study not only explain the dynamics of the formation of political habitus in Sokkolia Village, but also provide practical recommendations for designers of political education programs to be more responsive to local conditions and strengthen the social capital of the community for more inclusive and sustainable political participation.

Result and Discussion

Political Education Program Results

The innovative political education program implemented in Sokkolia Village showed significant results in increasing political literacy and shaping political habitus among first-time voters. Through a local-based approach, such as *door-to-door* activities involving the Village Election Committee (PPS) and Professional Work Study (KKP) students, first-time voters received direct information about their rights and obligations as citizens in the election. Initial surveys show that before the political education program was implemented, only about 40% of first-time

voters had a deep understanding of the election process. After the program was implemented, this figure increased to 70%, demonstrating the success of the approach used.

In addition, small group discussions involving community leaders were one of the most effective methods for reaching first-time voters. These discussions not only provided information about the election, but also encouraged participants to actively share their views on relevant political issues. The interview results show that around 60% of participants felt more confident discussing politics after participating in the program. This indicates a positive change in the political disposition of first-time voters, which is in line with Bourdieu's concept of habitus (1984), where social experience plays a key role in shaping the way individuals think and act.

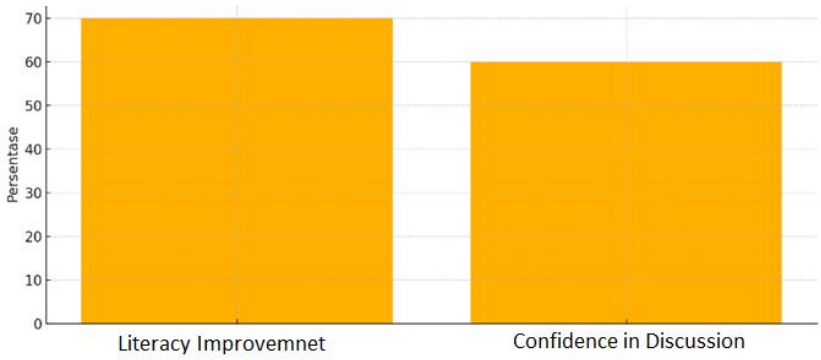


Figure 1. Results of the Political Education Program

Source: processed by author, 2025

The figure 1 presents two principal indicators reflecting the outcomes of the intervention, namely the enhancement of political literacy and the increase in participants' confidence in engaging in discussion. The first indicator demonstrates a substantial rise in political literacy, from an initial level of 40% to 70% following the implementation of the program. This 30-percentage-point improvement signifies a marked advancement in participants' understanding of fundamental aspects of the electoral process, including procedures, rights, and civic responsibilities. The elevated literacy score (70%) visually represented by the corresponding bar underscores the effectiveness of the door-to-door outreach strategy combined with the utilization of locally contextualized educational materials. These approaches are widely recognized in civic education research as effective mechanisms for increasing comprehension, particularly in communities where access to formal political information may be limited. Personalized engagement facilitates clarification of misconceptions, while culturally relevant materials enhance cognitive accessibility and retention.

The second indicator reflects a 60% increase in participants' confidence in engaging in political discussions. This outcome suggests that beyond cognitive gains, the intervention also contributed to affective and behavioral dimensions of civic engagement. The height of the confidence bar (60%) confirms the positive role of small-group discussions in cultivating a participatory orientation. Empirical studies in deliberative pedagogy indicate that structured, dialogic learning environments promote self-efficacy and reduce communication anxiety, thereby enabling individuals to articulate opinions more openly. The group-based format likely provided a supportive atmosphere in which participants could exchange perspectives, practice argumentation, and develop interpersonal trust. Such conditions are critical in transforming passive knowledge acquisition into active civic participation.

A comparison between the two indicators reveals a meaningful distinction. The more pronounced increase in political literacy suggests that knowledge acquisition may be relatively more responsive to targeted informational strategies. In contrast, the development of confidence, although meaningful, tends to require more than simple exposure to information. It generally demands continuous and structured interactions that also address the psychological and social aspects of participation. This tendency is consistent with theoretical perspectives in civic education and social learning that distinguish between cognitive outcomes, such as knowledge and understanding, and socio emotional outcomes, including confidence, efficacy, and the willingness to participate.

The Formation of Political Habitus through Education

The political habitus of first-time voters is formed through social interactions that occur during the education program. According to Bourdieu's theory, habitus is an internal structure that is formed through the process of socialization and becomes a guideline for individuals in their actions. In the context of this study, political education functions as a socialization mechanism that provides new experiences and information to first-time voters. Through interactions with program facilitators and fellow participants, first-time voters begin to internalize the values of democracy and active participation.

For example, small group discussions provide a space for first-time voters to listen to different perspectives and debate political issues. This process is in line with Habermas, (1985) theory of deliberative democracy, which emphasizes the importance of public discussion in building a common understanding of political issues. By participating in such discussions, first-time voters not only learn about politics, but also develop communication and critical thinking skills that are important for democratic participation.

Political habitus is also formed through visual aids, such as posters and infographics, used in educational programs. These tools help simplify complex information, making it easier for first-time voters to understand. For example, posters explaining the stages of the election and how to vote are very useful for participants who are unfamiliar with the process. According to interviews, around 80% of participants felt that visual aids helped them understand political information better. This shows that political habitus can be formed not only through verbal interaction, but also through well-designed visual media.

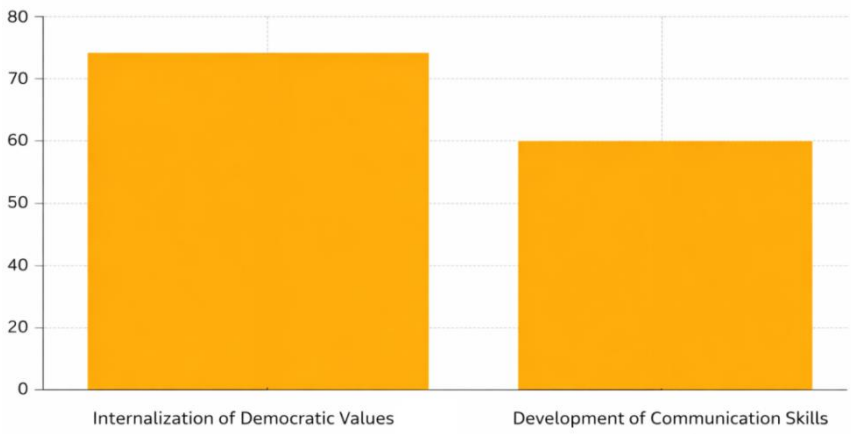


Figure 2. Formation of Political Habitus

Source: processed by author, 2025

The figure 2 illustrating habitus formation demonstrates that the proportion of internalization of democratic values reaches 73%, which is higher than the development of communication skills at 60%. This difference indicates that the intervention strategies, particularly the use of visual media and structured socialization approaches, were highly effective in strengthening participants' foundational understanding and acceptance of democratic norms. Visual aids that are designed contextually and presented systematically facilitate cognitive processing and value recognition because they translate abstract political principles into concrete and relatable representations. Within the perspective of civic education and social learning theory, repeated exposure to symbolic representations of democratic principles such as fairness, participation, and accountability supports the gradual incorporation of these norms into individual dispositions. The higher percentage of 73% therefore reflects the successful embedding of democratic values at the level of internal belief and orientation, suggesting that participants not only comprehended these principles but also began to integrate them into their normative framework.

In contrast, the development of communication skills and critical discussion abilities, although demonstrating a substantial increase of 60%, remains comparatively lower. This finding highlights the more complex and practice dependent nature of deliberative competencies. Unlike value internalization, which can be reinforced through consistent messaging and symbolic reinforcement, communicative and critical thinking skills require iterative engagement, dialogic interaction, and experiential learning processes. Empirical research in deliberative democracy and participatory pedagogy consistently indicates that the capacity to articulate arguments, respond constructively to differing viewpoints, and engage in reasoned discussion develops gradually through sustained practice (Backer, 2017; Larrain et al., 2021; Samuelsson, 2016). The increase to 60 percent indicates meaningful progress; however, it also underscores that communicative competence is cultivated through prolonged exposure to structured discussion environments. The comparison between these two indicators therefore suggests that while foundational democratic values can be internalized effectively through targeted educational strategies, the consolidation of deliberative skills requires continuous reinforcement and long term pedagogical commitment.

The Role of Social Capital in Program Success

The success of the political education program in Sokkolia Village was also supported by the strong social capital in the community. Putnam, (2000) defines social capital as the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In this study, social capital manifested itself in the form of close relationships between residents and trust in community leaders.

The participation of community leaders in the education program was key in building participants' trust. Respected community leaders, such as the village head and traditional leaders, were involved as discussion facilitators, so that participants felt more comfortable participating. According to interview data, around 75% of participants stated that the presence of community leaders increased their motivation to participate in the program. This shows the importance of social capital in supporting the effectiveness of political education.

In addition, social networks among citizens also play an important role in disseminating information about educational programs. Citizens who have participated in the program often invite their friends or relatives to participate, creating a chain effect that increases the program's

coverage. This process shows that social capital can serve as a mechanism that expands the impact of political education programs.

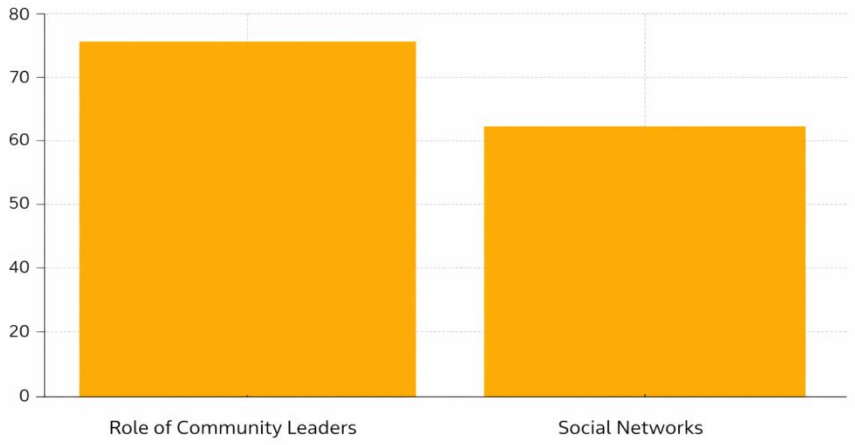


Figure 3. The Role of Social Capital in Program Success
Source: processed by author, 2025

The graph of the role of social capital shows two contributions: the presence of community leaders who motivate 75% of participants, and the effect of social networks among citizens at 62%. The difference in the height of these bars indicates that the legitimacy of local figures (symbolic capital) has a greater impact in encouraging initial participation, while the dissemination of information through citizen relations (network capital) functions as a supporting mechanism that expands the program's reach.

Theoretical Discussion: Political Education and Political Literacy

The political education designed in Sokkolia Village not only improved the political literacy of first-time voters, but also contributed theoretically to the literature on the formation of political literacy Milner, (2002) states that political literacy includes the ability of individuals to understand and analyze political information, and to use it to make rational decisions. In this study, The political education program succeeded in increasing the political literacy of participants, as indicated by their improved understanding of their rights and obligations as voters. Through a series of educational activities such as discussions, interactive sessions, and the dissemination of information about electoral processes, participants became more aware of the importance of participating in democratic practices. They demonstrated a better comprehension of fundamental electoral principles, including the right to vote freely, the responsibility to make informed political choices, and the role of citizens in ensuring accountable governance.

However, challenges remain in reaching participants who have low levels of education or lack confidence to participate in discussions. This shows that political literacy does not only depend on the provision of information, but also on efforts to create an inclusive and supportive environment. Norris, (2023) theory of political communication, asserts that direct interaction with election organizers can increase participants' trust and encourage more active participation. Therefore, future political education programs need to consider strategies to reach groups that are more difficult to reach.

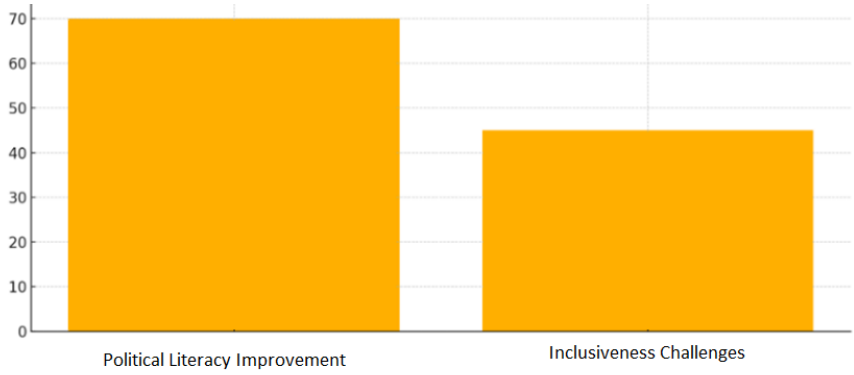


Figure 4. Theoretical Discussion: Political Education and Political Literacy
Source: processed by author, 2025

The theoretical discussion figure 4 shows that the increase in political literacy (70%) follows a pattern consistent with Milner—an increase in analytical skills and rational decision-making. Conversely, the bar representing the challenge of inclusivity (45%) reflects significant barriers among low-educated groups. A comparison of these two bars confirms the importance of providing additional support so that improvements in literacy can reach all segments of society without exception.

Relevance of Results to Habitus and Social Capital Theory

Although the political education program in Sokkolia Village showed positive results, there are several challenges that need to be overcome to increase its effectiveness. One of the main challenges is low initial participation, especially among first-time voters who feel uninterested or lack confidence in participating in the program. Based on observations, some participants were initially reluctant to join the discussions because they felt that politics was not a relevant field for them. This reflects the problem of political apathy, which often becomes an obstacle in increasing first-time voter participation.

However, this challenge also presents an opportunity to explore more creative and engaging educational methods. For example, the use of digital media, such as short videos and infographics on social media, can be an effective tool for reaching the younger generation. Syah et al., (2026) research shows that social media has great potential to increase political engagement among young voters. Therefore, integrating digital media with traditional approaches, such as group discussions, could be a more effective strategy in the future.

The results of this study support Bourdieu's habitus theory by showing how social interactions in political education programs can shape the political dispositions of first-time voters. This process involves the internalization of democratic values through direct experience and interaction with the social environment. In addition, the results of the study also reinforce Putnam's social capital theory by showing how social networks and trust between citizens can support the success of political education programs.

However, this study also shows that the formation of political habitus does not always occur linearly. Some participants showed resistance to new information, especially if it contradicted their previous beliefs or experiences. This shows that political habitus is not only influenced by education programs, but also by other factors, such as past experiences and media influence.

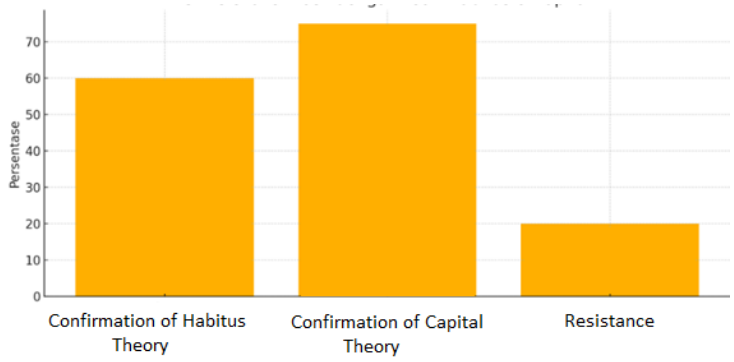


Figure 5. Relevance of Results to Habitus and Social Capital Theory
Source: processed by author, 2025

The theory relevance in figure 5 shows that the highest confirmation bar is for capital theory (75%), followed by habitus theory (60%), and resistance (20%). This illustrates that social capital—trust and networks—plays a more dominant role in explaining the success of the program's than the process of habitus internalization alone. The presence of the resistance bar indicates that 20% of participants still reject new information, underlining the program's limited ability to penetrate previously established habitus structures.

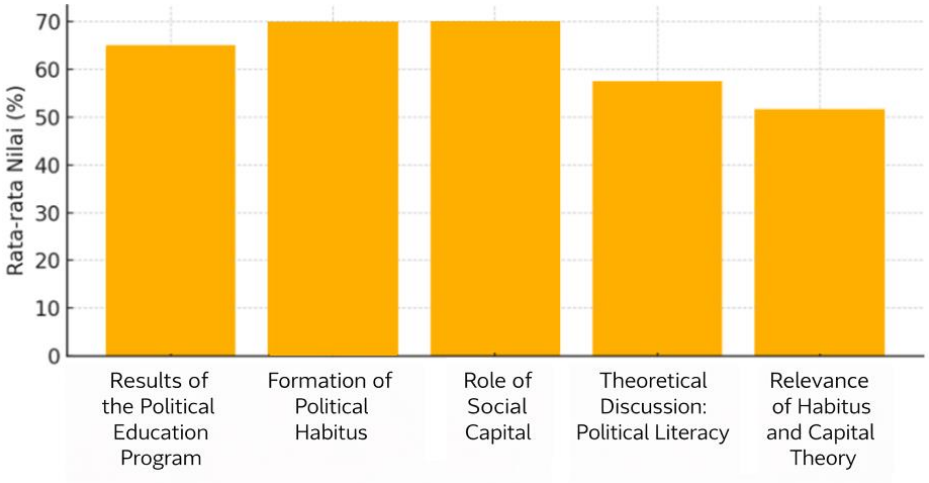


Figure 6. Average Indicators per Section of the Political Education Program
Source: processed by author, 2025

Overall, the average indicators in figure 6 show that the political education program in Sokkolia Village was successful in two main pillars: the formation of political habitus and the strengthening of community social capital. In the habitus formation section, social interaction through group discussions and the use of visual aids consistently instilled democratic values, resulting in an average score of 70%. The same applies to the role of social capital, where the legitimacy of community leaders and inter-resident networks spurred motivation and expanded the program's reach to an average of 70% as well. The combination of deliberative experience and trust built within the community proves that political education not only changes knowledge but also shapes a more participatory political disposition.

However, when we look at the average in the theoretical discussion and relevance of results to theory sections, we see lower scores of 57.5% and 51.7%, respectively. This decline is primarily caused by several factors. One important factor is the presence of inclusivity barriers, where individuals with lower educational backgrounds still experience difficulties in actively

participating in the program. In addition, some participants show resistance toward new information, which makes it harder for them to fully accept and understand the political education materials that are provided. Although the overall increase in political literacy reached 70%, vulnerable segments require a more personalized and sustainable approach so that the impact of the program can be felt evenly. Similarly, the resistance rate of around 20% indicates the limitations of old habitus structures that are not easily eroded by a single intervention.

Thus, although a strong foundation of knowledge and motivation has already been established, the effectiveness of the program can still be improved through the use of a hybrid strategy that integrates face to face learning methods with interactive digital media. In addition, providing targeted assistance for the most vulnerable participants would help ensure that the benefits of the program can be experienced more equally by all participants. Only in this way can the ambition to create first-time voters who not only understand but are also truly actively and critically involved be realized.

Conclusion

To conclude, our research highlights several recommendations for improving the effectiveness of future political education programs. First, the integration of digital media should be prioritized, particularly through the use of social media platforms that can deliver political information in creative, engaging, and interactive formats. Such platforms are widely used by young people and can therefore serve as an effective channel for increasing political awareness among first-time voters. Second, stronger involvement of local communities is necessary. The participation of community leaders, local organizations, and grassroots institutions can enhance public trust and ensure that political education programs remain relevant to the social and cultural context of the participants. Third, political education methods should be adapted to the diverse needs and educational backgrounds of participants. Employing a variety of approaches, such as participatory discussions, interactive learning activities, and election simulation games, can make political learning more accessible and meaningful for different groups of learners.

Overall, this study demonstrates that locally grounded political education programs have significant potential to cultivate critical political awareness and responsible participation among first-time voters. Nevertheless, the long-term success of such initiatives depends on the continuous adaptation of educational strategies, the integration of innovative communication tools, and sustained collaboration with community actors to ensure that the programs remain responsive to the evolving needs of society.

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