

Political Preferences of First-Time Voters In The 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections In Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province

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Abstract.

The political preferences of first-time voters constitute an important aspect in determining the quality of local democracy. This study aims to describe the political preferences of first-time voters and the factors that shape them in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province. The research employed a descriptive qualitative approach, using observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving the General Elections Commission, the Elections Supervisory Body, the National Unity and Politics Office, and first-time voters; the data were then analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results show that the political preferences of first-time voters are formed through three indicators, namely political values (rights, efficacy, relevance, and authenticity), political perceptions (civic education, environmental habituation, and digital agitation), and political inclinations that are both rational and emotional. Although the participation rate reached 82.78%, the political choices of first-time voters were not yet fully rational because they remained influenced by emotional aspects. The factors that determine these political preferences include the social environment (peers and organizations/communities), the family (the tendency to follow parents and family political communication), and social media (access to digital information, the shaping of candidate image, and disinformation and hate speech). This study affirms that the sustained strengthening of political education and digital literacy is greatly needed so that first-time voters may grow into critical, independent, and responsible subjects of democracy.

Keywords: Local Democracy; First-Time Voters; 2024 Regional Elections and Political Preferences.

I. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is one of the mechanisms for administering a system of government designed to realize the principle of popular sovereignty, in which state power is exercised by the government on the basis of the will and interests of citizens. Within this system, every citizen holds an equal standing and enjoys the same right to be involved in public decision-making. Democracy provides broad space for political participation, whether through direct involvement or legitimate representative mechanisms, so that the direction of state administration continually reflects the collective aspirations of society in a responsible and just manner.

The term democracy denotes that power rests in the hands of the people. Substantively, democracy carries a spirit that permeates various domains of life, whether in planning, management, or evaluation [1]. True democracy is a set of ideas and principles concerning freedom, and at the same time encompasses a set of practices and procedures formed through a long history, so that democracy is often described as the institutionalization of freedom, that is, the human rights and equality before the law that every society must possess [2].

One manifestation of a democratic state can be observed through the conduct of general elections and regional head elections. Elections function as an important instrument in the process of democratization and are frequently understood as both an indicator and a benchmark of the continuity of democracy in a country, because through such mechanisms the people are given the opportunity to determine their leaders directly. The administration of elections as a means of democracy therefore cannot be separated from the active involvement of society, since public participation is a fundamental element that determines the quality, legitimacy, and success of the democratic process [3].

Regional head elections play a strategic role as the primary instrument for conferring legitimacy upon political power, while also serving as a vehicle for the people to participate actively in the democratic system. Through the periodic conduct of regional elections, citizens obtain constitutional space to assess the performance of political actors, to determine their choice of leadership deemed representative, and to

exercise a supervisory function over the running of power, so that governance remains within the corridor of the will and interests of the people [4].

The legal basis for holding regional elections is set out in Law Number 10 of 2016 on the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors, which reinforces the principles of direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair democracy. Through this regulation, the people are granted the constitutional right to elect regional heads directly, without going through the representation of the legislative body, with the intent of realizing regional government that is more responsive, accountable, and close to the interests of society.

The constitutional foundation for the exercise of democracy is contained in Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which states that sovereignty is in the hands of the people and is exercised according to the Constitution. This article affirms that every form of state power must originate from the people and be exercised on the basis of the prevailing law. In the context of regional elections, this mandate is implemented through Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections, which regulates the mechanisms for holding elections in a democratic and measurable manner.

Efforts to strengthen democracy at the local level can be undertaken systematically through continuous and well-directed political education, particularly in building the civic awareness of first-time voters. Political education has been shown to enhance the political understanding and awareness of first-time voters, as evident in their increasingly active involvement in discussion, the development of their ability to express opinions critically and argumentatively, and the formation of mutual respect amid diverse backgrounds, all of which substantively reflect the internalization of democratic values [5].

The success of democracy depends heavily on the participation and active involvement of society. One group that occupies a strategic position is first-time voters, because their involvement not only determines the legitimacy of the political process but also reflects the continuity of democratic values in the future. The participation of first-time voters demonstrates a process of early political learning that has the potential to strengthen civic awareness, build a culture of democracy, and encourage the creation of a more inclusive and responsive political system.

First-time voters are individuals who, for the first time, exercise and cast their voting rights in an election, so that their electoral experience is still nascent and not yet firmly established. First-time voters should not be understood merely as an administrative category based on their newly acquired status as voters, but also as a group at a transitional phase toward political maturity, that is, when individuals begin to recognize the mechanisms of elections, understand the role of citizens in a democracy, and learn to make political decisions that affect public life [6].

First-time voters are often viewed as having limited mastery of knowledge and access to information about the political system, so that they are considered not yet fully to understand political dynamics, electoral procedures, or the consequences of the political choices they make, all of which may affect the quality of their participation [7]. Law Number 10 of 2016, Article 56, states that a voter is an Indonesian citizen who has reached the age of 17 or has been married and possesses the right to vote. Similar provisions are found in Law Number 32 of 2004, Article 68, and in General Elections Commission Regulation Number 19 of 2008, so that first-time voters may be understood as citizens casting their vote for the first time, within the age range of 17 to 21 years.

Data from the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia for the 2024 Election indicate that the group of first-time voters dominated the voter roll. This condition shows that first-time voters occupy a strategic position in the democratic process, because their political choices contribute significantly to the direction and outcome of political contestation. The role of first-time voters thus becomes crucial in exercising their political rights responsibly, while also reflecting the level of political awareness and participation of the younger generation in sustaining the democratic system.

According to data from the General Elections Commission of Boalemo Regency, the number of first-time voters in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections was recorded at 8,073 voters registered on the Permanent Voter List, comprising 4,212 male voters and 3,861 female voters. These data indicate that the participation of first-time voters was relatively balanced between men and women. All of these voters were

distributed across 242 polling stations throughout Boalemo Regency, which serves as an indicator that the conduct of the regional election was organized systematically so as to reach all segments of society.

Regional government is the administering authority that has proximity to and direct contact with the community. For this reason, a question arises as to whether the euphoria of local democracy through the direct election of regional heads will bring developmental progress while also enlightening the community's practice of democracy. In reality, some regional governments have not yet been fully able to translate the needs of the community and still leave various problems unresolved, which may then become a boomerang for the conduct of local democracy.

Regional elections occupy a strategic position in strengthening the edifice of democracy at the local level, because through such mechanisms one can observe concretely how democratic principles are put into practice in regional governance. Regional elections not only function as a means of constitutional leadership succession, but also serve as an evaluative space for assessing the development of the community's political awareness, particularly in understanding its political rights and obligations, thereby reflecting the quality of public participation and the extent to which democratic values have been internalized in the social and political life of the community.

The importance of the political understanding of first-time voters represents a fundamental form of awareness, especially in the context of contemporary political developments marked by increasingly complex dynamics of contestation. A rapidly moving and competitive political situation demands that first-time voters possess adequate understanding so as to be able to respond to various political processes critically and rationally; strengthening political understanding therefore becomes crucial to ensuring the attainment of democratic aims and the practice of politics consistent with democratic principles [8].

Socialization activities provided to first-time voters contribute significantly to enhancing political knowledge while also shaping and directing their political preferences, so that the political choices they make are not spontaneous but are grounded in more rational knowledge and consideration [9]. In line with this, political behavior can be explained through three approaches: the sociological approach, which emphasizes the influence of social structures such as class, religion, and economic status; the psychological approach, which focuses on perceptions, attitudes, and identification with a party or figure; and the rational approach, which views political behavior as the result of an individual's cost-benefit calculation [10].

In an effort to safeguard the credibility of democracy, there is a need to strengthen comprehensive oversight mechanisms accompanied by consistent law enforcement against every democratic violation, as well as synergy among public oversight, legal certainty, and the professionalism of election organizers so that all stages proceed transparently and in accordance with constitutional principles [11]. In addition, political education for first-time voters has been shown to enhance their cognitive capacity through the integration of political socialization and political literacy, so that they develop into voters who are more intelligent, critical, and rational [12], [13].

Preliminary observations indicate that the political choices of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency are not yet fully instrumentally rational, but are instead determined more by the construction of the values they hold, the perceptions formed toward political figures or parties, and the attitudinal tendencies that develop through everyday social experience. The way they interpret a candidate's image, credibility, and emotional closeness is often more decisive than a substantive evaluation of the candidate's vision and mission. This condition is consistent with the view that political preferences are influenced by the family as the primary agent, by the social environment such as peers and communities, and by the mass media as a secondary agent that shapes perceptions of political actors and issues [14].

A review of several studies shows that the political preferences of first-time voters are not formed by a single factor, but are influenced by a combination of sociological, psychological, and rational dimensions. Adolescents' political decisions are influenced by the family, school, and peer-group environment, as well as by the characteristics and track record of candidates [15]. The preferences of first-time voters are also still largely shaped by family and social-environment support, emotional closeness, candidate image, and the use of social media, whereas rational considerations are not yet fully dominant [16]. First-time voters have begun

to take into account their conscience, the nominating party, the vision and mission, and the capacity of candidates, although they remain influenced by social experience and access to information [17].

This condition shows that political awareness among first-time voters has not yet fully developed, because voting decisions are based more on emotional aspects than on consideration of candidates' programs and vision. As a result, the transformation of local democracy in Boalemo Regency has not proceeded effectively, since the political preferences of first-time voters do not yet genuinely reflect independence of thought and democratic maturity. To achieve substantive democracy, continuous political education is required so that first-time voters do not merely become objects of political mobilization, but grow into critical and rational subjects of democracy capable of making choices based on their own political awareness.

Based on the foregoing, the political preferences of first-time voters constitute a complex socio-political phenomenon that cannot be explained through participation figures alone. There therefore remains academic space that needs to be examined more deeply, particularly regarding how first-time voters in Boalemo Regency construct their political preferences in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections. On this basis, this study focuses on examining the political preferences of first-time voters under the title "Political Preferences of First-Time Voters in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province," as an effort to obtain a comprehensive empirical picture of the patterns, tendencies, and determinants of the political choices of the first-time-voter group in a regional head election.

II. METHODS

The object of this study is Boalemo Regency, Gorontalo Province. The research used a qualitative method because the problem under investigation is a social issue of a descriptive nature. Descriptive research serves to describe or portray the object under study, while the qualitative approach is explored on the basis of what informants say, feel, and do, adopting an emic perspective, that is, data are obtained from phenomena as they are in the field [18]. According to Bogdan and Guba, qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior [19].

In this study, the researcher acted as both the data collector and the active instrument in gathering data in the field, while other instruments in the form of aids and documents functioned as supporting instruments to reinforce the validity of the research findings. The researcher's direct presence in the field became a benchmark of success in understanding the case under study, so that the researcher's active engagement with informants and other data sources was absolutely necessary.

Data in qualitative research are not confined to words, but encompass everything obtained from what is seen, heard, and observed, such as field notes, interview descriptions, personal records, photographs, and other documents obtained through observation of and interviews with informants [20]. In qualitative research, the researcher serves as the human instrument, employing participant observation and in-depth interviews, and must therefore interact with and become thoroughly acquainted with the data sources [21].

The data sources are divided into two mutually reinforcing parts, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data are sources that provide data directly to the researcher, whereas secondary data do not provide data directly [22]. Primary data were obtained directly from their original sources through interviews and observation, which in this study comprised informants from the General Elections Commission of Boalemo Regency, the Elections Supervisory Body of Boalemo Regency, the National Unity and Politics Office of Boalemo Regency, and first-time voters. Secondary data were obtained through books, archives, and journal literature related to the research focus [21].

Data collection techniques constitute the most crucial step in research, because the aim of research is to obtain data that meet the established standards [21]. Data collection was carried out in a natural setting, emphasizing observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The informants in this study comprised the General Elections Commission of Boalemo Regency (2 persons), the Elections Supervisory Body of Boalemo Regency (2 persons), the National Unity and Politics Office of Boalemo Regency (1 person), and first-time voters (28 persons), consisting of 4 persons from each district. The limitation on the number of informants was applied because the information obtained from the first-time voters had reached a saturation

point, while the documentation technique was used to gather data from documents related to the research problem.

Data analysis was conducted to uncover the meaning contained in the data, so that its interpretation is not merely descriptive [22]. Qualitative data analysis is inductive, that is, analysis based on the data obtained, which are then developed into particular patterns of relationship or hypotheses [21]. The data analysis process was carried out through three main stages, namely data reduction, data display, and verification or conclusion drawing.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Political Preferences of First-Time Voters in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Boalemo Regency

Political preference refers to the positioning of an individual's attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations in determining political choices. According to Apter, political preference is the tendency of individuals or groups to place certain values as the foundation for forming attitudes, determining choices, and taking political action [23]. On this basis, the political preferences of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency are classified through three main indicators, namely political values, political perceptions, and political inclinations. These three indicators are interrelated because preferences do not arise in isolation, but are formed through the relationship among value awareness, the interpretation of information, and the direction of political inclination.

Political-value preference. The research findings show that the political values that emerge can be classified into four main categories, namely rights, efficacy, relevance, and authenticity. These four categories indicate that first-time voters do not interpret the regional election merely as a procedural activity for selecting a regional head, but also as a space to obtain recognition, conviction about the meaning of their vote, a connection between the election and their needs, and an assessment of a candidate's sincerity. Political values are present not merely as ideal moral rules, but also become the basis of consideration for first-time voters in determining their political choices.

The value of rights relates to first-time voters' awareness of their standing as citizens who possess the right to vote. The right that most frequently draws attention concerns the possession of an electronic identity card (e-KTP) as an administrative requirement for participation, since some first-time voters had not yet completed their data recording and therefore faced obstacles in ensuring their participation. This condition shows that the fulfillment of political rights depends not only on individual awareness, but also on the readiness of population administration and access to public services. From a democratic perspective, the right to vote is part of the exercise of popular sovereignty, so that it signals that first-time voters are beginning to enter a space of citizenship that demands political responsibility.

The value of efficacy relates to first-time voters' belief that their vote has meaning and can influence the direction of regional government. However, this belief is not yet fully strong, because some informants still doubted the impact of their vote on real change after the election, particularly because social experience shows that candidates often appear only when they need electoral support. This doubt indicates that the political efficacy of first-time voters still needs to be strengthened through well-directed and continuous political education, since political education is important so that they can respond to political processes critically and rationally [8] and can enhance their knowledge of political life [9].

The link between political education and political efficacy is important because political education builds the psychological foundation for first-time voters to feel that their involvement has value and impact in a democracy. Voters who possess political efficacy tend to believe more strongly that their participation can contribute to social and political change; conversely, voters who are unsure about the meaning of their vote are more prone to passivity and apathy. In the context of local democracy, the success of democracy is determined not only by the procedural conduct of elections, but also by the conscious and responsible involvement of society, since political participation functions as a means of conveying aspirations while also serving as an instrument for overseeing the exercise of power [24].

The value of relevance reflects first-time voters' assessment of the connection between the regional election and the needs of their lives. First-time voters tend to consider whether a candidate's vision, mission, and programs bear a direct relation to the problems they face, such as social, economic, and educational needs, and their future. If the programs offered are deemed appropriate, this can influence their political attitudes and encourage their involvement in the election. The value of authenticity, meanwhile, relates to the assessment of a candidate's sincerity, since some first-time voters regard a candidate's closeness to the community as occurring only during the campaign period, and therefore assess a candidate's presence more critically in order to distinguish genuine commitment from temporary image-building.

These various views demonstrate that the success of democracy is largely determined by the active involvement of all elements of society, including first-time voters. Their participation in the 2024 Regional Elections was also inseparable from their assessment of candidates' attitudes, behavior, and commitment. The higher the level of first-time voters' trust in the authenticity of a candidate's commitment, the greater the likelihood of their active involvement in the political process; political authenticity is thus understood as the congruence among a candidate's words, actions, and commitment in advocating for the interests of the community.

Based on this exposition, the political-value preferences of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency are shaped by four interrelated core values. The value of rights concerns awareness of one's standing as a citizen who possesses the right to vote; the value of efficacy reflects belief in the meaning of one's vote; the value of relevance indicates the alignment of a candidate's programs with the needs of the community; and the value of authenticity concerns trust in the sincerity and consistency of a candidate's commitment. These four values can shape political attitudes, determine the direction of choice, and influence the level of first-time voters' involvement in local democracy.

Political-perception preference. The political perceptions of first-time voters are formed through social and cognitive processes involving the reception, filtering, interpretation, and assessment of political information obtained from the surrounding environment. Political perception is understood as the way an individual views, interprets, and gives meaning to the political interests developing in the social environment; it relates not only to the level of knowledge, but also to the subjective assessment formed through social experience and the level of trust in the political system [23]. Based on the research findings, the political perceptions of first-time voters are formed through three main aspects, namely civic education, environmental habituation, and digital agitation.

The perception of political interests plays a significant role in shaping political behavior. First-time voters who hold a positive perception of candidates tend to be more open to participating and to exercising their voting rights consciously; conversely, if they hold a negative perception, for example viewing politics merely as an arena of elite interests or failing to understand the benefits of the election, their tendency to be passive, to follow the choices of others, or not to exercise their right to vote grows stronger. Political perception therefore cannot be separated from the quality of information, the social environment, political experience, and the communicative space that shape first-time voters' outlook on the democratic process.

Civic education takes place through socialization activities carried out by the General Elections Commission, the Elections Supervisory Body, the government, schools, and related parties to provide understanding of the stages of the election, voting rights, voting procedures, electoral prohibitions, and the importance of participation. However, such socialization has not yet been fully able to reach all first-time voters across the various districts, so that the strengthening of political education requires the involvement of various parties, including schools, regional governments, families, youth organizations, and social communities, so that political information can be received more evenly and understood more easily.

Within the framework of Civic Education, political education for first-time voters holds strong relevance, because civic learning is directed toward forming citizens who are aware of their rights, understand their obligations, and are able to participate responsibly. Civic Education is aptly positioned as a means of political education because both converge on the same aim, namely forming citizens who understand power relations, public norms, and the mechanisms of collective decision-making [25]. Civic Education also functions to form individuals capable of thinking critically about public issues, willing to

participate consciously, and possessing an ethical commitment to democratic values [26], so that it needs to be directed toward strengthening the competence of reasoned and responsible participation [27].

Environmental habituation describes the formation of political perceptions through the habits, conversations, and social experiences that take place within the family, school, peer groups, organizations, and society. The family becomes the first source of information, while peers and the social environment become spaces for informal discussion in assessing candidates, so that the political perceptions of first-time voters are influenced not only by information conveyed through social media, but also by the patterns of social communication that recur in everyday life. These findings are consistent with the view that the political preferences of first-time voters can be understood through sociological, psychological, and rational approaches [17], and that the school, family, and peer-group environments are important parts of forming political knowledge, attitudes, and orientation [15].

Digital agitation reflects the strong influence of social media in shaping the political perceptions of first-time voters. Information about candidates, programs, political images, endorsements, and even attacks on particular candidates spreads rapidly through Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and other digital platforms. Social media helps first-time voters become acquainted with candidates more broadly, but at the same time it introduces confusion arising from the circulation of hate speech, mutual attacks among supporters, and information that cannot necessarily be accounted for. This condition indicates that first-time voters require digital-literacy and political-literacy skills so as to be able to sort information critically before forming political judgments.

Social media such as Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp have become spaces for disseminating information about candidates, campaign activities, visions and missions, public opinion, and even political attacks on particular candidates. The presence of social media makes it easier for first-time voters to become acquainted with candidates quickly and to follow the dynamics of local politics more openly, but at the same time it presents a serious challenge in the form of the spread of disinformation, propaganda, and provocative narratives that can shape perceptions erroneously. The three channels of perception formation, namely civic education, environmental habituation, and digital agitation, are interconnected because first-time voters do not receive political information from a single source, but construct their political outlook through a combination of socialization, social communication, and exposure to digital media.

Thus, the political-perception preferences of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency in the 2024 Regional Elections were formed through civic education, environmental habituation, and digital agitation operating simultaneously. The participation of first-time voters is greatly influenced by the way they view the democratic process, assess candidates, understand the benefits of the election, and respond to the political information circulating in social and digital spaces; the formation of rational, critical, and responsible political perceptions therefore becomes an important aspect in encouraging the participation of first-time voters and strengthening the quality of local democracy.

Political-inclination preference. Political-inclination preference indicates the direction of choice formed after first-time voters have built a foundation of values and perceptions regarding the election process. The research data show that the overall voter participation rate in Boalemo Regency reached 82.78%, which illustrates the community's enthusiasm for engaging in local democracy. However, high participation does not automatically indicate that all first-time voters determined their choices independently and rationally, because their political decisions were still influenced by family relationships, social closeness, sympathy toward particular figures, and subjective experience.

A rational inclination is evident when first-time voters begin to consider the vision and mission, track record, work programs, political experience, and capacity of candidates to address regional needs. A rational inclination can be understood as voters' effort to assess political choices based on the benefits, consequences, and expectations regarding the outcome of the government to be formed [10]. Political preference also contains an element of reasoning and assessment that proceeds in stages, that is, when citizens receive information, compare alternatives, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of candidates, and then settle on the choice deemed most consistent with their needs and expectations [28].

Political preference can also be explained as part of voter behavior manifested in the voting decision, including the reasons, motives, and patterns of consideration that citizens use in determining their political support. Voter behavior is closely related to an individual's interest in and political choice of a particular party or candidate, so that political preference can be understood as the direction of inclination that guides a person in taking political action in stages, that is, when citizens receive information, compare alternatives, weigh the strengths and weaknesses of candidates, and then settle on the choice deemed most consistent with their needs and expectations [28].

Nevertheless, the political choices of first-time voters do not yet fully reflect a rational inclination, because they remain influenced by an emotional inclination evident in the strong influence of the family, trust in parents, social closeness with particular figures, and sympathy toward candidates. An emotional inclination is not always negative, since social relationships, family ties, and personal trust are important parts of the socio-political life of local communities and often serve as first-time voters' initial link to becoming acquainted with candidates. However, an emotional inclination can become problematic if it is so dominant that it closes off the space for critical thinking; the main challenge, therefore, is to create a balance between social closeness and rational consideration.

Based on this understanding, a rational inclination is evident when first-time voters assess candidates not only in terms of popularity or social closeness, but also with attention to the substance of programs, commitment to the public interest, and the possible impact of the policies to be produced after a candidate is elected. An emotional inclination, too, is not always negative, because social relationships and personal trust can serve as initial capital in building attention to politics. However, electing candidates on the basis of personal liking, family relationships, or personal closeness, without considering their vision, mission, programs, capacity, and track record, has the potential to produce political choices that inadequately reflect the broader public interest.

These findings share similarities with the view that the preferences of first-time voters are influenced by sociological, psychological, and rational features [16], and that political inclinations are formed through active or passive involvement influenced by the values and perceptions that voters construct [29]. Even so, this study places a different emphasis, because the political inclinations of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency are analyzed as the outcome of the relationship among political values, political perceptions, and social influence operating simultaneously. Theoretically, values are an important element that directs a person to accept, consider, or reject a political choice, which then interacts with perceptions and social experience to form the direction of inclination [23].

Factors Determining the Political Preferences of First-Time Voters

The political preferences of first-time voters are not formed in isolation, but are influenced by a number of factors operating within their social lives. The research findings show that the factors determining the political preferences of first-time voters in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Boalemo Regency can be classified into three main parts, namely the social environment, the family, and social media. These three factors are interrelated because they are the spaces in which first-time voters obtain information, build judgments, and determine the direction of their political choices.

Social-environment factor. The social environment is understood as a broader space of interaction in which individuals encounter diverse views, values, norms, and influences developing within society, so that it becomes an arena for the formation of a person's experience, knowledge, and orientation in understanding political life [14]. The social environment functions not only as a space for association, but also as a space for the exchange of information, the formation of opinion, and the reinforcement of political attitudes. In this study, the social-environment factor is examined through two main aspects, namely peers and organizations or communities.

Peers are the element of the social environment closest to the lives of first-time voters. Closeness in age, similarity of experience, and intensity of association make peers an influential group in shaping political outlooks through conversation, informal discussion, and the exchange of information in digital groups. On the one hand, association with friends can broaden political knowledge and encourage openness to various views; on the other hand, it can foster a tendency to follow the current of group support without critical

assessment, particularly when the information received comes from only one point of view or arises from a desire to conform and maintain social relationships.

This peer influence is consistent with the view that the social environment has an influence in shaping the political preferences of young voters [15], that the political support of first-time voters often tends to follow the social environment because their political understanding is still developing [16], and that the social environment exerts an influence on the political preferences of first-time voters [30]. Even so, peer influence relates not only to the formation of attitudes, but can also become a space for strengthening political education if discussion takes place in a healthy, critical, and balanced manner, thereby encouraging first-time voters to assess candidates more rationally.

In addition to peers, organizations and communities also play a role in shaping the political preferences of first-time voters. Involvement in youth organizations, social groups, and community forums enables first-time voters to become acquainted with the political process more broadly, to understand the importance of participation, and to gain knowledge about candidates and regional issues through the experience of interacting and discussing. However, organizations and communities can also influence political orientation because of proximity to particular figures or groups supporting a candidate. Organizations can strengthen the capacity for critical thinking if they provide space for open dialogue, but they can also become instruments of political mobilization if they merely steer members toward particular support without space for rational consideration. From a sociological approach, this shows that the political choices of first-time voters are greatly influenced by the social structures and relations surrounding them.

Based on this exposition, the social environment becomes a space that influences the way first-time voters receive information, assess candidates, and determine their political inclinations. Political preferences are not formed solely from individual will, but also from interaction with the social groups in which first-time voters associate, learn, discuss, and come to understand political life; the social environment therefore becomes an important factor in shaping the value, perception, and political-inclination preferences of first-time voters in Boalemo Regency.

Family factor. The family is the first environment that shapes the values, habits, social orientation, and outlook of first-time voters on political life. In the political context, the family becomes the first source of information, a space for conversation, a place to obtain advice, and an arena for forming an initial understanding of candidates, election issues, and the importance of exercising the right to vote. The influence of the family on the political preferences of first-time voters can be observed through two main aspects, namely the tendency to follow parents and political communication within the family.

The tendency to follow parents is evident when first-time voters make the experience, advice, and recommendations of the family a consideration in determining their political choices, because parents are viewed as possessing more mature political experience after taking part in elections in previous periods. This influence does not always take the form of direct pressure, but operates through emotional closeness, respect, and trust. Family influence can have a positive impact if parents encourage first-time voters to exercise their right to vote consciously, provide balanced information, and respect their freedom to determine their own choices, so that the family becomes a space of political education that supports independence of attitude.

Family political communication is evident through conversations about candidates, stories of political experience, explanations about the election process, and the conveying of the family's views on particular candidates. Dialogical communication can help first-time voters build a more mature understanding of a candidate's vision, mission, and track record; conversely, closed communication that merely emphasizes the obligation to follow the family's choice can hinder the development of a critical attitude. Within the theoretical framework, the family is the primary agent that introduces symbols, authority, values, and patterns of attitude toward power from the earliest stages of an individual's social life [14].

The findings regarding family influence share similarities with the view that the preferences of first-time voters can be influenced by the family and the social environment because their political understanding is still limited [16], and that the family is one source of influence in shaping political preferences alongside kinship ties [29]. Thus, the family plays a role as an agent of political socialization that not only directs but

also educates and guides first-time voters in assessing the process of local democracy rationally, provided that political guidance is not imposed dominantly without opening space for dialogue.

Based on these findings, the family environment has a great influence on first-time voters' decisions in determining their political rights. The tendency to follow the family's views occurs because they do not yet fully possess strong political experience and understanding. However, the family does not only provide guidance regarding particular candidates, but also plays a role in forming first-time voters' political knowledge through information about the candidates taking part in the election. In this context, the family plays a role as an agent of political socialization that not only directs but also educates, guides, and strengthens the ability of first-time voters to assess the process of local democracy rationally.

Social-media factor. Social media has a great influence in shaping the political preferences of first-time voters because of their characteristic strong affinity for digital technology and their reliance on digital space as the primary source of political information. Through social media, first-time voters can access information about the stages of the election, candidate profiles, visions and missions, work programs, campaign activities, public opinion, and the dynamics of political support. The social-media factor can be classified into three aspects, namely access to digital information, the shaping of candidate image, and disinformation and hate speech.

Access to digital information makes it easier for first-time voters to obtain information about the election schedule, the mechanisms for exercising the right to vote, electoral provisions, and candidate profiles more quickly and practically through platforms such as TikTok, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp. Election organizers use social media as a means of socialization because it is able to reach broader segments of society, including first-time voters who are difficult to reach through face-to-face socialization. Even so, the ease of obtaining information does not always guarantee the formation of a complete political understanding, because the information in circulation is of varying quality, so that access to digital information needs to be balanced by the capacity for verification and critical reasoning.

In view of this opportunity, election organizers use social media as one means of socializing the stages of the election, because digital space is able to reach broader segments of society, including first-time voters who are difficult to reach through face-to-face socialization. The dense schedule of the election stages means that direct socialization activities cannot always be carried out evenly across all areas, so that social media becomes an important alternative for disseminating electoral information more quickly and efficiently. Thus, social media functions not only as a medium of communication, but also as a means of political learning to enhance first-time voters' knowledge of local democracy.

Social media also plays a role in shaping candidate image through campaign posts, the dissemination of visions and missions, documentation of activities, and narratives that build a positive impression. Visually appealing content and the intensity of a candidate's appearance in digital space can influence the perceptions and choice inclinations of first-time voters. However, the political image displayed on social media does not always portray a candidate's capacity, track record, and commitment in full, because digital presentation is often composed strategically. First-time voters therefore need to read a candidate's image critically by relating it to the candidate's track record, program consistency, and leadership capacity, and by comparing information from various sources.

The candidate image formed through social media can influence the way first-time voters assess candidates for regional head, because visually appealing content, simple narratives, and the intensity of a candidate's appearance in digital space can form a particular impression in voters' minds. First-time voters who are frequently exposed to positive content about a candidate tend to become acquainted with that figure more easily and to build a supportive perception. However, political decisions must still be based on rational consideration, so that the assessment of a candidate rests not only on digital popularity and visual presentation, but also on the candidate's track record, program consistency, leadership capacity, and commitment to the needs of the community.

In addition to serving as a source of information and a space for campaigning, social media also becomes a site for the emergence of disinformation, hate speech, attacks on candidates, and political provocation, which can create confusion for first-time voters in distinguishing information that is true from

that which is manipulative. If it is not balanced by digital literacy, disinformation and hate speech can influence political preferences negatively. From the perspective of political education, social media needs to be positioned as a space for democratic learning as well as a space that requires critical oversight, so that first-time voters do not merely become recipients of information but are also able to become critical, ethical, and responsible digital citizens.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the political preferences of first-time voters in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Boalemo Regency are not formed simply as the act of voting on polling day, but constitute a process that unfolds through the formation of values, the reception and interpretation of information, social experience, and environmental influence. First, political-value preference is evident in the way first-time voters give meaning to political rights, their belief in the significance of their vote, the alignment of candidates' programs with the community's needs, and their trust in the authenticity of regional-head candidates' commitment. Second, political-perception preference is formed through civic education, environmental habituation, and digital agitation. Third, political-inclination preference exhibits two aspects, namely a rational inclination that considers vision, mission, programs, and track record, and an emotional inclination influenced by the family, social closeness, and sympathy toward particular figures.

The factors determining the political preferences of first-time voters comprise three matters. First, the social-environment factor plays a role because it is a space of interaction that brings first-time voters into contact with the various views, information, norms, and political attitudes developing in society, particularly through peers and organizations and communities. Second, the family factor exerts a great influence through the tendency to follow parents and family political communication. Third, the social-media factor becomes a fast source of information about the election, candidate profiles, and political campaigns, but at the same time presents challenges in the form of disinformation and hate speech.

Based on these conclusions, election organizers need to strengthen socialization and political education continuously, including through digital-based strategies; regional governments need to ensure the fulfillment of first-time voters' political rights, especially by accelerating e-KTP recording services, and to expand participatory political education; schools and Civic Education teachers need to develop contextual and critical political learning; families need to build open and dialogical political communication; organizations and communities need to develop a healthy culture of political discussion; candidates and campaign teams need to build ethical and substantive political communication; first-time voters need to cultivate an awareness of exercising their right to vote independently, critically, and responsibly; and future researchers may develop this study with broader scope, including the measurement of digital political literacy and the comparison of political preferences across regions.

V. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors express their gratitude to the General Elections Commission of Boalemo Regency, the Elections Supervisory Body of Boalemo Regency, the National Unity and Politics Office of Boalemo Regency, as well as the first-time voters in Boalemo Regency and the Master's Program in Pancasila and Civic Education, Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, which supported the implementation of this research.

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