



Factors influencing first-time voters' turnout in the 2024 legislative elections: Political efficacy, campaign strategies, and financial incentives

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the complexity of factors that mobilize the participation of first-time voters in the 2024 Legislative Election in Rabadompu Timur Village, Raba District, Bima City, West Nusa Tenggara Province. The low level of involvement of first-time voters in the general election process in Indonesia is the imperative basis for exploring the root causes underlying this phenomenon in order to strengthen the integrity and inclusiveness of electoral democracy. The urgency of this study is based on tracing the path of first-time voter participation, which has a crucial function in strengthening the legitimacy of the general election results through identifying dominant determinants in the form of political efficacy levels, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives. Data were collected from interviews with 20 first-time voters. The results of the study show that political efficacy plays an important role in encouraging participation, where voters with high confidence in their ability to influence election results tend to be more active. Candidate campaign strategies that utilize social media effectively also increase the involvement of first-time voters, although overly aggressive campaigns can actually reduce participation. In addition, financial incentives have been shown to mobilize some voters, although many still consider the candidate's program. These findings provide practical insights for policymakers and candidates in increasing the political participation of first-time voters, as well as offer theoretical contributions to the literature on voter behaviour.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In a democratic society, voter participation is the basic capital for the functioning of the political system. Voter turnout serves as an important mechanism through which citizens express political preferences and hold their representatives accountable. However, in many countries, there is a complex challenge of low voter participation, especially among first-time voters (Smets, 2016). This phenomenon raises critical questions about the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the democratic process.

First-time voters represent a unique demographic within the electorate. They are often transitioning into adulthood, navigating their identities, beliefs, and responsibilities in the political realm. Their involvement in the electoral process not only shapes election outcomes but also

reflects the level of civic engagement and political efficacy of the community (Ohme, 2019). Therefore, exploring the motivations, challenges, and incentives that encourage or hinder first-time voter participation is critical to fostering a more representative and participatory democracy.

Research on first-time voter turnout is a dynamic and multifaceted field that continues to evolve in response to shifting political landscapes, technological advances, and societal changes. Over the years, scholars from a variety of disciplines, most notably political science, sociology, psychology, and communication studies, have contributed to a voluminous literature aimed at understanding the complexities surrounding first-time voter behaviour. Prior studies seek to uncover the factors that influence an individual's decision to engage in the electoral process for the first time. Traditionally, demographic factors such as age, education, and socioeconomic status have been central to explaining variations in voter turnout across these demographics (Tambe, 2017). However, contemporary research has expanded beyond demographic determinants to encompass a broader range of individual, contextual, and institutional factors (Schäfer et al., 2020).

One of the main research areas now revolves around the concepts of political socialization and civic education. Researchers are interested in understanding how individuals develop political attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours throughout their lives and how these factors influence their likelihood of participating in elections as first-time voters (Weiss, 2020). This area explores the role of families, schools, peer groups, media, and other agents of socialization in shaping individuals' political identities and civic engagement (Furman et al., 2022). There is also a growing focus on the role of digital technology and social media platforms in shaping the behaviour of first-time voters. With the advent of the internet and social networking sites, political campaigns are increasingly turning to online channels to reach and mobilize young and first-time voters (Tariq et al., 2022). Researchers have been actively investigating how digital campaign strategies, such as targeted advertising, microtargeting, and online mobilization efforts, impact first-time voters' political participation. Previous research has also explored the role of online political information and social networks in shaping first-time voters' perceptions of candidates, parties, and issues (Ohme et al., 2018).

Another important dimension of contemporary first-time voter research concerns the role of institutional factors and electoral policies in shaping electoral participation. Researchers are interested in understanding how election laws, registration procedures, polling locations, and voting accessibility measures impact first-time voter turnout (Shino & Smith, 2018). In addition, comparative studies across electoral systems and political contexts offer insights into the effectiveness of different institutional arrangements in promoting electoral processes that are inclusive and accessible to first-time voters (Boyle, 2024). Ethical considerations also play a significant role in early voter research. As previous researchers grapple with questions surrounding the ethical implications of political campaigns, voter mobilization tactics, and election policies, there is increasing emphasis on ensuring that research in this area upholds principles of integrity, fairness, and transparency (Metcalf & Crawford, 2016). Prior scholars are increasingly aware of the potential ethical dilemmas associated with research with vulnerable populations, such as first-time voters. They are seeking to adopt rigorous ethical standards in their research practices.

In summary, previous research on first-time voter turnout reflects a dynamic yet interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses a range of theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches. By exploring the complex interactions between individual characteristics, social influences, technological developments, and institutional factors, researchers advance our understanding of first-time voter behaviour and contribute to the development of evidence-based strategies to promote inclusive and participatory democratic processes. As the political landscape continues to evolve, future research in this area promises to uncover new insights and inform innovative approaches to fostering civic engagement and democratic citizenship among first-time voters.

The novelty of this article lies in its comprehensive exploration of three interrelated aspects that are at the forefront of contemporary studies on first-time voter turnout, based on the context of Rabadompu Timur Village, Raba District, Bima City, West Nusa Tenggara Province. The three questions that this research seeks to answer are: (1) what is the role of personal political maturity in motivating first-time voters to participate in voting? (2) how can sophisticated election campaign

strategies from candidates influence first-time voter participation? (3) to what extent are financial incentives a dominant factor in mobilizing first-time voters to participate in voting?

This article is essential for several reasons. First-time voter turnout directly impacts the legitimacy and representativeness of election outcomes. By understanding the factors that influence their turnout, we can develop strategies to increase the inclusiveness and integrity of the electoral process. Effective election campaign strategies have the potential to shape public discourse and influence voter behaviour. By analyzing the effectiveness of different campaign tactics, we can refine approaches to engaging and mobilizing first-time voters to encourage greater political participation and awareness effectively. Providing financial incentives to voters presents complex ethical, legal, and democratic dilemmas. By critically examining the role of financial inducements in mobilizing first-time voters, we can contribute to policy discussions aimed at balancing the promotion of voter turnout with the preservation of democratic principles and electoral integrity.

This research is significantly different from previous research on first-time voter participation. While most prior studies tend to focus on demographic factors such as age, education, and socio-economic status to explain variations in first-time voter participation, this research expands the approach by exploring in depth three interdisciplinary aspects that have not been widely discussed in the local context: individual political maturity, campaign strategies implemented by candidates, and the influence of financial incentives on the motivation of first-time voters. In addition, the authors examine how political actors' use of digital technology and social media influences the behaviour of first-time voters. That dimension is increasingly relevant in today's digital era. Different from previous studies that tend to analyze voter participation from an aggregate macro perspective, the authors place special attention on the dynamics of first-time voter participation in Rabadompu Timur Village, to provide a more contextual and detailed understanding of how these factors interact at the local level. Thus, the study not only enriches insights into the patterns of first-time voter participation but also offers a new, more holistic, and integrated perspective on the factors that encourage or hinder the involvement of first-time voters in the electoral process in a particular area.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative research applies a descriptive approach to explore the determinants of first-time voter participation in the 2024 Legislative Election in Rabadompu Timur Village, Raba District, Bima City, West Nusa Tenggara Province. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the perceptions, motivations, and factors (Mohajan, 2018) that influence first-time voter participation. The primary focus is on three main variables, namely political efficacy, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives, which are thought to be determining factors in the level of first-time voter participation.

The population in this study consisted of first-time voters in Rabadompu Timur Village, totalling 274 people. The purposive sampling technique was used to select informants intentionally based on certain criteria, such as age (17-22 years), status as a new voter, and their involvement in campaign activities or participation in the 2024 legislative elections. Based on this approach, the number of informants considered ideal for digging up in-depth information was 20 people. The informants were selected by considering the diversity of backgrounds, such as gender and education level so that they were able to represent the varying perspectives of first-time voters.

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews with selected first-time voters. The interviews were designed to explore three main aspects: (1) Political Efficacy: Questions are directed at how much confidence first-time voters have in their ability to participate in politics and whether they feel their vote can influence election outcomes; (2) Candidate Campaign Strategy: Focus on how voters respond to candidates' campaign strategies, such as social media use, face-to-face meetings, and other approaches to attract young voters; (3) Financial Incentives: Questions were directed at first-time voters' views on the practice of providing financial incentives in the campaign process and the influence of these incentives on their decision to vote.

Data analysis was conducted using the thematic analysis method (H. Kim et al., 2017). Each interview was transcribed and categorized according to the main themes that had been

determined, namely political efficacy, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives. This thematic analysis process aims to identify patterns, relationships, and key themes that emerge from the interviews so as to provide a comprehensive picture of the factors that influence the participation of first-time voters. The analysis was conducted descriptively, where the results are presented in the form of narratives that describe the perceptions and experiences of first-time voters related to three main variables.

Source triangulation techniques were used to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. Data from interviews were compared with secondary data and interview results from informants with different backgrounds, such as students, workers, and the unemployed. This technique was used to verify the consistency of the findings and reduce potential bias in data interpretation. With this descriptive approach, the study is expected to provide in-depth insights into how political efficacy, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives play a role in determining the participation of first-time voters in the 2024 Legislative Election.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Efficacy and Participation of First-Time Voters

Political efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to participate effectively in politics (T. Kim, 2015), significantly impacts the level of turnout among first-time voters. Interview results show that most first-time voters in Rabadompu Timur have moderate to high levels of political efficacy, believing their vote matters and can influence the election outcome. Their education and social environment largely influence this perception. Voters exposed to political discussions at school or home tend to have greater confidence in the influence of their vote in the electoral process (Randolph et al., 2024). Regular discussions with peers and family members about politics helped specific informants feel more confident in voting. It confirms that social agents, such as family and friends, play an essential role in shaping first-time voters' beliefs about the political system. Their trust in politics grew along with their increasing understanding of the election process. Those who received more information through civic education or political news on social media felt more confident that their participation would contribute to change. "I understand more about how my vote can affect who will be elected, and that makes me more motivated to vote," said one informant. Some first-time voters, however, exhibit low political efficacy, feeling that their vote will not make a difference, often due to a lack of understanding of the political process or distrust in political institutions (Magni, 2017). This low efficacy is linked to political apathy and reluctance to participate. Such distrust in the integrity of political institutions can undermine motivation and contribute to alienation from the political system (Ayeni, 2024).

Political efficacy is also closely related to trust in political institutions. First-time voters who have high levels of trust in government institutions and the democratic process tend to feel more motivated to participate in elections. In contrast, those who are sceptical of the integrity of these institutions often feel that their vote will not have a significant impact (Harrison, 2018). One informant who felt uncertain about the transparency of the election stated, "I do not know if my vote will be counted properly. There are many news stories about vote rigging, so it feels pointless to vote." Such distrust can undermine first-time voters' motivation and reinforce political apathy.

In addition, the influence of technology, especially social media, has a dual role in shaping the political efficacy of first-time voters (Bimber et al., 2015). On the one hand, social media provides easier access to political information, allowing first-time voters to feel more empowered and informed. One informant said that he often gets political news from Instagram and Twitter, which helps him feel more prepared for the election. However, on the other hand, exposure to misinformation or pessimistic narratives on social media can reduce their trust in the political system. "I often see negative comments about politics on social media, and that makes me doubt whether voting is important," said one first-time voter.

Beyond these factors, personal experience also plays an important role in shaping political efficacy. First-time voters who have direct experience with government programs or public policies tend to feel more connected to the political process. Those who directly benefit from government programs such as educational scholarships or social assistance feel that their vote can help maintain these policies (Sandler & Lane, 2021). One informant stated, "I get a scholarship from the

government, so I feel it is important to vote so that this program can continue to exist." It shows that the direct connection between public policies and everyday life can increase the political efficacy of first-time voters. For some first-time voters, their first political experience can actually create frustration. Those who fail to access information or face administrative obstacles in the voter registration process can lose their enthusiasm for further involvement (Nyhan et al., 2017). They felt confused by the administrative processes of the election, such as electronic ID card registration or data matching, which made them feel marginalized from the political system. Experiences like these show that political efficacy is not only about understanding political concepts but also about ease of access and interaction with existing systems.

Several of the above findings are in line with the literature stating that political efficacy plays an important role in determining how much an individual is willing to engage in the political process (Bentancur et al., 2019). First-time voters who have high levels of political efficacy tend to be more confident that their votes have a direct impact on election results. It is reflected in the statements of informants who stated that political discussions in the family and school environment helped them feel that their participation was meaningful. This political socialization factor has long been identified as one of the main determinants of political efficacy, where family, friends, and the surrounding environment function as important agents in the formation of individual political beliefs (Randolph et al., 2024).

This study also revealed that some first-time voters have low levels of political efficacy, which makes them reluctant to engage in the electoral process. They feel that their vote will not have an impact on the election outcome, mainly due to the perception that the political system needs to be more responsive to their needs. This low level of political efficacy among young voters reflects a phenomenon also found in international research, where young voters often feel alienated from the political process due to the lack of direct involvement or tangible impact from their participation (Chou, 2017). Low levels of political efficacy often trigger political apathy among first-time voters. Those who feel that the political system does not provide space for their aspirations tend to withdraw from the democratic process. This perception, as shown in this study, is often reinforced by negative experiences related to government transparency and responsiveness. First-time voters who feel that political institutions ignore their views tend to experience disappointment, which ultimately reduces their participation in elections and other political activities (Cammaerts et al., 2014).

To address the low political efficacy among first-time voters, the government needs to focus on improving political literacy through a more inclusive and relevant curriculum. Political education materials must be designed to explain the democratic process more clearly and provide concrete examples of how young voters' voices can contribute to policy change. Community engagement in programs that build the capacity of young people to participate actively in the political arena can also help improve their perceptions of the political system (Head, 2007). These strategies will support the formation of a generation of voters who are more confident in their political role and ready to engage in democracy actively. Strengthening the role of digital media in the political socialization process is also equally important. Wide access to accurate and easy-to-understand political information will help first-time voters feel more connected to ongoing issues. Social media, as the main channel for the younger generation, must function as a space for political education, not just a means of communication (Gündüz & Pembecioğlu, 2014). With a holistic approach, from formal education to digital socialization, the level of political efficacy among first-time voters can be increased so that their participation in the democratic process will be more meaningful and sustainable.

Candidate Campaign Strategies and Their Influence on First-Time Voter Turnout

The campaign strategy carried out by candidates is also an important factor influencing the participation of young voters. In the digital era, the majority of young voters get political information through social media, and candidates who successfully use this platform effectively tend to get more attention from young voters. Based on the interview results, more than half of the informants stated that they follow candidate campaigns more often through social media than conventional media such as television or newspapers. Interactive and creative digital campaigns have their appeal to first-time voters. Some candidates use an approach that involves creating engaging

visual content, such as short videos on TikTok or Instagram, to explain their vision and mission. Information presented in an easy-to-understand and entertaining way has proven to be more effective in attracting first-time voters (Towner & Muñoz, 2024). "I like to follow candidates who are active on social media because they are closer and more communicative," said one informant.

The effectiveness of digital campaigns is only sometimes positive. Several first-time voters feel that political ads that appear too often on social media platforms can cause boredom. They tend to feel annoyed by campaigns that are too aggressive, or that feel too pushy. Some informants also stated that they needed help distinguishing between reliable political information and candidate marketing strategies. "Sometimes it is hard to know whether the candidate is really sincere or just trying to get our votes in an overly exaggerated way," said one informant. First-time voters value candidates who engage directly with them, either through face-to-face events or online Q&A sessions. Campaigns that provide space for voters to interact directly with candidates increase their trust in the candidate. Although digital campaigns have their appeal, direct interaction is still an important element that can increase voter turnout.

Another aspect is the candidate's approach to highlighting issues that are relevant to their lives (Reveilhac, 2023). Candidates who are able to raise issues such as employment, access to education, and climate change tend to attract more attention from first-time voters. In interviews, many first-time voters expressed that they are more interested in candidates who offer concrete solutions to the problems they face every day. "I support candidates who talk about solutions to unemployment because that is the biggest problem I feel as a new graduate," said an informant. The use of data and analysis in the campaign also affects the level of trust of first-time voters.

Candidates who are able to present data that supports their campaign promises, as well as provide evidence-based arguments, are considered more convincing (Cruz et al., 2024). One informant said that they trust candidates who use a rational approach with facts and statistics rather than just rhetoric. "I am more interested in candidates who provide real evidence of how their programs can work, not just empty promises," explained the informant. This evidence-based approach shows that some first-time voters are not only looking for popular candidates but also those who are able to provide measurable and credible solutions.

Findings on candidate campaign strategies confirm that social media plays a very significant role in shaping the participation of young voters. Candidates who are able to utilize social media for political campaigns effectively, with interactive and relevant content, are better able to attract the attention of young voters. It supports previous literature, which states that young voters tend to be more interested in political content delivered through digital platforms than traditional media (Wolfsfeld et al., 2016). The use of social media allows candidates to get closer to young voters, especially through visual content such as short videos and infographics, and direct interaction through Q&A or comment sessions.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study also show that overly aggressive or excessive digital campaign strategies can have a negative impact on participation. Some first-time voters feel bored with political ads that appear too often on social media, and they tend to avoid candidates who push their political messages too hard. This phenomenon reflects findings in the literature that digital campaigns can produce mixed results depending on how the message is delivered and received by the audience (Bossetta, 2018). Therefore, political candidates must be more careful in designing their digital campaign strategies to ensure that the content presented is not only informative but also relevant and not excessive.

First-time voters tend to value direct interaction with candidates more. Although social media plays an important role in campaigns, direct interaction through face-to-face events or online meetings still has a significant impact on increasing voter trust in candidates. It is in line with previous research findings that state that direct interaction between candidates and voters can build stronger trust and emotional connection (Carlin & Love, 2018). Therefore, the combination of digital campaigns and direct interaction with voters is an optimal strategy to mobilize first-time voters. In addition to serving as a primary communication tool, social media also provides an opportunity for candidates to present themselves more authentically and personally to first-time voters. Candidates who are able to use social media to present a human and relatable side, such as through personal stories or daily activities, are more likely to gain attention from young voters

who value openness and honesty. These findings suggest that, compared to traditional campaign strategies, first-time voters are more attracted to candidates who appear close and directly accessible through digital platforms. The success of a social media campaign strategy depends not only on the frequency of posts or engaging visual content but also on the candidate's ability to respond quickly and thoughtfully to voter feedback. Candidates who are able to respond to questions or comments with empathy and clarity often build stronger relationships with voters, ultimately increasing their engagement in the electoral process (Dabula, 2017). Therefore, the use of social media in political campaigns should be two-way; active and meaningful interactions are essential in maintaining the interest of first-time voters.

On the other hand, this study also shows the challenge of maintaining a balance between effective digital campaigning and potential information overload. Too much political content circulating on social media can lead to what is known as information overload, where voters feel overwhelmed by the volume of messages received, ultimately reducing their interest in further engagement. Political candidates need to consider the quality of the content presented, with an emphasis on relevance and convenience, so that first-time voters feel informed without feeling overwhelmed. While social media facilitates easier interactions between candidates and voters, findings suggest that personal touch through face-to-face campaigns or online events such as political webinars still plays an important role. Such events provide a space for voters to get to know candidates more deeply, hear their visions and missions directly, and ask questions directly without the intermediary of a digital platform. This direct interaction helps build an emotional bond that cannot always be achieved through social media. The combination of these two approaches, both digital and face-to-face, is an ideal strategy for forming active participation of first-time voters.

Financial Incentives in Mobilizing First-Time Voters

Financial incentives also emerged as a significant factor influencing first-time voter turnout (Justesen & Manzetti, 2023). Although this is a controversial practice, interview results showed that 40% of informants admitted that they had received financial incentives or other forms of assistance from a candidate's campaign team. The assistance was generally in the form of cash, necessities, or daily necessities. For some first-time voters, these financial incentives were a motivating factor for them to participate in the election. They received financial or in-kind assistance from candidates as an incentive to vote. This finding illustrates the reality in many political contexts, where patronage practices or incentives are often used as a strategy to mobilize voters (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020). Such incentives are often attractive, especially for voters who are experiencing economic difficulties, as expressed by several informants in this study.

In difficult economic situations, financial incentives are a special attraction for participating in the election. "I feel helped by the assistance given, and that makes me want to vote," said one informant. However, although financial incentives mobilize participation, not all first-time voters feel comfortable with this practice. Some of them feel that accepting such incentives can damage the integrity of the election and choose not to accept the assistance. Interviews showed that voters still considered the candidates' programs and visions even though they received incentives. "I received assistance, but that was not the only reason I voted. I also considered the programs they offered," said one informant. Even though financial incentives play a role in influencing participation, first-time voters still have rational considerations when choosing candidates.

Non-material forms of assistance, such as the promise of a job or access to training programs, were also found to be factors that influenced the decisions of first-time voters. Several informants admitted that job offers or training opportunities from candidates were a strong reason for them to participate in the election. "I was told that if this candidate wins, there will be job training programs that can help me get a job," said one informant. First-time voters respond to direct incentives and also the long-term economic opportunities promised by candidates.

There are also concerns that such incentives can create an unhealthy dependency between voters and candidates. Several informants stated that they felt pressured to vote for a particular candidate because of the assistance they received. "I feel a kind of moral obligation to vote for them after receiving assistance, even though I do not fully agree with their political program," said one informant. This situation suggests that financial incentives and other assistance

can create an unbalanced relationship between candidates and voters, which can ultimately undermine individual political freedom.

On the other hand, some first-time voters are more critical of the practice of providing incentives, stating that the incentives need to be commensurate with the long-term impact of the policies promoted by the candidates. One informant said, "Food assistance only lasts a few days, but bad policies can have an impact for years." This view emphasizes that while financial incentives can influence decisions in the short term, first-time voters who are more educated or have better access to information tend to prioritize the long-term impact of policies over immediate benefits.

First-time voters who engage in political activities such as candidate debates or group discussions tend to be more resistant to the influence of financial incentives. They believe that political participation should be based on democratic principles and not for personal gain. One informant said, "I join discussions and listen to the candidates' visions and missions. That is more important than the money or necessities they give." It suggests that involvement in more substantive political activities can be an antidote to the practice of money politics, especially among first-time voters who are more socially and politically active.

While financial incentives may increase turnout among first-time voters, they can negatively impact a candidate's image in the eyes of the wider public. Candidates who rely too heavily on incentives are often perceived as needing more capacity to lead effectively. Some first-time voters expressed their suspicion of candidates who provide excessive assistance, as they perceive them as simply trying to buy votes. "I feel like if they really have a good program, they do not need to provide incentives," said one informant.

These findings illustrate a shift among young voters who no longer view politics as a means to gain short-term material gains but also as an opportunity to drive social change through programs offered by candidates. While financial incentives may be appealing to some voters, it is essential to note that more educated first-time voters tend to reject these practices and focus more on the vision and policies offered by candidates (Taylor, 2016). Therefore, for political candidates, a strategy that focuses on material incentives may have limited impact if they fail to communicate a clear and relevant vision. On the other hand, the practice of providing incentives can also create unhealthy expectations among first-time voters. Several informants revealed that after receiving assistance, they felt pressured to provide support even though the candidate did not match their political preferences. It can create a circle of patronage that strengthens voters' dependence on material incentives rather than making choices based on rational evaluations of candidate programs (Szwarcberg, 2015). Thus, this practice risks weakening the foundation of democracy that should be based on deep understanding and involvement of voters.

Financial incentives can mobilize participation, but they also pose ethical dilemmas regarding the impartiality of the electoral process. Providing material incentives such as money or goods to voters tends to create an unhealthy dependency between voters and candidates and directs the electoral process towards political patronage. This practice can undermine the principle of freedom of choice while reducing the value of political participation based on a rational assessment of candidates' programs and visions. Furthermore, financial incentives can undermine the integrity of democracy by encouraging voters to make decisions based on short-term gains rather than considering the long-term impact of policies proposed by candidates. In the context of first-time voters, who tend to be more easily influenced by material lures, the practice of providing these incentives can create a negative perception of politics as a whole, as well as create an unfair electoral environment.

In addition, financial incentives have the potential to create false expectations among first-time voters about the political process as a whole. When voters become accustomed to receiving incentives from candidates in exchange for their participation, this can lead to the reinforcement of a culture of "transactional politics" that prioritizes material gains over discussions on the substance of public policy. Novice voters, who are in the process of shaping their political understanding, may perceive elections not as an arena for evaluating ideas or programs but as an opportunity for personal gain. In the long run, this practice will reduce the quality of voter participation, as they are not actively and critically engaged in understanding the visions and missions of candidates, which will affect their lives. Financial incentives also have the potential to reduce the long-term

engagement of first-time voters in politics, as their participation becomes highly dependent on the existence of incentives. Voters motivated by financial incentives are likely to become passive or apathetic beyond the election period, as there is no immediate stimulus to keep them engaged. As a result, this phenomenon can undermine a political process that should prioritize active and sustained participation from the public. Reliance on incentives can shape the mindset that politics is only relevant when there are material benefits to be gained, thus lowering the intrinsic value of political participation as a form of civic responsibility.

From a policy perspective, the use of financial incentives in political campaigns poses serious challenges to electoral regulation. Loose or inconsistent regulations cracking down on the practice of providing financial incentives can provide space for candidates to exploit the economic vulnerability of voters, especially in areas with low levels of welfare. This condition will create inequality of access and bargaining power between candidates who have large resources and candidates who have limited campaign funds, thus violating the principles of fairness and equality in the electoral process. Therefore, stricter regulations and more effective oversight need to be implemented to ensure that candidates compete fairly based on their visions and programs, not through vote-buying practices. Last but not least, financial incentives can also disrupt social relations at the local community level. When some voters receive incentives while others do not, this can fuel social divisions and a sense of injustice within the community. Voters who do not receive incentives may feel neglected or disadvantaged, which in turn can lead to social tensions and lower the sense of solidarity between citizens. In the long run, this situation has the potential to undermine social cohesion and create dangerous political segregation, where communities are divided into camps that are loyal to certain candidates only because of the material benefits received rather than based on common political views or ideals.

Further research is needed to identify the extent to which financial incentives influence the mindset, motivation, and political behaviour of first-time voters across different social and economic contexts. A deeper understanding of this will provide a strong basis for designing policies that can limit the negative effects of financial incentives without ignoring the socio-economic aspects of voters. Researchers and policymakers need to consider more inclusive approaches to increasing first-time voter participation, for example, through comprehensive political education programs and increased access to transparent and accountable political information. Only then can the essence of democratic, fair, and quality elections be optimally realized.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Several theoretical and practical implications can be drawn from the findings and discussions above. Theoretically, this study adds to the literature on the political behaviour of young voters by highlighting the important role of political efficacy, digital campaign strategies, and financial incentives in mobilizing participation. First-time voters are not a passive group, but they have complex motivations and rational considerations when choosing. Therefore, theories on the political behaviour of young voters need to take into account the interaction between political socialization factors, digital media, and material incentives. These findings provide guidance for policymakers and political candidates in designing more effective strategies to mobilize first-time voters. Some of the primary recommendations that can be implemented are increasing political efficacy through more inclusive political education, effective and relevant use of social media, and stricter regulations on financial incentives. Thus, the participation of first-time voters in elections can be significantly increased, which will ultimately strengthen political legitimacy and representation in democracy. This research also underlines the significance of a multidimensional approach in understanding the behaviour of first-time voters. Political efficacy, as one of the main factors, shows that first-time voters' confidence in influencing election outcomes is highly dependent on the level of political education they receive. Therefore, policymakers may consider strengthening civic education curricula in schools, which focus on the importance of active political participation and understanding the mechanisms of democracy. This intervention will help increase the involvement of first-time voters who are more critical and rational in assessing political programs.

In addition, digital campaign strategies should continue to be explored by considering the media consumption habits of young voters. Candidates who are able to convey political messages

through engaging formats, such as interactive videos and easy-to-digest infographics, tend to be successful in reaching this segment of voters. However, it is also important to maintain a balance between the use of digital technology and direct interaction, as young voters still value face-to-face communication that strengthens emotional connections with candidates. Therefore, a combination of digital and face-to-face campaigns can be an optimal strategy to increase young voter turnout.

Furthermore, regulations on financial incentives in political campaigns should be tightened to make the election process fairer and more transparent. Although material incentives appear to be effective in encouraging participation, this research shows that first-time voters are not only influenced by this factor. Policymakers can consider implementing regulations that prohibit the provision of material incentives during campaigns while encouraging campaigns that focus on delivering relevant programs in line with the aspirations of young voters. It will help create a healthier political climate and build sustainable voter participation based on rational considerations.

The above narratives have highlighted the importance of understanding the complex dynamics of first-time voter participation. Political efficacy, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives have been shown to play key roles in influencing first-time voters' decisions to participate in the 2024 Legislative Elections. While each factor has its impact, it is essential to remember that first-time voters are a heterogeneous group with diverse motivations. A more holistic approach to understanding and mobilizing their participation will result in a more inclusive and representative democracy. Thus, a deeper understanding of the complex motivations of first-time voters can help create a more inclusive and democratic strategy. Implementing broader political education, wise use of digital media, and proper regulation of financial incentives will improve the quality of first-time voter participation, strengthen the legitimacy of the election process, and ultimately contribute to improving the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

This article investigates the factors that influence the participation of first-time voters in the 2024 Legislative Election in Rabadompu Timur Village, Raba District, Bima City. Based on the results of descriptive analysis, it was found that the three main factors influencing the participation of first-time voters were political efficacy, candidate campaign strategies, and financial incentives.

Political efficacy plays a key role in mobilizing first-time voters. Voters who are highly confident in their ability to influence political outcomes are more likely to participate. Political socialization through family, school, and social environments has been shown to increase political efficacy among first-time voters. However, voters with low political efficacy tend to be apathetic and feel that their vote will not matter, which poses a challenge in encouraging broader participation. This finding is in line with previous studies examining the dynamics of first-time voter turnout in various social and economic contexts. For example, Berenschot & Aspinal (2020) confirm that financial incentives can increase voter turnout but have the potential to undermine democratic integrity, especially in low-welfare areas. It supports our findings which highlight that financial incentives are a dominant factor in mobilizing first-time voters but also create an unhealthy dependency between voters and candidates.

Candidate campaign strategies, especially digital ones, play a significant role in attracting young voters. Candidates who successfully use social media effectively with relevant and interactive content tend to gain more support from first-time voters. The influence of effective digital campaign strategies on the participation of first-time voters is also consistent with the findings of Ohme (2019), which underscored that the younger generation is more responsive to campaign content delivered by candidates through interactive digital media. Novice voters in the digital era tend to be more engaged when they can interact directly with candidates through platforms such as social media, which allows them to obtain more personalized and in-depth information. Thus, the right digital campaign strategy can increase the political engagement of first-time voters and strengthen their political efficacy. However, overly aggressive or excessive strategies can lead to boredom and rejection from young voters, requiring candidates to be more careful in designing digital campaigns. Financial incentives were also found to play a role in mobilizing first-time voter turnout, although this raises an ethical dilemma. Although some voters received material incentives, many still considered the candidate's programs and visions before deciding to vote. In

other words, while incentives play a role, rational considerations remain an important factor in voters' decisions. Such a close relationship between the level of political efficacy and the participation of first-time voters found in this study also supports the results of the study by Randolph et al. (2024), which revealed that political education has an important role in building young voters' confidence in the political system. First-time voters who have better political knowledge tend to feel that their votes have influence, so they are more encouraged to participate in elections. Overall, first-time voter turnout is influenced by a combination of personal, social, and economic factors. More strategic interventions in political education, digital campaign management, and regulation of financial incentives are needed to increase turnout. These findings provide practical guidance for policymakers and political candidates to understand and mobilize first-time voters, which can ultimately strengthen a more inclusive and representative democracy.

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