



HIMAPOL INDONESIA's Role in Strengthening University Students' Political Awareness during Elections in Indonesia

Munadi Munadi✉ & Aditya Insanurrohman

Political Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Communication (FKSP), Al-Qur'an Science University, Wonosobo, Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

University students constitute a strategic group in strengthening democratic participation, yet political apathy, misinformation, and limited political literacy remain challenges to their meaningful involvement in elections. This study examines the role of the Indonesian Political Science Students Association (HIMAPOL INDONESIA) in strengthening university students' political awareness during elections in Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis involving organizational actors and relevant participants. The findings reveal three major roles of HIMAPOL INDONESIA. First, it acts as an agent of political education and literacy through seminars, webinars, educational materials, and democracy-oriented programs. Second, it facilitates critical discussion and deliberation through public forums, focus group discussions, and online platforms. Third, it serves as a catalyst for political participation by encouraging voting, election monitoring, and other electoral activities. However, these efforts face constraints related to financial resources, campus bureaucracy, student apathy, and political disinformation. The study demonstrates the importance of student organizations as non-formal political education actors in strengthening informed and participatory democratic engagement among university students.

✉ *Correspondence Author:
E-mail: munadi@unsiq.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Elections constitute a fundamental mechanism of democratic governance through which citizens exercise political sovereignty, select representatives, and influence the direction of government. In Indonesia, elections are not merely periodic political events but an essential manifestation of popular sovereignty whose democratic quality depends substantially on meaningful public participation. Political participation is particularly important among younger citizens, including university students, who represent an educated segment of society with considerable potential to contribute to democratic development. As members of the academic community, students are expected not only to exercise their voting rights but also to critically engage with political information, evaluate candidates and electoral issues, participate in public deliberation, and contribute to maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

The strategic position of university students in democratic politics is closely related to their historical and intellectual roles in Indonesian society. Students have frequently been regarded as agents of change and a moral force because of their relative independence, access to knowledge, organizational networks, and capacity for critical analysis. These characteristics provide students with opportunities to participate beyond voting, including disseminating political information, educating their communities, engaging in public discussions, and monitoring electoral processes. Political participation in this broader sense is important because democracy requires citizens who are not merely formally entitled to participate but are also sufficiently informed and politically aware to make responsible political choices.

Nevertheless, the potential of university students as democratic actors does not automatically translate into high-quality political participation. Student political awareness continues to face challenges, including political apathy, insufficient understanding of electoral processes, skepticism toward political institutions, and exposure to political misinformation and disinformation. The phenomenon of abstention among young voters

also demonstrates a possible gap between the political potential of younger citizens and their actual involvement in electoral politics (Ramadhan & Sari, 2020). In the digital environment, this challenge has become increasingly complex because students encounter political information from multiple sources whose credibility and accuracy vary considerably. Putri and Lestari (2020) emphasize that student organizations consequently face new challenges in conducting political education in an era characterized by rapid information flows and disruption.

Political awareness is therefore an important prerequisite for meaningful student participation. It extends beyond basic knowledge of political actors or institutions and encompasses an understanding of political processes and issues, political interest, the capacity to critically evaluate political information, and political efficacy. Political efficacy is particularly relevant because students who believe that they can understand political processes and that their participation matters are more likely to become politically engaged. Political participation itself covers a wide spectrum of activities. Huntington and Nelson (1976) conceptualize political participation as citizens' activities intended to influence governmental decision-making, while Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978) demonstrate that participation may occur through various conventional and non-conventional political activities. In the electoral context, participation can therefore involve voting as well as political discussion, voter education, election monitoring, and other forms of civic engagement.

Within this context, student organizations can function as important arenas for non-formal political education and political socialization. Unlike classroom-based political education, organizational activities allow students to learn through discussions, leadership experiences, advocacy, interaction, and direct participation in social and political activities. Such organizations can facilitate the development of political knowledge and provide spaces where students encounter different perspectives and develop their capacity for critical deliberation. Wulandari and Santoso (2018) suggest that student organizations incorporating political education

into their programs can contribute to increased political awareness and participation. Similarly, Subagyo (2019) highlights the relationship between students' political literacy and their political participation. These studies indicate that organized student activities can provide an important environment for developing politically informed and participatory citizens.

One organization with particular relevance to this issue is the Indonesian Political Science Students Association (HIMAPOL INDONESIA). As an organization connecting political science students from various universities in Indonesia, HIMAPOL INDONESIA occupies a distinctive position compared with student organizations operating only at the university or faculty level. Its political science orientation provides an academic basis for discussing political institutions, elections, public policy, and democratic processes, while its inter-university network creates opportunities for political education and collaboration across regions. Through seminars, discussions, leadership and political education activities, electoral campaigns, and other organizational programs, HIMAPOL INDONESIA has the potential to connect students' academic understanding of politics with their practical engagement in democratic processes.

Previous studies have discussed student political literacy, political participation, political education, and the role of student organizations in developing political awareness (Wulandari & Santoso, 2018; Subagyo, 2019; Putri & Lestari, 2020). However, the specific role of HIMAPOL INDONESIA as a national association of political science students in strengthening students' political awareness during elections remains insufficiently explored in the literature considered in this study. Existing studies provide an important foundation for understanding student organizations as agents of political education, but they do not sufficiently explain how HIMAPOL INDONESIA translates its organizational position and political science orientation into concrete electoral education and participation activities. This creates a research gap concerning the forms of organizational intervention, the programs implemented, and the conditions that support or constrain their effectiveness.

Examining this issue is important because HIMAPOL INDONESIA potentially performs an intermediary function between academic political knowledge and students' practical participation in electoral democracy. Its contribution may take different forms at different stages and organizational levels, ranging from disseminating electoral information and facilitating critical discussions to encouraging students to vote and participate in election monitoring. At the same time, its ability to perform these functions may be affected by internal conditions, such as organizational leadership, member commitment, financial resources, and organizational solidarity, as well as external factors, including university support, electoral institutions, political conditions, and the prevalence of misinformation.

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the role and contribution of HIMAPOL INDONESIA in strengthening university students' political awareness during elections in Indonesia. Specifically, it examines the forms of political education and participation facilitated by the organization, identifies the programs and activities used to strengthen students' political awareness, and analyzes the internal and external factors that support or constrain the implementation of these roles. By focusing specifically on HIMAPOL INDONESIA, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on student organizations, political education, and youth political participation while providing an empirical understanding of how a national student organization can contribute to participatory democratic culture in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to examine the role of the Indonesian Political Science Students Association (HIMAPOL INDONESIA) in strengthening university students' political awareness during elections in Indonesia. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand organizational roles, experiences, perceptions, and processes within their social and political contexts rather than statistically measure relationships between

variables. The intrinsic case study design was used to investigate HIMAPOL INDONESIA as the primary unit of analysis, with particular attention to its political education programs, participation initiatives, organizational challenges, and perceived contributions to students' political awareness.

The study focused on HIMAPOL INDONESIA organizational networks and regional units that demonstrated activities relevant to political education and elections. The selection of research settings considered accessibility to data and informants, the availability of election-related political education programs, and geographical representation. These considerations were intended to capture variations in the implementation of HIMAPOL INDONESIA programs across organizational contexts.

Informant Selection

Informants were selected purposively based on their knowledge of, involvement in, or experience with HIMAPOL INDONESIA and its political education activities. Snowball sampling was also used to identify additional informants considered capable of providing relevant information. The informant categories included national-level HIMAPOL INDONESIA administrators, regional administrators, active members, students outside HIMAPOL INDONESIA who had participated in its activities, academics or political science experts, and, where accessible, representatives of election-organizing institutions such as the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu).

The selection of informants was guided by the principle of data saturation. Data collection was considered sufficient when interviews and other sources no longer produced substantially new information or themes relevant to the research questions.

Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured in-depth interviews served as the primary data collection technique. An interview guide was used to maintain consistency while allowing the researcher to explore issues

emerging during the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interviews addressed informants' understanding of political awareness and electoral participation, the role of HIMAPOL INDONESIA, the implementation and objectives of its programs, perceptions of their contribution to students' political awareness, supporting and inhibiting factors, and recommendations for strengthening the organization's future role. Interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed for analysis.

Observation was conducted to understand organizational activities and interactions in their actual settings. Participatory observation involved researcher engagement in relevant HIMAPOL INDONESIA activities where appropriate, whereas non-participatory observation positioned the researcher as an observer of activities such as seminars, public discussions, and political socialization programs. Field notes were used to document activities, interactions, and relevant contextual information.

Document analysis was employed to complement and triangulate evidence obtained from interviews and observations. The documents examined included organizational accountability reports, publications and political education materials, social media content related to elections, organizational statutes and bylaws (AD/ART), media reports concerning HIMAPOL INDONESIA activities, and relevant internal organizational documents. These materials were used to identify organizational programs, verify information obtained from informants, and provide contextual evidence concerning HIMAPOL INDONESIA's political education activities.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis consisted of six stages. First, the researcher became familiar with the data by repeatedly reading interview transcripts, observation notes, and relevant documents. Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful segments related to the research questions. Third, related codes were grouped into potential themes representing recurring patterns

in the data. Fourth, the themes were reviewed against the coded extracts and the overall dataset to ensure their coherence and relevance. Fifth, the themes were defined and named according to their central meanings. Finally, the themes were organized into an analytical narrative and interpreted in relation to the research objectives and relevant literature.

The analysis focused particularly on three analytical areas: the forms of HIMAPOL INDONESIA's role in strengthening students' political awareness, the political education and participation programs implemented by the organization, and the internal and external factors supporting or constraining these roles.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of the findings was addressed through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and data collection techniques, including interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was used to verify the accuracy of relevant interpretations with informants, while peer debriefing provided opportunities to critically examine the research process and emerging findings.

Transferability was supported by providing contextual descriptions of the organization, participants, activities, and research setting so that readers could assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. Dependability was addressed by documenting methodological decisions and the processes of data collection and analysis through an audit trail. Confirmability was supported through the same documentation process and researcher reflexivity to distinguish interpretations grounded in the data from the researcher's assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that HIMAPOL INDONESIA performs multiple roles in strengthening university students' political awareness during elections. Analysis of the interviews, observations, and organizational documents identified three interconnected roles: political education and literacy, facilitation of

critical deliberation, and encouragement of electoral participation. The findings also reveal several organizational programs through which these roles are implemented and a combination of internal and external factors that support or constrain their implementation.

HIMAPOL INDONESIA as an Agent of Political Education and Literacy

The first major finding concerns HIMAPOL INDONESIA's role in providing political education and electoral literacy. The organization conducts activities intended to improve students' understanding of elections, political processes, and contemporary political issues. According to the Chairman of HIMAPOL INDONESIA for the 2023–2024 period, political awareness needs to begin with political knowledge; consequently, organizational programs emphasize the provision of political information in forms that students can understand.

The educational activities identified in the data include national and regional seminars, webinars, educational materials, infographics, and democracy or political cadre schools. Election-related seminars and webinars address topics such as the electoral process, student participation in election monitoring, political disinformation, and considerations in evaluating political leadership. The manuscript's documentation data also report that a webinar on voter education organized in November 2023 by regional networks in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta attracted more than 500 participants from different universities.

In addition to event-based activities, HIMAPOL INDONESIA distributes political education materials through social media and internal communication networks. These materials address issues such as voting procedures, political information, and the identification of electoral misinformation. Some regional units also organize continuing political education through democracy or political cadre schools. Such programs provide participants with opportunities to study basic political concepts, Indonesian electoral development, and political debate.

These findings position HIMAPOL INDONESIA as an agent of non-formal political

socialization. Political knowledge acquired by students is not limited to formal university courses but can also develop through organizational interactions and political education activities. This finding is consistent with Easton and Dennis (1969), who emphasize the importance of socialization processes in developing political orientations. It also corresponds with the argument presented by Adawiyah (2019) concerning the relationship between political education and students' political awareness.

The significance of this role becomes particularly apparent in an information environment characterized by political misinformation and disinformation. Political awareness requires more than exposure to political information; students also need the capacity to evaluate its credibility and relevance. HIMAPOL INDONESIA's political literacy activities therefore potentially contribute to the development of more informed political judgments. This supports Putri and Lestari's (2020) argument that political education conducted by student organizations needs to adapt to the challenges created by contemporary digital communication.

Facilitating Critical Discussion and Political Deliberation

The second role identified in the findings is the provision of spaces for critical discussion and political deliberation. HIMAPOL INDONESIA does not rely exclusively on one-way dissemination of political information. Its activities also provide opportunities for students to question, debate, and interpret political issues.

The forms of deliberative activity reported in the study include public discussions, open forums, focus group discussions (FGDs), and online discussion forums. Public forums address contemporary electoral and political issues and provide opportunities for interaction between students and invited speakers. Smaller FGDs are used to facilitate more intensive discussion of particular issues, while online communication platforms extend political discussions beyond formal organizational events.

This finding is important because political awareness involves the capacity to process and critically evaluate political information rather

than simply accumulate factual knowledge. Discussion and deliberation allow students to encounter alternative arguments, articulate their own positions, and evaluate political issues critically. In this respect, HIMAPOL INDONESIA functions not only as an information provider but also as a deliberative space within the university student environment.

Such experiences can contribute to internal political efficacy, understood as individuals' confidence in their ability to understand and engage with political matters. The finding also supports previous research suggesting that student organizations incorporating political education into their activities can contribute to students' political awareness and participation (Wulandari & Santoso, 2018). Thus, the contribution of HIMAPOL INDONESIA lies partly in transforming political education from passive information transfer into an interactive learning process.

Encouraging Students' Electoral Participation

The third major role is the encouragement of active political participation. The findings suggest that HIMAPOL INDONESIA attempts to connect political knowledge and awareness with practical engagement in electoral processes. Activities identified in the study include voting campaigns, election monitoring initiatives, election simulations, and dissemination of voter registration information.

Campaigns such as "Let's Vote" and "Student Voice" encourage students to exercise their voting rights and emphasize the relevance of youth participation to democratic processes. The organization also encourages members to participate in election monitoring, either through formal opportunities involving election supervisory institutions or through observation within their respective environments. Election simulations provide another form of experiential political education by introducing students to electoral procedures through practical exercises.

These findings illustrate an important relationship between political awareness and political action. Knowledge alone does not necessarily produce participation; opportunities, motivation, and practical experience are also required. HIMAPOL INDONESIA's activities can therefore be understood as efforts to reduce

informational and psychological barriers between understanding elections and participating in them.

This pattern corresponds with the broader conception of political participation proposed by Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), in which citizen engagement extends beyond voting to other activities associated with political processes. It also provides a relevant response to concerns regarding abstention among younger voters discussed by Ramadhan and Sari (2020). Rather than treating students merely as electoral voters, HIMAPOL INDONESIA encourages them to participate as informed citizens who can also engage in discussion, political education, and election monitoring.

Organizational Programs as Instruments of Political Awareness

The three roles described above are implemented through several specific programs reported in the study. These include “Smart Politics for First-Time Voters,” candidate debate simulations, an “Election Hoax Clinic,” and election-monitoring initiatives. Although these programs differ in format, they share an emphasis on combining political knowledge with practical skills and participation.

“Smart Politics for First-Time Voters” focuses on basic electoral knowledge, the importance of voting, and political ethics in digital communication. Candidate debate simulations allow students to practice argumentation and policy analysis by assuming roles within a simulated electoral debate. The “Election Hoax Clinic” is oriented toward identifying and verifying questionable political information, while election-monitoring activities provide opportunities for students to engage more directly with electoral processes.

The variation among these programs indicates that political education can be delivered through multiple learning strategies. Conventional seminars may be useful for disseminating information to relatively large audiences, while simulations and discussion-based programs offer more participatory learning experiences. Digital political literacy activities, meanwhile, respond to the specific problem of misinformation in contemporary elections. This combination suggests that HIMAPOL

INDONESIA’s contribution is not based on a single activity but on the interaction of informational, deliberative, and participatory approaches.

Nevertheless, the available evidence in this study primarily demonstrates the existence and perceived contribution of these activities. It does not establish a statistically measurable causal effect of individual programs on students’ political awareness. The findings should therefore be interpreted as qualitative evidence concerning organizational roles, experiences, and perceived contributions rather than as proof of a quantified program effect.

Supporting Factors

The findings identify several factors that facilitate HIMAPOL INDONESIA’s activities. The first is the commitment and political interest of its members. As political science students, members generally possess an academic and personal interest in political issues, providing an important human resource for political education activities.

The second factor is HIMAPOL INDONESIA’s national organizational network. Connections among students and organizational units from different universities enable the exchange of information and experiences and create opportunities for cross-regional collaboration. This organizational characteristic distinguishes HIMAPOL INDONESIA from associations operating exclusively within individual universities.

Support from academics and alumni represents another facilitating factor. According to the study, lecturers and alumni contribute through academic guidance, access to speakers, organizational networks, and other forms of assistance. Members’ access to political science literature and electoral information also facilitates the preparation of political education materials.

Together, these findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of a student organization is influenced not merely by formal organizational programs but also by the social and intellectual resources available within its network. Organizational commitment, academic knowledge, and external networks provide forms of capacity that enable HIMAPOL

INDONESIA to undertake political education activities despite its status as a student organization.

Inhibiting Factors

Despite these supporting conditions, the study identifies several constraints. Limited financial resources constitute one of the most frequently reported challenges. Programs requiring substantial operational expenditure may depend on external sponsorship or member contributions, which can restrict the scale and continuity of activities.

Campus bureaucracy is another constraint. Differences in institutional policies and administrative procedures mean that political activities may receive varying levels of support across universities. In some settings, complicated permission procedures can constrain the implementation of organizational programs.

Student apathy also presents a substantive challenge. Political education programs may successfully attract students who already have an interest in politics while experiencing greater difficulty in reaching students with limited political interest. This issue is particularly important because the objective of strengthening political awareness requires engagement beyond the organization's existing membership.

Finally, political disinformation and polarization complicate political education. HIMAPOL INDONESIA operates within a digital political environment in which verified information competes with emotionally charged or misleading narratives. Members also face academic responsibilities that limit the time available for organizational activities.

These constraints demonstrate that political awareness cannot be strengthened solely through organizational commitment. The capacity of HIMAPOL INDONESIA to perform its educational and participatory roles is conditioned by institutional resources, university environments, student attitudes, and broader information dynamics. Consequently, strengthening the organization's contribution requires not only internal program development but also supportive relationships with universities, academics, election institutions, and other relevant actors.

HIMAPOL INDONESIA and Participatory Political Culture

Taken together, the findings demonstrate how a political science student organization can occupy an intermediary position between academic political knowledge and practical democratic participation. Political education provides students with information and conceptual understanding; deliberative activities allow them to critically process that information; and participatory programs create opportunities to translate awareness into electoral engagement. These three functions are therefore interconnected rather than independent.

The findings reinforce the broader argument that student organizations can operate as arenas of non-formal political socialization and democratic learning. In the case examined in this study, HIMAPOL INDONESIA's distinctive contribution derives from the combination of its political science orientation and its inter-university network. These characteristics provide opportunities to connect political knowledge, critical deliberation, and electoral participation across student communities.

At the same time, the findings indicate that organizational activities should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that students' political awareness has increased. The qualitative evidence presented here is more appropriately understood as demonstrating the mechanisms through which HIMAPOL INDONESIA seeks to strengthen political awareness and how participants perceive these activities. Establishing the magnitude of changes in political knowledge, efficacy, or participation would require additional systematic measurement. Within these limitations, the study shows that HIMAPOL INDONESIA provides an organizational space through which students can acquire political information, develop critical political discussion, and encounter opportunities for meaningful participation in electoral democracy.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that HIMAPOL INDONESIA plays an important role in strengthening university students' political

awareness during elections through three interconnected functions: political education and literacy, facilitation of critical deliberation, and encouragement of electoral participation. Through seminars, webinars, educational materials, discussion forums, election simulations, voting campaigns, and election-monitoring activities, the organization provides opportunities for students to acquire electoral knowledge, critically engage with political issues, and participate more actively in democratic processes. These roles are supported by members' commitment and political interest, HIMAPOL INDONESIA's national network, access to political knowledge, and support from academics and alumni. However, their implementation is constrained by limited financial resources, campus bureaucracy, political apathy among some students, time limitations, and the challenges of disinformation and political polarization. The findings demonstrate that HIMAPOL INDONESIA can function as an important arena of non-formal political education that connects political knowledge, critical deliberation, and practical electoral engagement. The study therefore contributes to understanding how political science student organizations can support participatory democratic culture among university students, while also indicating that stronger institutional collaboration and more adaptive political education strategies are needed to sustain and broaden their contribution.

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