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### **Critical Factors Behind the Abstainer in the Local Election**

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### **Abstract**

This study investigates the factors that led to the emergence of abstentions in the 2020 local election of the Ngada regency. This research was encouraged by the increased number of abstentions and percentage in regional head elections in Ngada Regency in 2020 compared to 2015. This study used a qualitative research approach with a phenomenology type of research. This study interviewed 22 informants selected purposively. This study found that the forms of abstention appearing in the 2020 Ngada local elections were technical, political, and pragmatic. Meanwhile, the factors causing abstentions in the 2020 Ngada local elections are divided into two groups: internal factors, which include work factors and educational factors, and external factors, which include political factors and election benefit factors. The contribution of this research is that it has succeeded in identifying critical factors that are essential in forming an abstainer group in the context of local elections. However, this study is limited to the eastern part of Indonesia.

Keywords: Critical Factor, Local Election, Abstainer, Ngada Regency

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan munculnya golput atau Golongan Putih pada Pilkada Kabupaten Ngada Tahun 2020. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh meningkatnya jumlah golput dan persentase pada pemilihan kepala daerah di Kabupaten Ngada tahun 2020 dibandingkan tahun 2015. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif dengan jenis penelitian fenomenologi.

Penelitian ini mewawancarai 22 informan dan menemukan bahwa bentuk-bentuk golput yang muncul pada Pilkada Ngada 2020 bersifat teknis, politis, dan pragmatis. Sedangkan faktor penyebab golput pada Pilkada Ngada Tahun 2020 terbagi menjadi dua kelompok, yaitu faktor internal yang meliputi faktor pekerjaan dan faktor pendidikan, serta faktor eksternal yang meliputi faktor politik dan faktor manfaat pemilu. Kontribusi penelitian ini adalah berhasil mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor kritis yang esensial dalam membentuk kelompok abstain dalam konteks pemilukada. Namun penelitian ini terbatas pada wilayah Indonesia bagian timur.

Kata Kunci: Faktor Kritis, Pilkada, Golongan Putih, Kabupaten Ngada

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of voter behavior in local elections has garnered increasing attention worldwide from scholars, policymakers, and electoral analysts (Bukari et al., 2023; Çoban & Öztürk, 2020). Whether eligible voters choose to participate or not in the electoral process carries significant implications for the functioning of democratic systems (Sofyan & Fadahliza, 2021). Thus, understanding individuals' participation in a public election is crucial for improving electoral processes and strengthening the representativeness of local governments (Hall & Yoder, 2022). Also, insights into the factors driving individuals to vote in the election process can inform targeted strategies to enhance civic engagement and foster robust democratic practices (Engelman et al., 2022).

Previous research has explored voter behavior, such as Larcinese & Miner (2021), Belcastro et al. (2022), and Braun et al. (2020). Nonetheless, these studies have limitations. First, these studies are limited in examining the issue of political marketing strategies and voter behavior. Second, these studies were performed in the context of developed-western countries, such as European and Anglo-American countries, due to their massive role in shaping the foundation of the world's system of democracy (Ritonga & Harahap, 2023). Lastly, these studies focus more on the issue of voter behavior at the national election level. These gaps implied that non-voter behavior or abstaining phenomena in local elections in the context of developing-Asian countries remain underexplored.

The phenomenon of non-voters at the local level needs to be the concern of scholars. The act of abstaining, where voters choose not to participate in regional-level elections, will significantly impact the functioning of the democratic system. It is because the emergence of non-voters or abstainers delivers a political dilemma. Abstaining is a right in a democracy, but on the other hand, abstaining is a disaster because it weakens the legitimacy of elected leaders (Rich & Treece, 2018; Suwardi & Budiyo, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the factors that affect the abstention movement. It is in line with the call of Stockemer & Blais (2019) to research more on the local election level and explain the factors behind the reason for non-voters or abstainers; thus, appropriate solutions to encourage strong democratic practices through minimizing the number of non-voter can be materialized (Syawaludin, 2023).

Few studies have examined non-voter themes in local elections (Ahuja & Chhibber, 2012; McElwain, 2020; Rich & Treece, 2018; Sullivan, 2021; Wang et al., 2017). However, these studies have limitations that focus more on the context of European-western countries and East and South Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan and India, where these countries are seen as the epicenter of world democracy. Ahuja & Chhibber (2012) limited in examining the motivation of poor and non-poor people in elections in India. Wang et al.

(2017) only focused on the correlation of personality traits to voter participation mediated by various factors in South Korea. McElwain (2020) is limited in outlining the challenges of mass-elite policy in responding to the election candidates in Japan. Sullivan (2021) only examined the affective characteristics of a person who hates politics and turns into a non-voter in the United Kingdom. These limitations show that few studies have examined the phenomenon of non-voters in Asian countries, including Indonesia. Thus, this study aims to fill the research gap on the theme of non-voters in local elections in the context of non-Western and non-East and South Asian countries, namely countries located in the Southeast Asian Region (Firdaus, 2013; Pratisti et al., 2019).

Responding to the gaps above, this research aims to examine critical factors behind abstention in local elections. Thus, the primary objective of this research is to identify and analyze the key determinants that influence voter abstention in local elections, considering the unique characteristics of various local contexts. This study will investigate the non-voter phenomenon in the local context of Indonesia as a developing-Asian country for two reasons. First, Indonesia is the third-largest democracy in the world. It has several types of elections: presidential and legislative elections at the national level and local head elections (governors, mayors, and regents). Second, Indonesia is struggling to minimize the non-voter phenomenon in local elections, known as the *Golongan Putih*, which refers to someone who does not exercise his right to vote in general elections in Indonesia (Sofyan & Fadahliza, 2021).

*Golongan putih* can also be defined as rejecting political resistance over various national problems (Suwardi & Budiyanto, 2020). The *Golongan putih* phenomenon has become an integral part of Indonesia's long history of democracy since 1993, as a movement to boycott the public election in the authoritarianism of Soeharto's regime (Gazali, 2014; Wisnaeni & Herawati, 2020). Surprisingly, this phenomenon still occurs and tends to be popular among the local-level voters. Thus, it threatens the legitimacy and credibility of the democratic process and hinders the formation of a government that represents the interests of all the people in Indonesia (Sofyan & Fadahliza, 2021). Despite many studies examining the Golput phenomena in the Indonesian context, most of them were conducted in the Java and Sumatra region, a western part of Indonesia, and only a few studies were performed in the eastern region of Indonesia (e.g., Astuti, 2020; Rinjani, 2014; Yuliono, 2013). Moreover, examining abstained phenomena in the eastern Indonesia-local election is crucial because Indonesia's western and eastern regions have different contextual dynamics, such as voter demographic profile and local political issues (Buchari, 2014; Fernandes, 2019). Hence, there is a lack of non-voter behaviour studies in the eastern part of Indonesia.

This study will investigate the Ngada regency's local election to fill the gap in Indonesian non-voter behaviour studies, which needs to be explored. In 2020, the Ngada regency performed a local election for the regent and deputy regent of Ngada (Gatra News, 2020). However, abstainer or Golput phenomena occur in Ngada's regional election. At the 2020 Ngada regency local elections, the number of voters in the permanent voter list or *Daftar Pemilih Tetap* (DPT) was 111,416 across 12 sub-districts. From the existing DPT, 26,013 or 23.34%, did not use their voting rights (abstentions), with a participation rate of 76.85% (KPU Ngada, 2021).

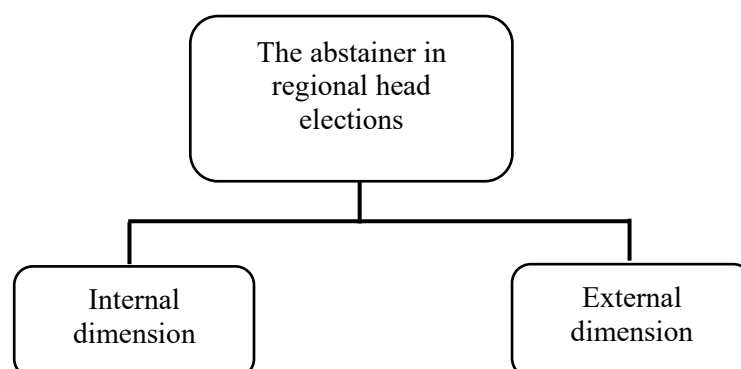
The percentage of abstentions in the 2020 Ngada Regional elections tends to increase compared to the previous regional elections in 2015. In the 2015 regional elections, 75,178 voters exercised their voting rights, while 19,921 or 20.94% did not exercise their voting rights (abstentions)—a participation rate of 79.43%. The comparative data from the 2020 and 2015 Ngada regional elections showed that the percentage of abstentions in 2020 increased by 2.4%. Thus, examining the context of the abstention phenomenon in Ngada Regency is

suitable to fill the gaps in voter behaviour both in the global and Indonesian context by examining the critical factors behind non-voter behaviour in the local context of the eastern part of Indonesia.

This study differs from previous non-voter studies studies (e.g., Ahuja & Chhibber, 2012; McElwain, 2020; Rich & Treece, 2018; Sullivan, 2021; Wang et al., 2017). First, previous research has focused on the issue of the dynamics of the process of forming non-voters in Western, East-Asians and South Asian countries. On the other hand, this study investigates critical factors behind the emergence of the abstaining phenomenon in local elections. This study argues that the emergence of *Golongan Putih* in the 2020 Ngada local election comes from individual voters' internal and external dimensions (see Koch et al., 2021; Zankina, 2017). Second, previous non-voter studies in the Indonesian context were primarily conducted in Java and Sumatra, representing the western part of Indonesia (e.g., Astuti, 2020; Rinjani, 2014; Yuliono, 2013). On the other hand, this research will study the phenomenon of white groups in eastern Indonesia. This study argues that the phenomenon of abstainers or *Golongan Putih* in the western and eastern regions of Indonesia has differences in terms of its forming factors, which are influenced by differences in economic, social and political configuration levels, as also stated by previous scholars (see Nurhayani, 2014; Widianingsih, 2017). Moreover, the appearance of the white group is not mysterious or magical. Scholars describe abstention as a phenomenon forced by internal and external dimensions (Agustana, 2019; Subanda, 2009). First, the internal dimension includes technical factors and work factors. Technical factors cause abstentions, which refer to technical matters of voters, such as illness, grief, accidents, and other personal reasons that prevent voters from exercising their right to vote. Meanwhile, the work factor leads to the absence of voters at the election venue because they choose to do their jobs (Rich & Treece, 2018; Sullivan, 2021).

Second, external dimensions, including various aspects outside the voters themselves, prevent voters from using their voting rights. First is the administrative factor. This factor is the cause of general abstentions leading to voters' non-participation due to administrative issues. Second is the socialization factor. This factor refers to voters' lack of knowledge about the holding of elections due to the lack of socialization conducted by election organizers. Third is the political factor. This factor arises due to various political reasons behind voter abstention (Ardiyanti & Zulian, 2018; Junaidi, 2018).

Figure 1. Theoretical framework



This study offers three contributions to the non-voter literature. First, this study identifies critical factors essential in forming abstainers or *Golongan Putih* in the context of regional head elections. Second, this research was conducted in Indonesia, a developing

country, and the third-largest democracy in Southeast Asia. Third, this analysis was conducted in Ngada Regency, located in the eastern region of Indonesia. Investigating the abstention phenomenon in Ngada District will provide empirical evidence and a more comprehensive understanding of the abstention phenomenon in Indonesia, which has a variety of socio-political situations and arrangements divided into western, central, and eastern Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research methodology anchored in the phenomenological tradition. This approach, renowned for its depth and focus on personal experiences, was deemed essential for delving into the subjective world of electoral abstention. Also, qualitative phenomenological methods allow this study to explore the nuances and complexities of human experiences that might not be readily quantifiable or observable through quantitative methods. Phenomenology emphasizes uncovering the meaning and essence of these experiences and exploring them in great detail to understand the underlying reasons and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miller et al., 2018).

Regarding participant selection and sampling, this study interviewed 22 informants selected using purposive sampling (Tongco, 2007). This study selected informants based on two criteria—first, individuals from Ngada Regency who had participated or abstained from voting in recent local elections. Second, individuals experienced involvement in local general election commissions. The informants interviewed included the chairman of the general election commission or Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU), the chairman of the election supervisory body or Badan Pengawas Pemilu (Bawaslu), voters who voted, and voters who abstained, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Informants

Category	Position	Informants
The General Election Commission or Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU)	Chairman	1 informant
The Election Supervisory Body or Badan Pengawas Pemilu (Bawaslu)	Chairman	1 informant
Voter	voters who voted	10 informants
	voters who abstained	10 informants
Total		22 informants

Source: Compiled by the Authors, 2023

Concerning data collection, this study used in-depth interviews and participant observations (Sugiyono, 2015). Each method offered unique insights into the abstainers' world. The in-depth interviews, semi-structured, served as intimate conversations where participants freely expressed their thoughts and feelings about not voting. For this technique, Interviews were conducted face-to-face until the data obtained was saturated. Most interviews last around 45-60 minutes, recorded and transcribed. Subsequently, participant observations added another layer, allowing us to immerse ourselves in the community settings of Ngada Regency. Observing daily interactions and community events, we gathered

unspoken cues and contextual understanding of the political and social fabric influencing abstention.

Regarding data analysis, the data collected is then analyzed using the interactive analysis technique of Miles and Huberman, which includes data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion. The data validation technique is a triangulation technique (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Miles et al., 2014). The path to analyzing our collected data was embarked by immersing ourselves in the data, repeatedly reading the interview and transcripts and reflecting on our observational notes. This immersion was the foundation for our thematic analysis.

Our initial step in the analysis was coding—a meticulous process where we identified significant statements related to electoral abstention. This coding process was not solitary; multiple team members engaged independently to ensure a breadth of perspectives. As codes emerged, we began clustering them into themes. These themes were not just collections of codes; they were the essence of our participants' experiences, the narratives that spoke of the reasons, emotions, and contexts behind abstention. In interpreting these themes, we constantly referred back to our research questions, ensuring that our findings were insightful and relevant. We contextualized these themes within the broader literature on electoral behaviour, weaving our findings into the existing tapestry of knowledge.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The meaning of abstention or *Golongan Putih* has undergone many changes, particularly after the Reformation. During the New Order era, abstention was perceived as a protest or political resistance, but its meaning changed after the New Order. Post-New Order abstentions have widened their meaning as an attitude of not voting for various reasons, not just political resistance. The study results revealed three types of abstention forms in the Ngada Pilkada in 2020. The determination of the abstention group is caused by factors influencing the population to choose abstention. The form of abstention in question is a form of technical, political, and pragmatic abstention. *First*, technical abstention. The form of technical abstention is a form of abstention that arises due to technical reasons, which include a series of organizing election activities by the organizers and the personal reasons of the voters themselves. In the Ngada Pilkada in 2020, the technical reasons that emerged included the work and negligence of individual voters in taking care of the new Population Administration documents despite having moved from the region. *Second*, political abstention is a form of abstention due to political choices that do not fit into their spectrum (Ramadhan, Izomiddin & Zalpa, 2022). A person who enfranchises only one candidate is on their side of the spectrum. The candidate who is closer in ideology to the electorate will be the candidate who best represents the electorate's interests. In the Ngada Pilkada in 2020, the public consciously did not use their voting rights because they had political reasons, did not find a candidate pair that matched the voter criteria, and needed more information about the candidate pairs. This group still gives confidence in the state and elections but chooses abstention because it does not have the right candidate pair preference. *Third*, pragmatic abstention, namely, people who think there is no election and no impact on their lives. In this form of abstention, voters demand benefits from their participation in the election (Viana, 2022). As well as what happened in the Ngada Pilkada in 2020, some people chose not to vote because they had other activities that were considered more important, such as work or the community was disappointed because the government was not fulfilling the realization of the promises of the candidates and the fulfillment of other aspirations of the people.

Furthermore, abstention will be significant if it is in three conditions. *First*, when the context of collective interests and political content appears behind many abstentions. The



interests of the people who abstain should be accommodated so that democracy is not trapped in old-fashioned practices. The 2015 Ngada regional election Data had a higher voter turnout than 2020. In the 2015 elections, the number of voters registered with the DPT was 96,540 people. However, only 75,178 people exercised their voting rights, so the percentage of community participation was around 79.43%, with the number of non-voters at 19,921 people. In the next five years, namely the 2020 regional elections, there were 112,395 and 111,416 people who had the right to vote in the DPT, but only 85,403 people voted, so the percentage of participation was 76.85%, with the number of non-voters at 26,013. The increase in the number of non-voters by 6,699 should be of more concern. It shows that the tendency of high abstention in the previous election will also continue in the next election because of the characteristics of the community. In other words, abstention represents politics and tends to grow when the democratic system is hurt (Bosco & Verney, 2012; Mastropaolo, 2008).

*Second*, in political marketing, a high percentage of abstentions will impact the distribution of political parties and candidates. In other words, the amount of abstention will be an obstacle in acquiring legislative seats (DPR RI and DPRD). The amount of abstention will determine the competition between pairs within a small winning margin. The votes from 5 candidates for Regent and Vice Regent candidates were dominated by passion number 2 with 23,786 votes. Paslon 1 got 14,405 votes, paslon 3 got 14,870, paslon 4 got 16,692 votes, and paslon 5 got 16,171 votes. The data shows that the difference between Candidate 2 and Candidate 4 is only 17.53%, with a total difference of 7,094 people. Although the rules are already above the threshold, the representation of the selected candidate pairs has not interpreted the leader most residents desire (Teele et al., 2018).

*Third*, abstention also has a crucial meaning if the number of abstentions exceeds the votes received by the selected candidate pairs. The popular vote received is almost equal to the number of abstentions, affecting the democratic system significantly. It will also lead to a crisis of legitimacy in the political system. The result means that it can be said that the elected leader has not been by the people's vote in the implementation of democracy. The Ngada Pilkada in 2020 reached an abstention rate with a total of 26,013 people, which is higher than the acquisition of the winning candidate pair of 23,786. This condition is alarming because the amount of people who choose not to vote is greater than the vote of the winning candidate pair. In another sense, the legitimacy of the power of the elected candidate does not represent the people's aspirations (Kodiyat & Siagian, 2020).

### **Internal dimensions**

The internal dimension includes various factors that cause a person's abstention for personal reasons. The reasons for abstention in the 2020 election for the regent and deputy regent of Ngada are work and education factors.

*First*, related to work factors, a person's economic situation can affect their participation in election activities. It can be seen in the 2020 election for the regent and deputy regent of Ngada. Several voters were unable to exercise their right to vote due to their busy schedules at work, as the following interview results show:

"During the campaign, my candidate pairs were still here (at home). At that time, I did not have a steady job. More idle days. When there was an offer to work in Ende, I chose to go to work. Because it is useless here, I have no work. On election day, I was still busy with work; I wanted to go home to vote but could not." (Informant 3, Interview August 25 2021)."

"I was at the hotel for work at that time. Incidentally, important guests stay at the hotel where I work, so we employees work extra and sleep less. We worked from early morning until late

evening, so I came home tired and did not have time to vote at the TPS. If I am not busy serving guests, I will also choose" (Informant 4, Interview on August 16, 2021)

"The reason for working also influences someone to be involved in democratic party activities. In a research study conducted by the KPU for Ngada Regency regarding the low turnout of voters in the 2020 election for the regent and deputy regent of Ngada, work is also one of the reasons why voters do not exercise their right to vote. Some people are working on the D-day, some are outside the area due to work and study reasons." (Informant 1, 12 August 2021)

The results of the interview above demonstrate that economic factors, mainly the type and occupation of work, play an essential role in determining a person's attitude toward participating in regional head elections. Voters' busyness at work can cause someone to abstain. The argument that people's jobs and the economy are more vital than holding elections is the most paramount factor. It reveals that work factors affect one's participation in elections.

*Second*, it is the educational factor. The educational process causes busyness in students. It has an impact on activities outside of education, one of which is the holding of the 2020 Ngada local elections. Some students are still outside the region, and it is possible to attend instead because they are busy with educational activities, as quoted from the following interview results:

"On December 9, 2020, I was at college. I cannot go home because I am still doing my thesis consul. I am studying at a campus in Ende Regency, so if there are no obstacles, my thesis consultant will take the time to participate. Many students who studied at the same place as me came home, but I could not." (Informant 6, Interview August 25, 2021)

"I knew about this activity during the 2020 Ngada and deputy regent elections. I often read billboards, stickers, and social media and often hear stories from others. Sometime before the election, I was still here. At that time (election day), there was an exam, so I had to go back to the college to take it. I cannot return here (Jerebuu District) because I am still taking exams." (Informant 4, Interview on August 24, 2021)

The results of the interview above demonstrated that being busy with education is something that often happens. The dilemma for voters occurs when they choose between exercising their right to vote or continuing their education activities. According to researchers' findings, some voters will continue with education. Like the abstention group for work reasons, voters who abstain for being busy with education are also part of the voter's rights. It is also because voters feel that there are more important than general election activities. At the same time, it reveals an influence between educational activities and a voter's decision to abstain from voting. These findings are in line with the results of previous studies. For example, the study of Junaidi (2018) also found causes of abstention, one of which is socio-economic factors, which are generally related to busy work so that voters do not exercise their right to vote. Correspondingly, the study by Sa'ban & Wijaya (2018) found that technical internal factors prevented voters from exercising their right to vote, such as illness, education, other activities, and other technical reasons related to the voter's personality.

### **External Dimensions**

The external dimension refers to various factors that cause abstention, which are influenced by factors outside the voters. This analysis found two external factors: political and election benefit factors. *First*, the political factor is the cause of a person's abstention due to various political reasons. In the researchers' findings, the political reasons for abstention in the 2020



election for the regent and deputy regent of Ngada are the reasons for the leader's criteria and the lack of voters' knowledge regarding the background, vision, and mission of the candidate pairs. Concerning the causes of abstentions, because they did not find pairs of candidates who met the criteria, the study found that the influence of political considerations, in this case, was the leader's criterion as well as the researchers found in informants who also voted, as quoted from the following interview results:

"I have to be honest; the running candidate pairs are only the result of political activities. The candidate pair that was carried did not match what I wanted because it did not fit my criteria.

The candidate pairs running is only the result of a political agreement and not the people's aspirations. I do not want to use my voice because the candidate pair results from a political party agreement." (Informant 5, 1 September 2021)

"One of the factors that prompted me to vote was the presence of candidate pairs that matched the voter's criteria. I chose one candidate pair because the candidate pair has made a real action in terms of development. It is by the criteria of a leader that I hope to convey, that is, he has acted for the people (Informant 6, 02 September 2021)."

The description of the interview results above demonstrated that voters have their own criteria for selecting leaders. It is expected in a democratic country like Indonesia for some of the criteria that the researchers concluded from the informants about the criteria for leaders. First, it must be popular; second, it must have a satisfactory career track; third, it must have integrity; fourth, it must be taken from the aspirations of the people, not just a political agreement; fifth, it must be able to formulate a quality vision and mission, sixth, having acted for the people. Moreover, the analysis of research findings revealed that at the local election level, political parties have not been able to become the key to victory. It can be seen from the statements of several research informants who explained that they had a candidate pair during the regional head elections, not because of the influence of political parties. The presence of political parties at the local election level is seen only as a political vehicle. The community considers who is promoted, not what party is promoted. Furthermore, the informants explained that the emergence of abstention is a warning symbol for each political party because political parties are currently experiencing a crisis of public trust. Society views all political parties as the same. Because of this, political party considerations were not considered; thus, they tended to lead to the person being promoted. These findings are in line with a study conducted by Mustadin (2013) that the phenomenon of political abstention is influenced by political factors, such as those who do not vote because they do not find a candidate leader who meets the criteria of voters as well as because voters distrust the government and the political system that walks.

Apart from that, the findings related to political factors are also supported by the results of Nurjaman's study (2020), which explains that one of them is a political factor. This political factor is related to people's lack of trust in the ongoing political system, both election organizers and participating parties being one of the reasons for the emergence of abstentions. The abstention or *Golongan Putih* phenomenon conflicts between non-voters and the existing political system (Almlund, 2018). Apart from the criteria, the study's results also revealed that informants abstained because they lacked information about the candidate pairs and material for consideration in choosing. The informants also added that they went to the TPS (Polling Place) on election day but did not vote. After all, they had just returned from Jakarta because they studied there.

The reason for the lack of information regarding the candidate pairs and their vision and mission is very likely to occur, particularly for those who are outside the region. The campaign for candidate pairs is very massive face-to-face but less optimal online. It resulted

in information about candidate pairs targeting only some of the community; thus, the potential for abstention was very likely to occur (Yusnita & Anisyah, 2023). The lack of active voter participation in finding out the background, vision, and mission also impacts the lack of information about the 2020 candidates for regent and deputy regent of Ngada.

*Second*, it is the election benefit factor. The consideration of the benefits of elections always appears in every form of a general election because every society needs a real impact from elections. Such considerations also emerged in Ngada District during the 2020 election for regents and deputy regents. The existence of considerations for the benefits of the election can lead voters to abstain from voting if these voters do not experience the benefits of the election. The study's results revealed that voters did abstain because they did not feel the benefits of the leader's presence. The informants gave examples of several infrastructure developments that did not benefit the community, such as the Bobou market, and slow development that indicated corruption, such as the construction of a sports center. Apart from those who abstained because they did not feel the benefits of the Ngada regional elections, some informants voted on election day because they felt the benefits of the Ngada regional elections. Several informants explained that they chose and participated in the general election for regional heads because they felt developments made by the government motivated them to vote, as quoted from the following interview results:

"There are developments made by the government so that people feel the benefits. Apart from the fact that there are candidate pairs that you like, there are also developments made by the government, such as the construction of roads and other infrastructure, that make you want to vote (Informant 18, 24 August 2021)."

"You chose because you are aware of your responsibilities as a citizen. Apart from that, my mother chose the election for the regent because there was an emotional connection, not for reasons of benefit or other reasons. My mother sees general benefits so far but no personal ones. Some government policies are also not optimal and slow in their completion. We can see one of these policies in the development of sports centers. Some of these slow policies prevent people from benefiting from the presence of a leader." (Informant 22, Interview 3 September 2021)

The statements above demonstrate a link between the benefits of regional elections and one's participation. It means that the government needs to work as well as possible for the benefit of the people because the people need real action from what has been promised. The government's failure to realize political promises and respond to people's needs will impact the incumbent's low vote share. It can be seen from the 2020 Ngada regional election results, where the incumbent only received 14,870 votes or around 13%. In addition to impacting incumbent candidates, the government's failure to develop community welfare can also awaken public apathy toward holding regional elections. It further strengthens the possibility of abstention. Interestingly, the research results revealed that the factor behind abstentions voters, because they do not feel the benefits of the candidate pairs, lies not in the failure of the candidates' achievements but because of the failure of the candidate pairs' political campaigns to disseminate their successes and achievements. Thus, political reasons reveal that many people hope that general election activities are an instrument to create a better life by electing quality leaders. However, when it is difficult for these voters to determine quality leaders, this will cause the white group phenomenon (Juelich & Coll, 2021; Kukec, 2023).

Several informants explained that the failure of the incumbent candidate to be re-elected was not because the Government of Ngada Regency, led by the incumbent candidate pair, failed or was not successful in implementing their various policies but because the

public did not receive complete information regarding the success of the incumbent candidate pair's regime (Mislawaty, Harahap & Anisyah, 2022). The informants added that the policy, for example, the handling of stunting during the reign of Mr. Paulus Soliwooa, was very successful, which can be seen in 2017. The stunting rate in Ngada Regency was 68% and could be reduced to 15% in 2019. It also means that apart from several unsuccessful or unsuccessful policies, the problem of the government's successful campaign also had an effect. Therefore, it is imperative to publicize these successes. The results of the research above indicate that the realization of political promises can also create high voter turnout. The government's failure to realize political promises will impact high abstention (Khadijah at al, 2022). In addition, publications regarding government achievements also need to be optimized. Several policies have been successful by the government but have yet to be discovered to voters. This phenomenon can be explained by democratic theory, which states that the level of citizen participation in elections is determined by their preference for a policy that directly impacts citizens (Dassonneville et al., 2021; Powell, 2000). These findings align with the opinion of Soebagio (Soebagio, 2009), who explains that one of the causes of abstention is that direct elections have not been able to produce significant changes for improving people's welfare. The absence of changes from the election can lead to abstention due to consideration of the benefits of the election.

## CONCLUSION

This study found that the factors that led to the non-voting of the people of Ngada Regency in the 2020 election for regent and deputy regent of Ngada are divided into internal and external factors. Internal factors include work factors and educational factors. In contrast, external factors include political factors and electoral benefits factors. Occupational factors refer to voters who abstain because they are busy with their work; thus, they cannot attend the vote. The educational factor refers to voters who do not exercise their right to vote because they are busy with voter education activities. Political factors refer to voters who abstain for reasons of candidate pairs that do not meet the voters' criteria and lack of background information on candidate pairs and their vision and mission. The election benefit factor refers to voters who abstain because they do not feel the election's impact. This study has two drawbacks. First, this study employed interview techniques in the data collection process. However, interview techniques have disadvantages because there may be answers from informants that are incomplete or lacking because their memory abilities influence them. However, this investigation triangulates data and sources of various information obtained from interviews to overcome this weakness and increase the reliability of the research results. Second, this study was only conducted in the context of regional head general elections in regencies attached to the eastern part of Indonesia. Therefore, future research needs to consider this study in different contexts, for example, covering the central region of Indonesia or in other eastern contexts such as Papua and Maluku, to help test the generalizability of the findings of this study.

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