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## **Gen-Z's Rational Choice in Influencing Political Participation in the 2024 Regional Elections**

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### **Abstract**

The basic assumption of the rational choice approach is that humans are basically selfish, rational, and always try to maximize utility and profit for themselves. In this view, individuals as actors are assumed to have a series of special property rights (set of properties), including certain tastes or preferences. This is also applied in political participation, where rational choice is able to influence actors in participating in politics such as general elections. In its development, Indonesia's political participation level is still experiencing ups and downs due to the low level of public trust in government performance. This has an impact on Gen Z's negative view of the implementation of the Election. Gen Z as a new voter is one of the votes that are taken into account, so this study aims to determine how rational actors own choice in this case Gen Z to participate in politics. Especially in the implementation of the 2024 Sumenep Regency Election. Qualitative methods were used in this study with the results that Gen Z's political participation in the election. The results show the influence of rational choice theory, greatly influenced by their calculations regarding the benefits and costs of participating. Factors such as trust in the political system, relevance of issues, and social involvement greatly determine their decisions. If they feel that their voice can make a significant difference and the process is accessible, they are more likely to get involved.

**Keywords:** Rational Choice, political participation, Gen Z

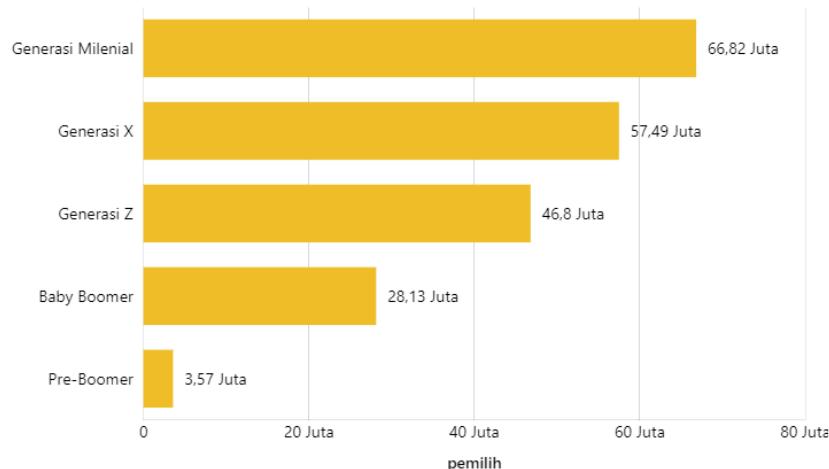
### **Introduction**

Community involvement in politics is one indicator of the achievement of the principles of democracy. There is no democracy without citizen political participation, because participation is the essence of democracy. Community participation or involvement in politics is a measure of a country's democracy (Mochtar maso'ed, 2003). A democratic country places people's political participation as one of the main keys to the country's success. A country with a high level of political participation shows that citizens understand the importance of political involvement by being willing to involve themselves in these activities. The assumption that is

built is that society knows better what is needed in social and state life. This article will explain how Gen-Z's rational choice influences political participation in the 2024 regional elections.

The 2024 election is getting more interesting because of the increasing number of election participants from the `young voter age group, namely generation Z and millennials. The millennial generation is a term for people born between 1980 and 1994, while generation Z refers to people born from 1995 to 2000. The 2024 election is an event to show their increasingly influential role, arouse enthusiasm, and voice political issues. Their participation can influence the direction of policy and issues raised in society. The number of first-time voters from Gen-Z in yesterday's election was the third largest of the DPT recorded by the General Election Commission (KPU). The General Election Commission (KPU) determined that the permanent voter list (DPT) for the 2024 Election reached 204,807,222 voters. A total of 66,822,389 or 33.60 percent of voters are from the millennial generation. Meanwhile, voters from Generation Z are 46,800,161 voters or 22.85 percent. These two generations dominate the 2024 Election voters, which is 56.45 percent of the total voters. This figure shows that Gen Z and millennials have the potential to shape change and make positive contributions in decision-making (Muhamad, 2023).

However, the problem is that many Gen Z think that the democratic party is only aimed at the interests of certain groups. The tendency to be reluctant to get involved or even apathetic towards politics is influenced by various factors, especially related to cases of corruption, collusion and nepotism carried out by state officials who are able to influence their opinions. Some of them choose not to participate in the election as a form of protest or distrust of the political system. They feel their votes will not make significant changes or the available candidates do not meet their expectations. Number of Voters in the 2024 Election by Age Group (Muhamad, 2023);



Gambar 1. Data Daftar Pemilih Tetap Pemilu 2024

The positive and negative reactions of Gen Z towards the implementation of elections at various levels starting from the presidential and vice presidential elections, DPR/DPRD, gubernatorial elections, regional elections to village head elections are political decisions made by Gen Z in which there is rational choice as the basic foundation in determining involvement in political participation. Rational choice is based on the assumption that each individual will

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always have an accentuation or priority among several choices that allow individuals to determine the decisions they expect. This means that each individual will always have a preference among the various choices that have been determined in the surrogate-substitute list. The most important essence of Rational Choice emphasizes that each individual will always determine the circulation or choice that is believed to bring maximum utility/benefit with minimal loss (Elster, 1989). Basically, the vision, mission, and approach of prospective election participants will be the benchmark for influencing Gen Z to provide support in the election. From here, Gen Z's rational choice regarding the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the general election will be used. In Sumenep Regency itself, based on Disdukcapil data, Gen Z is included in the fourth group with an estimated current age of 9-24 years. Generation Z in Sumenep Regency is 240,761 people or 21.2 percent of the total population (Kominfo Sumenep, 2022). A total of 21.2 percent of the total population makes Gen Z a voice that is taken into account in the implementation of the 2024 PILKADA. Therefore, this study will emphasize how rational choices are used by Gen Z in their participation in the 2024 Sumenep regional general elections (PILKADA).

### **Literature Review**

#### *Rational Choice Theory*

The problem solving in this study is by emphasizing the theory of rational choice and political participation. Rational Choice Theory is a theory in the social sciences, especially economics, sociology, and political science, that focuses on individual decision making based on rational considerations of advantages and disadvantages. In this context, "rational" means that individuals act most efficiently to maximize their personal benefits or goals, given all available information and taking into account the costs and benefits of the choices available. In a political context, rationality theory is used to understand the political behavior of individuals and groups in choosing candidates, supporting certain policies, or engaging in other political processes (Awaluddin, 2019). Basic Principles of Rational Choice Theory include;

##### **1. Individuals as Rational Decision Makers**

Every individual acts to maximize their satisfaction or utility based on their preferences and goals. They will choose the option that is considered to provide the greatest benefit at the lowest cost.

##### **2. Known and Consistent Preferences**

Individuals have clear and consistent preferences. They can rank decision alternatives based on the level of satisfaction they obtain.

##### **3. Cost and Benefit Considerations**

Choices are made by considering each option's costs (both direct and indirect) and benefits. Decisions are made to maximize net benefits (benefits minus costs).

##### **4. Self-Interest drives Individual Actions**

Decisions are driven by self-interest, ignoring external or social factors (although in some versions, social and moral factors are still taken into account in individual preferences).

##### **5. Perfect Decision Assumption**

This theory assumes that individuals have sufficient information to make optimal decisions. Although information can be limited in practice, this theory focuses more on the possibility of rational decisions under ideal conditions.

Rational choice in politics can be viewed as an activity of choosing which results from calculating costs and benefits. This means that individuals consider various factors, including the costs and benefits of each available option and the probability or likelihood that their vote or action will affect the expected outcome (Delmana, 2020). When someone makes a political decision, they not only consider the "cost" of choosing, such as the time and effort required to vote or engage in political activities, but also consider the benefits of the action. These benefits can be the expected impact of the victory of the supported candidate or the success of a particular supported policy (Wartoyo & Ginting, 2024).

Meanwhile, according to James S. Coleman, rational choice emphasizes individual actions that have goals and are determined by values. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory is clearly seen in its basic idea that individual actions lead to a goal and that goal is an action determined by values or preferences (choices) (Ritzer & Goodman, 2012). In this theory, there are two main elements, namely actors and resources, these two elements will explain how rational choice can encourage individual political interest (Sastrawati, 2019). 1. Actors as actors (political participation) in this case Gen Z use all internal and external resources in achieving their political goals. 2. External resources including political modalities are considered by individuals in determining the form of political participation that is rationally considered appropriate. In this case, Gen Z has full control over mastering and managing these resources, especially in terms of the use of information technology.

### *Political Participation*

Meanwhile, political participation refers to the involvement of citizens in political processes and decision-making that affect their lives. It includes various activities carried out by individuals or groups to influence public policy, the choice of leaders, or even the structure of government itself. Political participation can be carried out in various forms, both formal and informal, including local, national, or international activities. Political participation is an important aspect of the implementation of democracy, where citizens are actively involved in political activities through general elections, political campaigns, demonstrations, public discussions, political organizations and civil society (Roskin et al., 2016). With broad and inclusive political participation, a country can ensure better representation of the various interests of society and build strong political legitimacy (Schroder, 2010). Therefore, the government and related institutions need to create an environment that supports active political participation and protects the basic rights of citizens to participate in the political process (Wartoyo & Ginting, 2024). Meanwhile, the factors that influence political participation include (Widhiastini et al., 2019).

#### 1. Education Level

Higher education is often associated with higher levels of political participation. More educated individuals tend to better understand the political system, social issues, and ways to influence policy (Handoyo & Lestari, 2017).

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### **2. Economic and Social Well-Being**

Individuals with better economic well-being are more likely to engage in political activities. Meanwhile, those living in poverty or economic hardship may feel more alienated or have fewer resources to participate.

### **3. Participation as a Culture**

Some political cultures place greater emphasis on participation in social and political life. These cultures can encourage people to become more actively involved in politics. On the other hand, cultures of apathy or skepticism toward politics can reduce participation.

### **4. Media Influence**

The media (both traditional media such as television and newspapers, as well as social media) play an important role in shaping public opinion and motivation to participate. Critical and educational media can increase political awareness, while biased or sensationalist media can lead to apathy or distrust.

### **5. Trust in the Political System**

The level of public trust in the political system and government greatly influences the level of participation. If people feel that the political system is unfair, corrupt, or does not represent them, they tend to be less involved.

### **6. Availability of Time and Resources**

Political participation often requires time and resources, especially for more intensive involvement such as participating in campaigns or becoming a political party member. Those with more free time or resources tend to be more active.

### **7. Age and Political Experience**

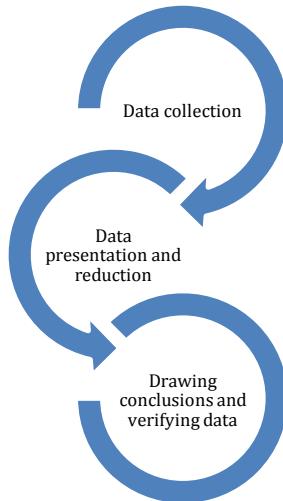
Younger people may be less involved in politics than older people, although this is not always the case. First-time experiences of participation, such as voting in an election, can motivate someone to continue to be involved in politics.

It can be concluded that political participation is a key element in democracy and effective governance. Increasing political participation requires a deep understanding of the factors that influence it and strategies that can overcome existing barriers. This includes strengthening political education, increasing accessibility of information, and reducing inequalities that prevent some citizens from actively participating in the political process.

## **Research Method**

The method used in this study is descriptive - explanatory, descriptive research methods can be done to determine the existence of independent variables, either only in one variable or more (stand-alone variables or independent variables) without making comparisons of the variables themselves and looking for relationships with other variables. The descriptive method is a method that aims to determine the nature and deeper relationships between two variables by observing certain aspects more specifically to obtain data that is in accordance with the existing problems with the purpose of the study, where the data is processed, analyzed, and processed further on the basis of theories that have been studied so that the data can be drawn a conclusion (Sugiyono, 2018). While explanatory, answers why a situation or condition

occurs. The use of these two methodologies to offer a more comprehensive explanation of the research theme. A study is difficult to explain without a description, conversely, a description without a reasonable explanation is not interesting. The following is the flow of the methods used in this research:



This research is also literary, namely, by using a literature review and written materials, including data sources and data collection techniques. Researchers use secondary data sources from documentary materials through literature studies relevant to the research object. While primary data is obtained by conducting a series of interviews with parties, especially Gen Z as the main actor in this study.

## **Result**

Generation Z is important to study because some of the members of this generation who are 17-21 years old in 2024 are first-time voters and some older members of Generation Z or more specifically those born from 1997 to 2000, have participated in previous elections and are currently starting to achieve financial independence and reach the next stage of life such as marriage and career. Although Generation Z are still first-timend young voters, there needs to be preparation for Generation Z so that in 2039, Generation Z will be a mature generation and ready to continue the leadership baton in this country(Evita, 2023).

Generation Z is currently an interesting generation to study in Indonesia. The Permanent Voter List (DPT) released by the General Election Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI) shows that 22.85 percent of the total DPT for the 2024 Election is Generation Z (Muhamad, 2023). Generation Z's position in the DPT for the 2024 Election is second after the Millennial Generation. Meanwhile, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 stated that Generation Z is the largest generation in Indonesia, at 27.94 percent (Evita et al., 2023). As first-time voters, Gen Z tends to get information related to general elections from the mass media, this can be seen from Reportal data, in 2023, there were a total of 167 million social media users. 153 million are users over the age of 18, which is 79.5% of the total population. The results of the National Socio-Economic Survey (Susenas) conducted

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by the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) show that the country's next highest use of social media comes from the student age group or 19-24 years old at 14.69%. Social media, which used to be just a means of entertainment, has now been eyed by politicians to be used as a new space for politics. Most of the people who often access social media are young people from generation Z.

Generation Z's political participation is very important because it reflects their political awareness, interest in political issues, and their response to social problems. The voter turnout rate of Gen Z in the 2019 election reached 91.3% and they are expected to be even more active in the 2024 election. However, despite the increase in young voter turnout, there are still 19.24% of voters who do not exercise their right to vote, known as the white group (golput). This highlights the need for greater political involvement than first-time voters. As the dominant population in Indonesia, Generation Z has the potential to influence election results and the direction of the country's politics (Putricia et al., 2024). The reasons that dominate the reason for golput by Gen Z include technical factors such as being unable to attend on election day for personal reasons, being unable to attend because they are in an area outside the Permanent Voters List (DPT), and not having or not obtaining a voter card. In addition, political reasons such as not believing that the election will bring change or improvement and the candidate's vision and mission not being in accordance with ideology are also included in the top five dominant factors that cause Gen Z to decide to abstain from voting (Rohmah, 2023).

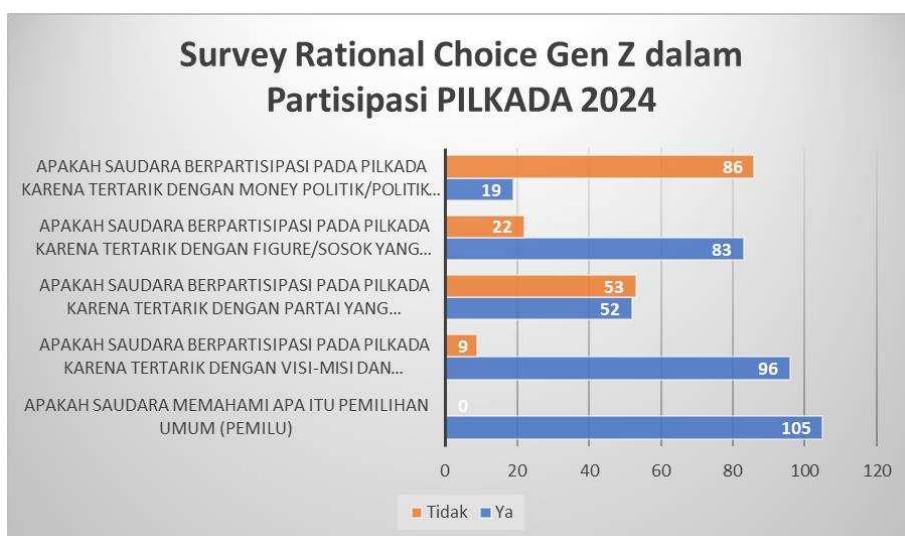
Gen Z's dominance in social media and the reasons for participating in politics or Golput are forms of rational choice from new voters, in the rational choice approach, the logic of thinking is based on the economic approach recommended by Downs. The main assumption of this theory is very easy: if rational choice can explain market mechanisms, then this theory can certainly explain the exchange of votes in politics. In this context, Downs said that (Setiawan & Djafar, 2023):

“The central thesis of rational choice is that parties in democratic politics are analogous to businessmen in a profit-seeking economy. Thus, to achieve their personal goals, they formulate whatever policies they believe will win them the most votes, just as businessmen produce whatever products they believe will win them the most profits for the same reason. To test the implications of this thesis, we must assume that citizens behave rationally in politics. This premise itself constitutes the second major hypothesis.”

So, it can be explained that elections are seen as an exchange institution between voters and political parties that aims to achieve their respective benefits. On the one hand, voters use their votes to maximize the benefits they want to obtain, while on the side of political parties they will formulate pro-voter policies and programs in order to gain votes in the general election. The main argument underlying rational choice theory is the concept of rational (exchange) (rationality). This is also supported by Coleman's Rational Choice Theory, which is clearly seen in its basic idea that individual actions lead to a goal and that goal is an action determined by values or preferences (choices) (Ritzer & Goodman, 2012). Where in this theory there are two main elements, namely actors and resources, these two elements will explain how rational choice can encourage individual political interest (Sastrawati, 2019). 1. Actors as

actors (political participation) in this case Gen Z use all internal and external resources in achieving their political goals. 2. External resources including political modalities are individual considerations in determining the form of political participation that is rationally considered appropriate. In this case, Gen Z has full control over mastering and managing these resources, especially in terms of the use of information technology.

Gen Z as an actor who has resources with easy access to interact and get information in the general election through social media is one of the advantages for Gen Z. until then Gen Z can have information related to the vision, mission and work programs of each candidate, supporting parties to the track record of each candidate who is competing in the general election. From here, Gen Z's rational choice regarding the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the general election will be used. In Sumenep Regency itself, based on Disdukcapil data, Gen Z is included in the fourth group with an estimated current age of 9-24 years. Generation Z in Sumenep Regency is 240,761 people or 21.2 percent of the total population (Kominfo Sumenep, 2022). A total of 21.2 percent of the total population makes Gen Z a voice that is taken into account in the implementation of the 2024 PILKADA. In its implementation, based on a survey conducted on 105 student respondents from the 2022-2024 intake who are included in the Gen Z group, they gave answers as below;



Based on survey data, it shows that out of 105 student respondents involved in the 2024 PILKADA, they have various choices, where among the reasons Gen Z participated in the PILKADA, it was dominated by Gen Z's interest in the 2024 PILKADA because of the vision, mission and work programs of the candidates, amounting to 96 answers (91.4%). While the second reason is because they are interested in the figure/figure of the candidate and the third interest is because they are interested in the party that supports each candidate who is constellated in the PILKADA. The variety of choices given by students shows how political participation and their participation in the PILKADA is a rational choice chosen by students with each consideration.

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the considerations given by students also did not escape from considering factors such as the following: first, Political Benefits where Gen Z will decide to participate if they feel their vote can influence the election results

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or policies that are important to them. They are more likely to vote if they believe their choice can bring about significant change. Second is the cost of participation, which includes the time, effort, and resources required to participate in the election. Third is the probability of influence, where Gen Z will be more likely to participate if they feel that their vote can have a real impact and how likely their vote is to be counted and considered. Fourth, Involvement in Relevant Issues where Gen Z tends to be very concerned with social, environmental, and economic issues. They will participate if they feel that elections can be a channel to address issues that they consider important, such as climate change, social inequality, human rights, education, and economic welfare.

In addition, individuals also consider the differences in available alternatives, namely the choices between different candidates or policies. However, it is important to remember that political decisions are not always based on perfectly rational considerations. Nevertheless, the concept of rational choice remains an important foundation in the analysis of political behavior, because it helps us understand how individuals make political decisions based on considerations of the costs, benefits, and differences in existing alternatives (Wartoyo & Ginting, 2024). So that rational choice in the context of politics can be seen as an activity of choosing which is the result of calculating costs and losses. This means that individuals consider various factors, including the costs and benefits of each available choice and the probability or possibility that their vote or action will affect the expected outcome (Delmana, 2020).

Based on a survey conducted on Gen Z students, they also have their own rationality, especially regarding participation in the PILKADA due to factors related to money politics. As many as 86 (81.9%) students chose No and answered yes, as many as 19 (18.1%) answered Yes, the action of students' choices not to agree to participate in the PILKADA due to money factors raises the hope that basically Gen Z is aware that in creating a clean government, a clean election needs to be implemented. The results of the survey prove that Gen Z participating in politics has made rational choices based on considerations of good and bad and the impact of their participation in the 2024 PILKADA.

With a good understanding of relevant political and social issues and an awareness of their responsibilities as citizens, Generation Z can make wise decisions and choose leaders who represent their aspirations and needs. In addition, active participation in political campaigns, public discussions, and supporting initiatives that promote democracy and community involvement are also ways for Generation Z to play a role in the 2024 election process. So that later Generation Z will continue to be inspired to become agents of positive change in building a better future for Indonesia, by utilizing their potential and strengths in elections and the democratic process.

## **Conclusion**

Gen Z's political participation in elections, viewed through the lens of rational choice theory, is heavily influenced by their calculations of the benefits and costs of participating.

Factors such as trust in the political system, relevance of the issues, and social engagement are key drivers of their decisions. If they feel that their vote can make a significant difference and if the process is accessible, they are more likely to engage. Conversely, if they feel apathetic about politics or do not see meaningful differences between candidates or parties, they may choose not to participate. By understanding these motivations and barriers, political campaigns can more effectively engage and increase Gen Z's participation in elections.

### **Declaration of conflicting interest**

Researchers purely conducted this research, and there was no conflict of interest at the time. Purely just to find out how rational choices Gen Z has in determining choices during the election.

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