

# The Influence of Public Debate on the Political Preference of Communities in the Presidential Election in 2019

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Public debate is one form of political campaigning carried out at the campaign stage in the presidential and vice presidential elections in 2019 with the aim of influencing the political preference of the people. Besides being able to influence people's political preference, public debate (political debate) between presidential candidates and vice-presidential candidates in the 2019 Presidential Election is also expected to increase the political participation of the public. Through public debate (political debate) that is broadcast on TV nationally, the people will get information directly about the programs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates if elected or won in the presidential election in 2019, and it is one way to attract public interest to participate in the presidential election in 2019. By using a qualitative approach through literature studies, this paper discusses the significance of the public debate in the Presidential Election contestation, the influence of public debate on people's political preference in presidential elections, as well as factors that influence people's choices (related to debate public) in the Presidential Election.



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The process of choosing a leader in a country is a crucial process because it will affect the future sustainability of the life of a nation. As mandated in the 1945 Constitution, Indonesia adheres to a democratic system where sovereignty is in the hands of the people (Article 1 paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia). The presidential election, which has also been regulated in the constitution in the process, was chosen directly by the people as a form of popular sovereignty (Article 6A paragraph 1 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia).

In the selection process, the candidates who are promoted to become presidential candidates will compete to attract the attention of the people to get support in order to win the contest. In order to attract people's attention, the Election participants will compete to convince voters by offering a vision, mission and program commonly referred to as the campaign process (Law Number 8 of 2012 concerning General Elections of Members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representatives, and the Council Regional People's Representatives article 1 number 26). In practice, there are several campaign methods that are allowed to be implemented in Indonesia, one of which is the holding of public debates or open debates between candidates (General Election Commission Regulation Number 16 of 2014 concerning General Election of the President and Vice President Article 15).

Debate can be understood as an argument against an issue, from the conflict then it can be seen how the attitudes and perspectives of the parties arguing over an issue are the topic of debate. The purpose of this debate is to explore the reasons behind each point of view in order to convince others that the opinions delivered are better, listen to other people's opinions on an issue and find the best solution for a problem (Nurchahyo, 2015). In the context of elections, it is hoped that the holding of debates between presidential candidate pairs can give preference to the community as voters in determining their choices.

As stipulated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, that the candidate pair debate must be related to the campaign of the related candidate pair (Article 275 paragraph 1 letter h of the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections), and national vision as referred to in the

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Opening of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Article 277 paragraph 5 of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections). However, what happened during the first stage of the debate, each candidate pair was deemed unclear in the delivery of the vision and mission program which was supposed to be delivered in the event so that the debate event which should be one medium for campaigning was not used effectively. From these weaknesses, the emerging public opinion emerged, including the inability of the KPU as the organizer of the debate in concocting the concept of debate and the inability of contestants to debate themselves unable to elaborate their vision and mission to attract community support. This public opinion arose because the public debate of the presidential candidate pair was important because it had an effect on changes in the number of swing voters and undecided voters, which would have an impact on the acquisition of numbers from each candidate. Based on this, in this paper the authors are interested in discussing how the political debate between presidential and vice-presidential elections influences people's political choice.

Besides being able to influence people's choices, the public debate (political debate) between presidential candidates and vice-presidential candidates in the 2019 Presidential Election is also expected to increase public political participation. Through public debate (political debate) that is broadcast on TV nationally, the people will get information directly about the programs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates if elected or won in the presidential election in 2019, and it is one way to attract public interest to participate in the 2019 presidential election.

Some studies of political communication, especially political campaigns in relation to political contestation have been carried out by researchers, such as the Political Communication Dynamics Ahead of the 2014 Election (a collection of articles from researchers on political communication and political campaigns in the 2014 election) published by the Communication Studies and Development Center and Informatics (BPPKI) Bandung, HR R & D Agency of the Ministry of Communication and Information.

Other important studies of political communication have been also conducted. Whilst a few of these studies have analysed the dynamics of political communication in elections and the formation of democratic election law, the remaining studies have investigated the role of elections strategies in the election of national and regional heads

(Susanto, 2013; Siti Fatimah, 2018; Pulungan, 2010; Mahadi, 2015; Putri, 2015; Turistiati, 2016).

Some related studies on political communication and political campaigns mentioned above review various forms of political communication, political campaign strategies, carried out by candidates, and studies of the phenomenon of black campaigns in political contestation in order to win the political contestation. While in this study, the author discusses the significance of the public debate in the Presidential Election contestation, it is then indispensable to discuss the influence of public debate on people's political preference in the presidential election, and the factors that influence people's choices in the Presidential Election related to the public debate.

Public debate is one form of political campaigning carried out at the campaign stage in the presidential and vice-presidential elections in 2019. Campaigns are the delivery of messages from senders to audiences (Ardha, 2014, p. 107). In the implementation of elections, campaign activities are one of the things that attract the attention of many people. Political campaigns themselves can be understood as organised efforts that try to influence the decision-making process in certain groups and campaigns focused on elections and candidates for heads of state or heads of government to be the most interesting things (Fatimah, 2018, p. 8). The presidential candidate's campaign usually gets great attention from the audience where it is also influenced by the media that take advantage of the moment by preaching the characteristics and program of candidates (Hirzi, 2008, p. 135).

The campaign period was included in one of the stages of holding the Election of President and Vice President 9 (Article 3 Paragraph 5 of the Law of the Republic of Indonesia concerning the General Election of the President and Vice President). In the General Election Commission Regulation Number 16 of 2014 concerning the General Election Campaign for the President and Vice President, it was explained that campaign material included the candidates' vision, mission and program, and explained further in the regulation that in the delivery of campaign material can use several methods, among others, through limited regulations, face to face and dialogue, dissemination through printed mass media and electronic media, broadcast via radio and / or television, dissemination of campaign material to the public, installation props in the campaign site and elsewhere determined by the KPU, debating the candidate pair about the campaign material for the can-

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didate pair and other activities that do not violate the laws and regulations (Article 15 Paragraph 1 of the Election Commission Regulation Number 16 of 2014 concerning the Presidential Election Campaign and Vice President).

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As one of the campaign methods, public debate among candidates has always received great attention from the public. With the debate being held the policy position of the presidential candidate pair will be elaborated more deeply and broadly on each of the themes discussed (Budhirianto, 2015, pp. 156-157). From the debate activities, the community is expected to get a picture as a voter to be able to determine their preference of information obtained from the debate.

As an organizer, the KPU is responsible for the technical implementation that must contain political education for the people so that the attitude towards their choices can be influenced properly and correctly. In addition, this event can generate public awareness in democracy in shaping a more mature society order for their political preference (Budhirianto, 2016, p. 157). So that many people can access information from this debate, this debate program is usually broadcast on various TV media.

The public debate held by the KPU as a form of campaign for presidential and vice-presidential candidates not only provides information on the vision, mission and programs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates to serve as a way of attracting the public to vote, but also aimed at increasing political participation society.

Political participation can be understood as all activities of citizens in order to influence (directly or indirectly) public policies and the determination of political authorities and the distribution of power in society. The presence of political participation in a country can also be said as a form of manifestation of democracy because countries that do not facilitate the existence of public participation will lead to an authoritarian system

Political participation in General Elections is a very important instrument because it can determine the direction and progress of the country. The quality of political participation in elections will be largely determined by the factor of voting as a people's right to vote, the ease of access in choosing and the reason for giving their choices based on the quality of the chosen leader (Liando, 2016).

All forms of political participation will be directed at influencing the course of government. Milbart and Goel (in Subekti, 2014) distinguish participation into several categories. First, apathy that can be under-

stood by the state of society that does not participate and withdraw from the political process. Second, the spectator is understood as a society that has at least voted in general elections. Third, gladiator where people are actively involved in the political process, namely communicators, specialists hold face-to-face contacts, party activists and campaign workers, and community activists (Subekti, 2014).

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The high or low level of public political participation in elections can be explained through a rational choice approach. The rational choice approach is the approach adopted by political scientists from economics popularised by James Coleman. Coleman's rational choice approach is evident in the basic idea that individual action leads to a goal and goal that is determined by value or preference (Subekti, 2014). In politics, this rational choice approach produces static methods that are more realistic as those carried out in the voting process. According to adherents of rational choice theory, the core of politics is individuals as important actors in the political world because human (voter) is a rational individual, so he always gives rational rights as an option and he also has the obligation to make choices in an effort to influence social issues (Supriyadi, 2015, p. 404).

Information, education and knowledge possessed by voters become determinants of political preference that are not based on chance or habit but are determined by factors of reasoning and logical thinking. With consideration of profit and loss to determine the preference of alternatives that are in the best and most profitable choices both for self-interest and for the public interest (Supriyadi, 2015: 404). In the process of determining that preference, social institutions have a significant influence in this rational choice theory.

## **Research Methods**

This study used descriptive qualitative research methods, where a detailed review of some related studies are analysed and discussed. The authors collected and reviewed various studies related to the problem, to be the material of analysis in this study.

## **Result and Discussion**

### *Significance of Public Debate in the Presidential Election Contestation*

As one of the campaign methods, the public debate event has become a significant means of influencing the electability of election candidates.

William L. Benoit (2014, p. 3-4) explained that there are at least 5 important factors in the debate in the political campaign process, namely:

1. Debate gives access to the public to be able to compare each candidate who fights in contestation. This is because in the debate the issues being debated have been arranged by the organizers who assumed the issue was neutral so that the public could read the ability of each candidate as voters;
2. With the coverage of media debate and discussion in political reporting and discussion, this gives additional access to candidates for voters so voters can learn about candidates indirectly or directly;
3. Debates have far less intervention from the media than reporting. Even sometimes journalists who are involved in debates can berate candidates who do not answer questions;
4. In the debate, candidates have the opportunity to correct alleged false statements from opponents. Denial can be made even when the injured party does not have the turn to speak and they often ask the moderator to reply to the statement.
5. Candidates usually do not like voters to only hear messages from their opponents. Although the opponent is not wrong in representing the other party's point of view, the candidates usually want the voter to listen to their side besides the point of view of their opponent.

But most importantly, the debate program offers substantial benefits for democracy where as a medium, debate can be a source of information for voters and debate offers opportunities for candidates to discuss the position of their issues and make campaign appointments. The public debate program is an important part of democracy because it is witnessed by many voters, has effects by voters and is held in various places for various positions. So that the political debate program between candidates broadcast by various media can be called an excellent opportunity for candidates to be able to compare themselves to be able to reap as much - the many voices of the people. In the contestation of the Presidential Election, the debate program in each series will certainly get the attention of many parties, especially the voters.

In the momentum of the presidential election, public debate received broad attention due to the function of the Election itself. These reasons include general elections as comparative action, candidates who are required to distinguish themselves from opposing parties,

political campaign messages will make candidates distinguish themselves, candidates build choices through recognition, attacks, and defense, campaign discourse applies to two topics namely policy and character (Benoit, 2014). This will be more comprehensively elaborated in the momentum of public debate when compared to other campaign methods.

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Debate is the best opportunity for presidential candidates to convey their message to many people. Although there is a tendency that the debate itself does not have a major influence on the preference of the people who have become sympathisers for each candidate who has been patterned before. With the debate of sympathisers and supporters, they will always seek justification for the parties they support in the moment of debate and look for loopholes to the opposing parties. However, the debate between candidates has a significant influence for the beginner voters, swing voters and undecided voters.

The existence of beginner voters, swing voters and undecided voters has a significant influence on the victory of each candidate. The number of swing voters in the 2019 Presidential Election based on the survey results of various pre-presidential survey institutions is in the range of 7-13%, so there are equally large opportunities for candidate pair 01 and incumbent 02 to win the 2019 presidential election (Sanur, 2019, p. 26). Data found based on a survey conducted by Charta Politika found that novice voters aged 17-20 and young voters aged 21-35 years accumulated as many as 11% expressed doubts about whether to vote or not on the day of the presidential election. Hendri Satrio (in Sanur, 2019) argues that basically swing voters or undecided voters are groups of people who actually already have a preference but keep their choices a secret, which makes swing voters often equated with the silent voters who indeed keep their political preference secret (Sanur, 2019).

The release of the survey results from political indicators concluded that after a series of presidential candidate debates there was a trend of decreasing the number of undecided voters or getting closer to the H-day the selection of the number of undecided voters declined. The survey conducted in December 2018 showed 9.2% of the number of undecided voters and showed a figure of 7.2% with the number of swing voters who tended to be balanced on each pair in the survey



conducted in March 2019 (<https://tirto.id/survei-indikator-undecided-voters-berkurang-jelang-pencoblosan-dkZl>).

From the data, the results show that the debate does not have a significant effect on the electability of the presidential candidates fighting in the 2019 Presidential Election. This can be caused by the polarisation of the people who have formed strongly since the 2014 presidential election and continued to the 2019 presidential election, which also brings together two candidates the same presidential candidate. The polarisation was also strengthened in the momentum of the election of the DKI Jakarta governor in 2017 which was sharpened by the case of blasphemy by Basuki Tjahaya Purnama alias Ahok who was the incumbent governor at the time to trigger the existence of 212 Peaceful Action.

Meanwhile, what also influenced Joko Widodo's superiority was that the incumbent position held by Joko Widodo was the reason for the community, especially those who were satisfied with the performance results in the previous period to re-elect contestation in 2019.

Although the public debate of the presidential candidates is an effective campaign tool to gain votes, especially for beginner voters, swing voters and undecided voters, the results of the data shown by the debate show no effect as expected. The enthusiasm of the beginner voters does have a positive impact on political participation in Indonesia, but they also have characteristics that are less rational in choosing so that it is easy to influence (Sanur, 2019: 28). With the existence of a number of irrational voters, the debate will be less effective in gaining votes.

### *Factors Affecting to Community Political preference in Presidential Elections*

Factors that influence people's choices in the Presidential Election are inseparable from the factors of community political participation. These factors include social and economic status, situation, parental political affiliation, organisational experience, political awareness, trust in the government and incentives for participation through mass media socialisation and informal discussions (Hendrik, 2010, p. 141-142). The source of these factors comes from various forms of campaigns accepted by the public as voters, including from public debates.

With the increasing level of community political participation, it will show that the implementation of a democratic system is getting

better. Elections are an accumulated moment where community participation is contained in a process. Therefore, those elections become a sacred moment to read public participation as a prerequisite for the establishment of a democratic state of life.

As a source of public information that determines the level of participation, political campaigns, especially public debates conducted by candidates who fight in a general election cannot be underestimated. Political campaigns must really contain a political message that is useful for the community because of these messages the community can consider its choices, especially for rational voters. From this, it is expected that there will be a sound acquisition of representative election results from rational community considerations.

In addition, the purpose of political campaigns is certainly related to the effectiveness of political campaigns carried out. Political campaigns are said to be effective if what is the goal of the political campaign is achieved. The statement is in accordance with the measure of effectiveness (Bastian, 2007, p. 215) that effectiveness must be measured by the standards formulated based on the objectives of the program itself. In this context, the aim of a presidential candidate campaigning through public debate is to explain his program, vision and mission, then the campaign. The public debate is said to be effective if the public becomes aware of the vision and mission of the program that has been presented by the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, which ultimately can attract the interest of the community in determining their political preference. Thus, the public debate broadcast on TV nationally aims to influence the behaviour of the public (audience / audience) in order to cast their votes for them, which when associated with campaign effectiveness, are in accordance with the campaign in the form of public debate if they influence the level of public political participation.

The success of public debates in influencing and changing audience behaviour cannot be separated from the efforts of a presidential and vice-presidential candidate to carry out political campaign activities in the form of other campaign methods that are carried out repeatedly not just once. Thus, the intensity of campaigning and various political campaign methods carried out by candidates became an important dimension in the effectiveness of campaigning. In other words, to be able to influence people's political preference, political campaigns do not rely solely on public debate, but also combine all forms of campaigns

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tailored to the conditions of the people (audience) who attend, their incisions and the substance of politically packed material.

### **Conclusion**

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Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that public debate is one of the significant campaign methods in influencing the electability of election candidates. As a debate medium, it can be a source of information for voters and serves as a forum for candidates to discuss the position of their issues and make campaign promises to the public that are substantial in democracy. Candidates who compete in political contestation will be able to elaborate more comprehensively the vision, mission and program that they campaigned in the public debate event.

Debate events that are intended more specifically to influence vote acquisition from beginner voters, swing voters and undecided voters in fact have no significant effect. It can be seen from the survey results, which were only slightly reduced from the undecided voters from the surveys conducted pre-debate and post-debate. The electability of the two pairs of candidates also tended to remain unchanged both before and after the debate was dominated by the superiority of the pair Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin.

Effects that have little effect on the voices of novice voters, swing voters and undecided voters after the series of debates were held generally due to the failure to convey the message of the vision, mission and program expected by voters from the candidates obtained from the debate. This is also supported by the lack of technical debate, even though in every series technical changes have been made to obtain the best quality. So that the series of debates held as one of a series of campaigns in the 2019 Presidential Election momentum has less influence on the main target of debates, namely beginner voters, swing voters and undecided voters, but the series of debates can show an increasing level of community political participation. became trending and there were various criticisms and suggestions from the people that emerged from the debate.

The political preference of the people in the Presidential Election are influenced by the factors of community political participation, namely social and economic status, situation, parental political affiliation, organisational experience, political awareness, trust in the government and incentive for participation through mass media so-

cialisation and informal discussions obtained by the community from political campaigns (especially through public debate) from presidential candidates to vice presidents. These factors can also explain the effectiveness of public debate on community political participation in the 2019 presidential election; where the effectiveness of public debate is also influenced by various other forms of political campaigns, such as the intensity of delivery, which are packaged in the form of interesting programs so that the substance of the campaign material is delivered well and effectively, which ultimately the community (audience) is interested in participating in choosing the best candidate with his political preference.

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