Grassroots Election Oversight: Enhancing Electoral Accountability and Civic Engagement

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Abstract

Despite high expectations for Indonesia's elections, including the most recent in 2024, widespread violations undermined their integrity. In response, there is a pressing need for grassroots participation in electoral monitoring to complement formal oversight by government bodies. This article investigates community-based participatory election supervision through the establishment of Election Monitoring Villages in Batang Regency, Indonesia. The study aims to assess how these initiatives enhance grassroots democratic literacy and foster meaningful political engagement. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews with 10 informants, field observations, and a review of relevant literature. Four monitoring villages—Sijono, Bandar, Ujung Negoro, and Sidorejo were established by the local Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) based on strategic and participatory considerations. The findings reveal that these villages have raised public awareness of electoral processes, strengthened civic responsibility, and encouraged residents to actively report violations. Academically, this study contributes to the discourse on participatory democracy by offering empirical evidence of how structured village-based programs can cultivate political awareness and expand community oversight. The research concludes that monitoring villages function not only as mechanisms for electoral supervision but also as platforms for civic education and democratic consolidation.

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Keywords

Civic participation, Election Monitoring Villages, democratic literacy, participatory democracy, political engagement

Abstrak

Meskipun pemilu di Indonesia, termasuk yang paling mutakhir pada tahun 2024, diharapkan menjadi tonggak kedewasaan demokrasi, berbagai pelanggaran yang meluas justru merusak integritasnya. Menyikapi hal tersebut, muncul kebutuhan mendesak akan partisipasi masyarakat dalam pengawasan pemilu di tingkat akar rumput guna melengkapi pengawasan formal yang dilakukan lembaga pemerintah. Artikel ini meneliti pengawasan pemilu partisipatif berbasis komunitas melalui pembentukan desa pengawasan di Kabupaten Batang, Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menilai bagaimana inisiatif tersebut meningkatkan literasi demokrasi masyarakat dan mendorong keterlibatan politik yang lebih bermakna. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan 10 informan, observasi lapangan, serta telaah literatur yang relevan. Empat Desa Pengawasan Pemilu—Sijono, Bandar, Ujung Negoro, dan Sidorejo—dibentuk oleh Badan Pengawas Pemilu (Bawaslu) setempat berdasarkan pertimbangan strategis dan partisipatif. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa desa-desa ini telah meningkatkan kesadaran publik terhadap proses pemilu, memperkuat tanggung jawab kewargaan, serta mendorong masyarakat untuk secara aktif melaporkan pelanggaran. Secara akademis, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada wacana demokrasi partisipatif dengan menghadirkan bukti empiris mengenai bagaimana program berbasis desa yang terstruktur dapat menumbuhkan kesadaran politik dan memperluas pengawasan masyarakat. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa desa pengawasan berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai mekanisme pengawasan pemilu, tetapi juga sebagai wadah pendidikan kewargaan dan konsolidasi demokrasi.

Kata-kata Kunci

Demokrasi partisipatif, Desa Pengawasan Pemilu, keterlibatan politik, literasi demokrasi, partisipasi warga

Introduction

Indonesia's 2024 general election was once again expected to be a testament to the strength and maturity of its democratic system. However, widespread allegations of electoral fraud and violations have cast a shadow over this democratic process. Reports of money politics, black campaigns, violations of the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN), and breaches of electoral ethics illustrate the complex and entrenched nature of these problems (Susilowati 2019). According to the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), a total of 1,023 alleged violations were recorded during the 2024 elections—comprising 482 reports from the public and 541 internal findings. Of these, 479 were confirmed as violations, while many others remain under investigation (Bawaslu 2024). In terms of classification, Bawaslu identified 69 administrative violations, 39 criminal allegations, 244 ethical breaches, and 125 other legal infractions.

A significant portion of these problems is linked to the political behavior of state officials. The State Civil Service Commission (KASN 2024) reported 417 cases of alleged violations of ASN neutrality, with nearly 200 confirmed breaches, 40% of which occurred via social media platforms (KASN 2024). These findings indicate that unethical partisan behavior by civil servants continues to plague every electoral cycle and undermine public trust in democratic institutions.

The magnitude of fraud and misconduct in the 2024 elections has sparked widespread concern, particularly regarding the ability of election organizers to uphold electoral integrity. Institutions such as Bawaslu, the Election Commission (KPU), and the Election Organizer Ethics Council (DKPP) face immense pressure to enforce the law and safeguard democratic values (Yuniarto 2024; Khopipah et al. 2023). While legal frameworks such as Bawaslu Regulation No. 7 of 2022 provide tools for enforcement, implementation has often lagged behind the scale and sophistication of violations.

Although Bawaslu is legally mandated—under Article 89 of Law No. 7 of 2017—to supervise every stage of the election process from the national to the village level, its operational effectiveness remains constrained (Nasution 2023). The rapid evolution of electoral democracy, including the digitalization of campaigning and information dissemination, has further complicated Bawaslu's monitoring capacity (Fadhilah 2024).

This underscores the growing urgency to broaden electoral supervision beyond formal institutions.

In response to these challenges, community participation in election monitoring has emerged as a critical and necessary strategy. Participatory supervision not only serves to uphold democratic accountability but also strengthens public engagement with the electoral process (Dairani and Islami 2023). It performs a dual function: affirming that democracy is alive and vibrant, while also helping to establish grassroots mechanisms to minimize fraud and electoral misconduct.

This paper examines the importance of public participation in electoral supervision through the case study of Batang Regency. Amid the high volume of election-related violations—12,795 incidents recorded in the 2024 election alone—Bawaslu Batang initiated an innovative approach by establishing *Desa Pengawasan Pemilu* (Election Monitoring Villages) as a means of fostering citizen-based oversight (Kutnadi 2023). These villages serve as community-based structures to detect and report violations, including 8,601 instances involving illegal campaign materials (Jumadi 2024).

By focusing on Batang as a special case, this study analyzes how grassroots electoral monitoring can respond to systemic shortcomings in institutional oversight. It explores how local initiatives, anchored in community engagement, offer alternative strategies for sustaining electoral integrity. In doing so, this paper contributes to broader discussions on democratizing election supervision in contexts where formal mechanisms face structural and operational limitations.

Anumber of studies have examined the role of participatory supervision in the context of electoral oversight in Indonesia. These studies consistently highlight the importance of community involvement—particularly among the younger generation—in strengthening electoral integrity. Primadi conducted a case study on participatory election supervision involving first-time voters in South Bangka (Primadi et al 2019). Their research focused on the activities of Bawaslu Supervision Agents and the implementation of an "election supervision class" initiated by the local Bawaslu office. The findings indicate that this initiative was effective in increasing both the participation rate and political awareness among novice voters. However, the study also noted that while first-time voters were involved, they were

primarily positioned as program targets rather than as initiators of the participatory efforts. Nevertheless, this approach succeeded in cultivating a participatory climate among young voters during the election period.

In a similar vein, Yusrin and Salpina (2023) explored the involvement of the millennial generation in supervising the 2024 electoral stages. Unlike the previous study, this research highlighted millennials as active initiators of supervision rather than passive participants. Their findings suggest that millennial engagement in monitoring activities significantly influenced the electability of legislative candidates. These two studies collectively underscore the strategic importance of youth participation in electoral oversight, both as a mechanism for supervision and as a catalyst for raising political awareness among younger demographics (Yusrin and Salpina 2023).

Wibawa extended the discussion by examining participatory supervision in the context of good governance. His study argued that community-based election monitoring serves as a vital pillar of democratic governance, contributing to public trust, legitimacy, transparency, and service quality. Participation from citizens, especially in monitoring elections, was presented as a form of public control essential for preventing fraud and electoral misconduct. This reinforces the idea that participatory supervision is not only a democratic right but also a mechanism for ensuring accountability in public institutions (Wibawa 2019).

Further, Purnomo investigated community participation in developing a local election monitoring system in Ngujung Village, Maospati District, Magetan Regency. Their study demonstrated that participatory supervision at the village level contributes significantly to strengthening Bawaslu's institutional authority, which has often been constrained by structural and capacity-related limitations (Purnomo et al. 2023). Village-based supervision initiatives were seen as a valuable form of social capital that could enhance the effectiveness of electoral monitoring efforts.

While these studies affirm the importance of participatory election supervision, particularly involving youth and local communities, they tend to focus on either specific demographic groups (e.g., millennials, novice voters) or particular regions. What distinguishes the present study is its focus on election supervision villages (*desa pengawasan pemilu*) in Batang Regency—an initiative pioneered by the local Bawaslu office. To

date, no research has specifically examined this model, making it a novel contribution to the field.

This paper aims to fill that gap by analyzing how the *desa pengawasan pemilu* serves as a grassroots mechanism for participatory supervision and how it contributes to addressing widespread election violations at the local level. The study introduces two main contributions: (1) a focus on the unique institutional innovation of monitoring villages in Batang, and (2) a detailed exploration of the community's active role in election oversight. To frame this analysis, the study adopts the theoretical perspective proposed by (Qoyimah et al. 2023), who argue that participatory supervision is essential for three main reasons: first, the limited institutional capacity of Bawaslu to supervise every stage of the election process (subjective factor); second, the increasing complexity of electoral violations and fraud (objective factor); and third, the need to preserve the substance of transparent and accountable elections (quantitative factor). These theoretical insights provide a foundation for understanding the necessity and potential of participatory approaches in electoral governance.

Method

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the phenomenon of participatory election supervision in Batang Regency. This approach was chosen to allow for a deep and contextual analysis of the subject matter, enabling the researcher to explore social dynamics and uncover patterns that may not be visible through quantitative methods alone.

The research relies on two main sources of data: primary and secondary. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with ten purposively selected informants who were directly involved in participatory supervision. These included two officials from Bawaslu Batang Regency, four village heads from selected election-monitoring villages, three respected community figures, and one local youth. These sources were chosen based on their roles and experiences related to the implementation of community-based election monitoring. Secondary data were gathered from sources not directly involved in the case but relevant to the broader context of the research. These included academic books, peer-reviewed journals, media reports (both digital and print), official

institutional documents, and archival materials. These sources provided important background and supported the interpretation of findings from primary data.

For data analysis, this study adopted the Spradley model of qualitative analysis, which includes four stages: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. This model helped the researcher systematically interpret the data, identify key categories, and reveal deeper cultural patterns and meanings (Hidayati and Setiawan 2023; Choirunnisa 2024). The entire research process—from preliminary observation to data collection and analysis—was conducted over a period of three months, allowing sufficient time to engage with informants, gather comprehensive data, and conduct thorough analysis within the local context.

The Election Monitoring Village Program

The Election Monitoring Village (*Desa Pengawasan Pemilu*) is an innovative initiative introduced by Bawaslu Batang Regency to address the limitations of its existing electoral monitoring mechanisms. This initiative emerged from an awareness that, while the complexity and frequency of electoral violations are increasing—alongside a growing voter population—Bawaslu's supervisory capacity remains relatively constrained. To bridge this gap, Bawaslu initiated a community-based model by directly involving villages in the election oversight process. This approach not only aims to broaden monitoring efforts but also to foster political literacy and civic responsibility at the grassroots level. The program positions villages as collaborative partners in promoting clean, fair, and transparent elections (Adelia et al. 2019).

To date, Bawaslu Batang has established 16 Election Monitoring Villages (see Table 1). However, this number is still limited compared to the total of 239 villages and 9 urban wards spread across 15 sub-districts in Batang Regency (Batangkab 2022). This indicates a need for further expansion to ensure more inclusive and representative community participation in electoral processes. With broader implementation, the program can transform electoral supervision into a more collective responsibility, going beyond passive voter participation.

However, several sub-districts—such as Pecalungan, Banyuputih, Batang, Kandeman, Tersono, and Tulis—have not yet implemented the program. This means that 5 out of 15 sub-districts still lack a single Election Supervision Village. To optimize the impact of this initiative, Bawaslu should aim for equitable distribution across all sub-districts, ensuring that each has at least one model village actively involved in supervision.

In essence, the Election Supervision Village program serves two strategic purposes: first, to compensate for institutional limitations in electoral oversight; and second, to empower communities through participatory democracy and political education. As such, it represents both a pragmatic solution and a visionary step toward enhancing election integrity in Batang Regency.

Table 1. Election Monitoring Villages Initiated by Bawaslu Batang Regency

| No | Villages | Formation Date | Place of Declaration |
|----|---|-------------------|---|
| 1 | Desa Sijono Kecamatan Warungasem | 23 Juni 2021 | Aula Balai Desa Sijono |
| 2 | Desa Bandar Kecamatan Bandar | 31 Agustus 2021 | Aula Balai Desa Bandar |
| 3 | Desa Ujung Negoro Kecamatan Kandeman | 15 September 2021 | Aula Balai Desa Ujung Negoro |
| 4 | Desa Sidorejo Kecamatan Gringsing | 14 Oktober 2021 | Kawasan Objek Wisata Pantai Jodoh Desa Sidorejo |
| 5 | Desa Babadan Kecamatan Limpung | - | Desa Babadan |
| 6 | Desa Kepuh Kecamatan Limpung | November 2019 | Desa Kepuh |
| 7 | Desa Kemiri Barat Kecamatan Subah | November 2019 | Desa Kemiri Barat |
| 8 | Desa Sodong Kecamatan Wonotunggal | November 2019 | Desa Sodong |
| 9 | Desa Bismo Kecamatan Blado | 7 November 2019 | Balai Desa Bismo |

| Continued | | | | |
|-----------|--|------------------|-------------------|--|
| 10 | Desa Kalisari Kecamatan Reban | 7 November 2019 | Balai Desa Bismo | |
| 11 | Desa Silurah Kecamatan Wonotunggal | 7 November 2019 | Balai Desa Bismo | |
| 12 | Kelurahan Sambong Batang | - | Kelurahan Sambong | |
| 13 | Desa Adinuso Kecamatan Subah | - | Desa Adinuso | |
| 14 | Desa Purbo Kecamatan Bawang | - | Desa Purbo | |
| 15 | Desa Sidorejo Kecamatan Warungasem | - | Desa Sidorejo | |
| 16 | Desa Gerlang Kecamatan Blado | 23 Februari 2021 | Desa Gerlang | |

Source: Bawaslu Batang, 2024

The Urgency of Election Monitoring Villages

Addressing the Limitations of Bawaslu's Supervisory Capacity

Ensuring robust election monitoring is a critical responsibility of electoral institutions such as Bawaslu (Badan Pengawas Pemilu). Allegations of electoral fraud and violations are inevitable during any election process. Therefore, Bawaslu plays a vital role in responding to public complaints and verifying the validity of reported violations. However, a significant challenge arises from the disproportion between the increasing number of alleged violations and the limited personnel and capacity of Bawaslu to monitor them effectively in the field. Given these constraints, enhancing participatory supervision through community involvement becomes essential. The Chairperson of Bawaslu Batang, Mabrur, explained the rationale behind establishing election supervision villages

According to Mabrur, the Chairperson of Bawaslu Batang, the formation of election supervision villages is part of Bawaslu's mandate. He emphasized that the success of elections is not solely the responsibility of election organizers like the KPU or Bawaslu, but a shared responsibility involving the entire community. Therefore, involving the public through supervision villages is a strategic approach to ensure the integrity and success of the election process (interview, 28 May 2024).

This statement reaffirms that the supervision village initiative is not only a programmatic innovation but also a formal mandate derived from Bawaslu's broader institutional responsibility. More importantly, it reflects a shift toward shared accountability, where electoral supervision extends beyond institutional confines to include grassroots participation.

The implementation of supervision villages in Batang Regency has generally been well received by local communities. These villages, initiated by Bawaslu, act as pioneers of participatory supervision and represent a significant achievement. Not every village is ready to take on such a role, as it requires commitment and preparation across various sectors. Thus, the villages that have been officially designated as supervision villages are seen as capable and trusted actors in election oversight, involving all layers of society.

This positive public perception was echoed in an interview with a local community leader, Abdul Kholik, who stated:

The formation of supervision villages is crucial because Bawaslu alone cannot conduct comprehensive supervision given its current human resource limitations. Community participation through these villages is needed to expand the reach and effectiveness of election oversight (interview, 24 June 2024).

It is evident that the supervision village initiative is seen as a necessary response to the institutional limitations of Bawaslu. It reflects a public understanding that successful election monitoring requires both institutional authority and grassroots engagement. Without expanding the reach of supervision down to the village level, especially given the growing complexity of electoral violations, Bawaslu risks being overwhelmed.

The establishment of election supervision villages in Batang Regency represents a strategic innovation to address the limitations of centralized monitoring. By fostering participatory, community-based supervision, Bawaslu is enhancing both the quality and coverage of electoral oversight, while simultaneously promoting political literacy and civic responsibility at the village level.

Responding to the Growing Prevalence of Elections Violantions

The establishment of the Election Supervision Village (*Desa Pengawasan Pemilu*) in Batang Regency reflects a strategic response to the growing

prevalence of election violations and fraud. More than a symbol of synergy between the public and election organizers, this initiative serves to strengthen grassroots monitoring mechanisms. Recognizing that many violations emerge from rural areas where political literacy remains low, the program leverages the village community as a key social resource in curbing unconstitutional practices.

This community-based monitoring system aims to foster vigilance at the local level, enabling early detection and rapid reporting of suspicious activities. As emphasized by Mabrur, the Chairperson of Bawaslu Batang:

Each person must at least be willing to reject money politics. If there is a suspected violation, they should have the courage to report it and understand how to exercise control. If this control mechanism works, at least some residents in the village will be brave enough to report suspected violations. But remember, we prioritize prevention. So ideally, when something in the village goes against the regulations, people will act to prevent it before it needs to be reported (interview, 1 May 2024).

This statement underlines Bawaslu's priority on preventive measures. By equipping citizens to recognize violations, the Supervision Village provides a platform for collective awareness and early intervention. It transforms community members into active contributors to electoral integrity through education and monitoring.

This participatory approach is further supported by local leadership. Sumpeno, Head of Sidorejo Village, described the initiative as "as a forum within village activities to communicate and conduct outreach, helping the community become more aware of their rights as citizens" (interview, 23 June 2024).

This highlights the role of the Supervision Village as a civic education space that fosters awareness of political rights. With such awareness, communities are better positioned to identify and challenge undemocratic practices.

In anticipating increasingly complex electoral challenges, Bawaslu acknowledges that institutional oversight alone is insufficient. Collaboration with villages offers a sustainable and strategic response. Bastomi, Head of Sijono Village, reinforced this by saying:

A supervisory village is essential to involve the community in election monitoring. In fact, establishing such a village does not require much—just a space for activities, basic needs like refreshments, and typical meeting arrangements. What's most important is fostering community awareness about their crucial role in overseeing and supervising village-level activities (interview, 23 June 2024).

Thus, the Election Supervision Village initiative represents a grassroots innovation in electoral oversight. It positions the community not just as observers, but as frontline actors in safeguarding democracy. Through enhanced literacy, collective vigilance, and shared responsibility, the initiative aims to curb electoral misconduct and promote accountable participation from the ground up.

The Role of Election Monitoring Villages: Strengthening Substantive Democracy

One of the key purposes of establishing Election Monitoring Villages (*Desa Pengawasan Pemilu*) across Batang Regency is to promote more substantive and consolidative democratic elections. The term substantive refers to the need for elections to be conducted free from unconstitutional practices. Allegations of fraud and election violations must be anticipated and prevented. As long as such practices persist and remain ingrained in the political culture, truly substantive elections cannot be realized. Substantive democracy demands elections that uphold the true values of democratic integrity—free from manipulation, coercion, and irregularities.

Even though instances of electoral fraud and violations may still occur in democratic contexts, this should not prevent a collective and holistic effort to minimize and eventually eliminate such practices. Substantive democracy must center on the protection of fundamental values and freedoms, such as freedom of expression, freedom of choice, recognition of human rights, and tolerance (Sadzali 2022).

The establishment of supervision villages is not only a response to democratic deficits but also a proactive effort to foster democratic awareness and engagement at the grassroots level. These villages serve as community-based platforms for maintaining and cultivating democratic values in everyday life. They ensure that democratic processes are not reduced to procedural formalities but reflect the deeper ideals of citizen agency and participation.

This perspective was clearly articulated by Bastomi, Head of Sijono Village:

Perhaps prioritizing active community participation is important to encourage active community participation in the village election monitoring program. This can be done through holding discussions, forums, or other participatory activities that allow people to share their views, experiences, and ideas about politics (interview, 24 June 2024).

This highlights how village supervision programs do more than just oversee electoral processes; they also create inclusive spaces for civic engagement, public discourse, and political education. These forums allow citizens to voice concerns, raise awareness, and take collective action when fraud or violations are suspected.

However, it is important to note that participation in these supervision villages is voluntary. There are no coercive mechanisms involved; instead, they rely on fostering genuine political awareness and motivation from within the community. As more supervision villages are established and supported, it is expected that Batang Regency will see the strengthening of substantive democracy—one that grows through active, informed, and committed citizen participation. Only through such inclusive involvement can collective democratic consciousness flourish and be sustained over time.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the establishment of Election Monitoring Villages reflects a concrete model of grassroots participation in safeguarding electoral integrity. By fostering collaboration between local communities and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), these initiatives have not only strengthened oversight of electoral violations but also promoted the internalization of democratic values at the village level. Beyond serving as mechanisms for monitoring, Election Monitoring Villages function as platforms for civic education, raising political awareness and encouraging citizens—particularly in rural areas—to become more literate, vigilant, and engaged in the democratic process.

The findings show that structured, community-based programs can enhance democratic literacy, foster meaningful political engagement, and complement formal oversight mechanisms. Bawaslu's approach demonstrates how leveraging local social capital can contribute to building a more substantive and consolidated democracy.

While this study is limited to the context of Batang Regency, it provides a basis for further inquiry. Future research could explore comparative cases across other regions, assess the sustainability of community-based monitoring in the long term, and examine how digital tools and social media might be integrated to expand grassroots oversight. Such studies would deepen understanding of participatory democracy and offer broader insights for strengthening electoral integrity in Indonesia and beyond

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