

## Political Communication in Medan Regional Head Election during the Covid-19 Pandemic

### Komunikasi Politik Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Medan di Masa Pandemi Covid-19

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#### Abstract

*The implementation of the 2020 Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) in the Covid-19 pandemic requires cooperation and synergy of every existing element to uphold the constitution and suppress the outbreak of Covid-19. This study was conducted to determine the public's perception of whether the simultaneous regional elections in 2020 became a new cluster in the spread of covid-19. The method used in this study is a descriptive quantitative approach, using a questionnaire as a data collection tool. The data obtained were analyzed through percentage analysis and multiple regression tests. This study found that 400 respondents (36.36%) did not trust the information conveyed by mass media and social media regarding the development of Covid-19. Meanwhile, 553 respondents (50.30%) stated that they would attend the polling stations only if there were strict safety procedures and implementation of health protocols.*

**Keywords:** Covid-19; Regional Head General Election (Pilkada); Voters' Attitude

#### Abstrak

*Pelaksanaan Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada) Tahun 2020 di tengah masa pandemi Covid-19 menuntut setiap elemen yang ada untuk saling bekerja sama dalam upaya menegakkan konstitusi dan juga menjaga semakin berkembangnya Covid-19. Kajian ini dilakukan untuk mengetahui persepsi masyarakat apakah pelaksanaan Pilkada serentak Tahun 2020 menjadi kluster baru dalam penyebaran covid-19. Metode yang melalui pendekatan kuantitatif deskriptif, dengan menggunakan kuesioner sebagai alat pengumpulan data. Data yang diperoleh dianalisis melalui analisis persentase dan uji regresi berganda. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa 400 responden (36,36%) tidak mempercayai informasi yang disampaikan oleh media massa dan media sosial terkait perkembangan Covid-19 dan 553 responden (50,30%) akan hadir ke tempat pemungutan suara dengan catatan adanya penerapan yang ketat terhadap keamanan dan penerapan protokol kesehatan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Covid-19; Pemilihan Umum Kepala Daerah (Pilkada); Sikap Pemilih

## Introduction

The implementation of the Election for the Governor and Deputy Governor, the Regent and the Deputy Regent, and the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor (Pilkada) in 2020 is an implementation of the policy enacted in Law Number 1 of 2015 related to the stages of implementing simultaneous general elections in Indonesia as outlined in the General Election Commission Regulation (PKPU) of the Republic of Indonesia Number 15 of 2019. The simultaneous regional election voting, which was supposed to be held on 23 September 2020, experienced a change in schedule due to the impact of the spread of the coronavirus that has hit the world since the end of 2019. Coronavirus disease, better known as Covid-19, was first discovered in Wuhan City, China (Li et al., 2020; Riou & Althaus, 2020). In Indonesia, cases of patients affected by Covid-19 were first discovered in February 2020 (Djalante et al., 2020). At the beginning of the pandemic that hit Indonesia in particular, the difference in perceptions between the people and the Indonesian government became a problem in overcoming the spread of Covid-19 (Limilia & Pratomawaty, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic took place massively with an increase in the number of victims daily. The spread showed a significant increase in numbers, making various parties participate in making various attempts to prevent its spread. One of the parties who are required to minimize the growth of Covid-19 is the General Election Commission (KPU). As a state institution that is given the right to carry out general elections as outlined in the law, sensitivity rises for the KPU in addressing the simultaneous regional elections while being aware of the growth of Covid-19. Based on the analysis and mutual agreement with various competent parties, changes in the stages of the simultaneous regional elections in 2020 were made, as stated in PKPU number 13 of 2020 on Changes in Simultaneous Pilkada Implementation in the Non-Natural Disaster Conditions of Covid-19.

The information conveyed by the organizers and the government regarding the implementation of this simultaneous regional election must be able to provide confidence and trust for the community to always comply with and follow health protocols even though at the same time the simultaneous regional election stages are taking place. The government is expected to take advantage of every potentially available media to deliver messages related to the 2020 simultaneous regional elections.

For candidate pairs, changes in the election stages due to the growth of Covid-19 make each contestant strive to gain sympathy and support from the community through activities of maintaining health protocols. Candidate pairs are also expected to take advantage of the campaign period given by the organizers. Provided that the campaign participants are limited, the vision, mission, and political promises that are built should be conveyed properly to the voters.

Political promises that are conveyed are one of the political contracts that are built between candidates and voters. Thomson & Brandenburg (2019) and Thomson (2011) emphasize that every elected candidate is expected to fulfill his political promises and, likewise, voters should always evaluate every campaign promise made by the candidates both subjectively and objectively.

The process of political communication through political messages, in this case, is a deliberate attempt to influence the political environment to seize or defend something. In political messages, according to Botha (2014), some satires are used as part of humor and have been very influential in building public opinion since the days of Ancient Greece. According to Schuck et al. (2014), political messages are part of the

mobilization of candidates according to the group's interests, allowing potential conflicts between supporters and those who are not in favor. Regarding the political message conveyed through an effective campaign, according to Green & Schwam-Baird (2016), it is an activity to influence voters' political participation. Therefore, the political message presented is part of persuading voters. Chou and Yeh (2017) stated that the use of certain language in political messages that adjust to society's existing conditions could affect voter attitudes.

The Covid-19 pandemic conditions have made the candidates think creatively to convey their political promises to voters. Anshori (2018) emphasizes that the media used by candidate pairs in disseminating their ideas really determines the level of acceptance of the voters. Various political channels that can be used include mass media and online media. Adhani et al. (2017) said that the mass media is capable of imaging the candidate pairs who will compete. Meanwhile, according to Gurevitch & Blumer (2009), online media is a new interactive media that has the potential to increase public communication and enrich democracy.

For voters themselves, the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic have made voters unable to carry out a direct dialogue with the candidates due to regulations imposed regarding restrictions on campaign participants. Voters really need information about the vision and mission and political promises conveyed by the candidates. This is necessary to open the view and knowledge of voters to the candidates' political commitment. Chou and Yeh (2017) emphasized that the political promises conveyed by candidates must be able to adapt to the existing conditions of society, wherein the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, voters need assurance from candidates for their commitment to develop the region and also improve the social economy in the covid-19 pandemic and after the end of it. Dupont et al. (2019), Born (2018), Naurin (2014), and Scherman (2014) find that the promises delivered during the campaign are a necessity that is fulfilled when a candidate wins an election contest.

The 2020 Medan City Regional General Election (Pilkada) is one of the Pilkada held during the Covid-19 pandemic and 269 other regions. There are two pairs of candidates for regional leaders who have been appointed by the KPU of Medan City to contest in the 2020 Pilkada. Both are Akhyar Nasution-Salman Alfarisi and Muhammad Bobby Afif Nasution-Aulia Rachman. They will win sympathy and choice from 1,601,001 voters registered at the KPU Medan. The Pilkada of Medan City this time received attention from the people of North Sumatra and also nationally. This is not only because Medan City is the capital of North Sumatra Province, but also because the Pilkada was held during the Covid-19 pandemic, and one of the candidates was President Joko Widodo's son-in-law.

Just like other regions, the implementation of the 2020 Pilkada in Medan also received a lot of attention. The pros and cons also often appear related to its implementation amidst the outbreak of the coronavirus. Some agree that the election should continue, while some refuse it. Furthermore, various groups also highlighted the political participation of the community. It is believed that the Covid-19 pandemic will also influence the society's political participation, following all stages of the regional elections until when voting was held on 9 December 2020.

Public participation in the 2015 Medan City Election last time was 25.38 percent. Many questions have been raised about whether such relatively low participation could increase or be repeated in the 2020 Pilkada. Alternatively, it could be even lower because the Pilkada was held during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Faiz Albar Nasution et al.

(2020) explained at least three determining factors that increase voter participation in the 2020 Medan City elections. The first is related to voter confidence in the Medan City government, the second is related to the role of political parties, and the third is related to voter data collection. Gindarsah (2020) stated that the government's unpreparedness in handling the Covid-19 outbreak caused panic in society. Public communication carried out by the government since covid-19 take place, in fact, did not provide good and transparent information related to covid-19. This certainly adds to the record for voters to use their voting rights in the 2020 elections.

With the background described above, this study aims to analyze how the political participation and perceptions of Medan City voters regarding the implementation of Pilkada during the Covid-19 pandemic. This study is very important to see the implementation of Pilkada in the middle of a pandemic and to find out people's perceptions of whether the implementation of the simultaneous Pilkada in 2020 is a new cluster in the spread of Covid-19.

### **Method**

This research was conducted through a positivistic paradigm that is descriptive quantitative. Azwar (2011) emphasized that quantitative analysis is based on numerical data (numbers) processed by statistical methods. Meanwhile, the descriptive approach used is a method of describing and analyzing the results of research yet not to draw broader conclusions (Sugiyono, 2018). The approach taken is correlational.

This research was conducted from 28 October 2020 to 1 November 2020 to voters in Medan City with a population of 1,601,001 voters based on the 2020's legal voters data. With the Slovin formula of 3% precision, the number of samples in this study was 1,100 people, determined by a simple random sampling method and spread over 21 districts and 151 sub-districts in Medan City.

Data collection techniques used in quantitative research can usually be collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentation (Kriyantono, 2014). In this study, data were collected through a survey with a questionnaire tool. Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2018) states that the survey research method is used to obtain data that occurs in the past or present. The variables used in this study consisted of the X1 variable, namely the voters' perception of Covid-19, the X2 variable, namely the voters' perception of the implementation of the simultaneous regional elections in 2020, and the Y variable, namely the voter's attitude regarding the implementation of the elections in the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data analysis was carried out using percentage analysis and multiple regression test, where this method was used to see the frequency of trends in respondents' answers to each question (Junaedi & Sukmono, 2020). The results are presented in numbers, percentages, and infographics by narrating the existing data. Meanwhile, multiple regression, according to Pardede and Manurung (2014), is to measure the effect that occurs between two or more independent variables (X) so that they are functionally related to the dependent variable (Y). To determine the effect, multiple linear regression analysis equations were used using the SPSS 25.0 for windows software.

### **Results and Discussion**

Research on voters' attitude in the 2020 elections in Medan City was conducted on 1,100 respondents with 51.6% female voters and 48.4% male voters. Based on educational background, respondents selected from this study have a majority of

educational backgrounds as high school graduates of 65.27%. The rest are graduates of Bachelor degree (19.18%), Diploma (6.64%), Junior High School (4.18%), Elementary School (3.18%), Postgraduate (1.09%), and did not complete elementary school (0.45%). Looking at the respondents' educational background, it was found that the majority of respondents (92.18%) graduated from high school to postgraduate, which means that the respondents have a fairly good ability in translating the socio-political activities that occur.

In following the growth of Covid-19, 575 respondents (68.82%) followed the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, while 150 respondents (13.64%) did not follow the update of Covid-19. In addition, 193 respondents (17.55%) did not provide answers. Regarding information on the update of Covid-19 conveyed through mass media and social media, 400 respondents (36.36%) said they did not believe the information conveyed while 275 respondents (25.00%) stated that they believed the information. Meanwhile, 425 respondents (38.64%) did not provide answers. The high number of voters who distrust the information received through the mass media and online media is in line with what Yunus and Rezki found (2020). It happened due to the lack of information disclosure related to Covid-19, especially at the beginning of the pandemic.

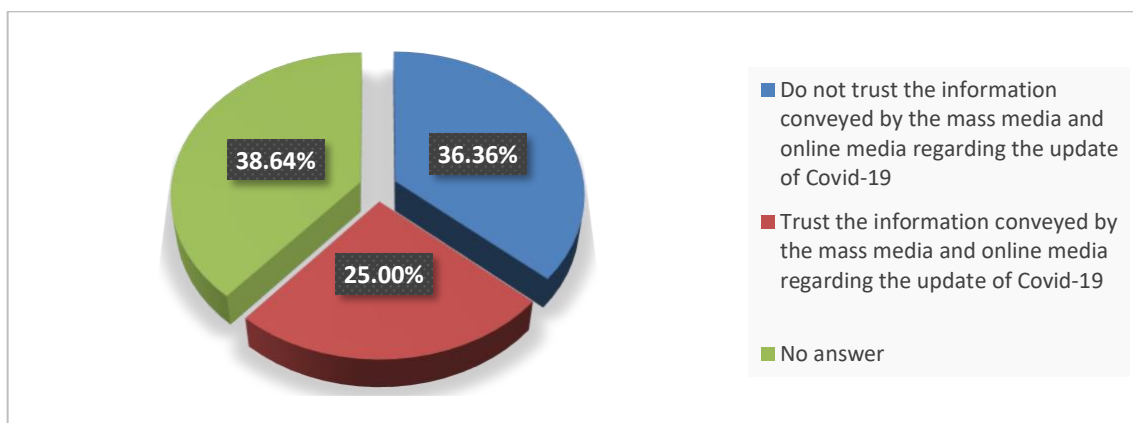


Figure 1. Respondents' Attitudes Toward Information Delivered by Mass Media and Online Media Regarding Covid-19 Development Information

Regarding the implementation of concurrent regional elections in 2020, 932 respondents (84.73%) stated that they knew about the simultaneous regional elections in 2020. Regarding the implementation of the simultaneous regional elections, there were still 152 respondents (13.82%) who stated they did not know about it, and 16 respondents (1.45%) did not answer. In terms of attendance at polling stations (TPS), 553 respondents (50.3%) stated that they would attend polling stations on the voting day, with the condition that the organizers had strictly enforced health protocols to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Meanwhile, 421 respondents (38.3%) stated that they would attend the polling station, and 125 respondents (11.4%) did not provide answers.

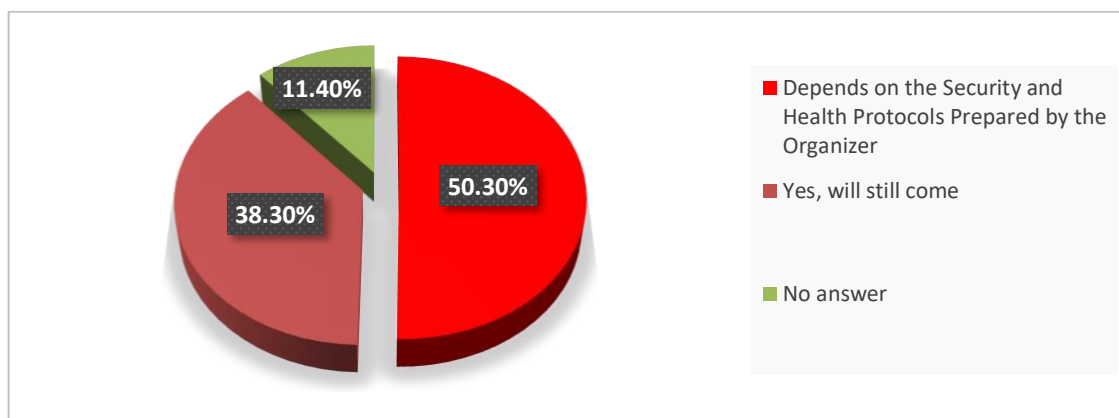


Figure 2. Respondents' Attitudes Regarding Attendance to TPS on 9 December 2020

Regarding the possibility that conducting the 2020 regional elections in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic could create a new cluster of Covid-19 spread, only 320 respondents (29.09%) said that elections could potentially lead to a new cluster of Covid-19. However, 416 respondents (37.82%) believed that the regional elections amid the Covid-19 pandemic did not affect the new covid-19 cluster's development, while 364 respondents (33.09%) did not provide answers to these questions.

#### Distribution of Variable X1, Voters' Perception of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19, which hit the world in 2020, has become a natural part of life in society. The information conveyed did not provide a good level of satisfaction for the society regarding the conditions of the growth of Covid-19. The information conveyed by the mass media, which is generally the government's way of conveying information, did not provide a good level of satisfaction in society. This can be seen in Table 1 regarding public perceptions, in this case, voters, of Covid-19.

Table 1. Distribution of X1 Variables, Perceptions of the Covid-19 Pandemic (n = 1100)

Category	STS	TS	R	S	SS
Respondents believe that victims of coronavirus infection will increase in Indonesia	97	223	336	276	168
Respondents believed in the Indonesian government's ability to overcome the coronavirus outbreak	82	172	363	317	166
Respondents believed and followed all government recommendations regarding Covid-19	17	59	221	456	347
Coronavirus will not be transmitted to those with a strong immune system	40	98	225	378	359
Coronavirus has a very high spread capability between humans	38	97	292	423	250
The chance of recovery if contracting the coronavirus is high	32	67	352	411	238
Healthy people can still transmit the Coronavirus	132	203	285	318	162
Reducing the spread of the coronavirus is one of the responsibilities of respondents as citizens of the community	9	30	97	422	542
Isolation at home is the best way to avoid the spread of corona	43	81	192	341	443

Source: primary data from 2020 research data processing

### Variable Y Distribution, Voters' Attitudes Regarding the Covid-19 Pandemic and the 2020 Pilkada

Voters' understanding of the spread of Covid-19 and the information about the 2020 elections is an integral part of responding to the development of the 2020 regional elections during the Covid-19 pandemic. In this study, voters' attitude is seen from voters' actions in determining their political choices, both about the right to vote and the voters' attitude towards the candidate pairs to be elected.

Table 3. Distribution of Y Variables, Perceptions of the Implementation of the 2020 Pilkada and the Potential for the Spread of Covid-19 (n = 1100)

Category	STS	TS	R	S	ST
Respondents elect on their own awareness as Indonesian citizens despite the Covid-19 Pandemic Conditions	5	12	79	375	629
Respondent select because the vision and mission conveyed by the Candidate Pair is in accordance with what the respondent expects	51	72	277	419	281
Respondents elect because the respondent feels indebted to one of the candidate pairs as he/she has provided assistance in goods/services/money to the respondent personally and the community.	659	272	102	46	21
Respondents elect for a candidate pair that is well known and are considered capable of fighting for the aspirations of the society	112	103	201	392	292
Respondents elect pairs of candidates who have given money to the Respondent	635	265	122	48	30

Source: primary data from 2020 research data processing

### Results of the Analysis of Multiple Linear Regression Equation Voters' Perceptions about Covid-19 and the 2020 Pilkada on voter attitudes

Table 4 explains that the change in the perception towards Covid-19 and the simultaneous regional elections in 2020 (the value of X1 and X2 is 0) means that the voter participation in the 2020 regional elections in Medan City is 7,417. The perception regression coefficient value for Covid-19 is 0.073. This shows that the perception variable towards Covid-19 (X1) increases by 1%. With the assumption that the perception variable towards the 2020 regional elections (X2) and the constant (a) is 0 (zero), then voter participation in the 2020 regional elections in Medan City increases by 0.073 units. This shows that the better the perception of Covid-19 (X1) received by voters on health information and protocols, the higher the voter participation in the 2020 elections in Medan City. Likewise, the perception of the 2020 regional elections (X2) increased by 1%. With the assumption that the variable perception of covid-19 (X1) and the constant (a) is 0 (zero), then voter participation in the 2020 regional elections Medan City will increase by 0.260. This shows that the better the socialization carried out by the organizers and participants of the 2020 elections, the greater the number of voter participation in Medan City will be.

Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Test Results Coefficients a  
(source: Primary data from 2020 research data processing)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7,417	0.530		14,005	0,000
	Perceptions of Covid-19 (X1)	0.073	0.016	0.125	4,620	0,000
	Perceptions of the 2020 Pilkada (X2)	0.260	0.015	0.459	16,929	0,000

a. Dependent Variable: Voters' Attitudes Toward the Implementation of the Regional Elections in 2020 Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic Period

### T-test results

The t-test related to perceptions of covid-19 (X1) and perceptions of the 2020 elections (X2) on voter participation (Y) with an error rate of 5% was carried out by looking at the significance column on each independent variable with a significance level of <0.05. Table 5 shows the t-test results.

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a. Dependent Variable: Voters' Attitudes Toward the Implementation of the Regional Elections in 2020 Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic Period

Voters' perceptions of Covid-19 (X1) positively and significantly affect the increase in voter participation in the 2020 elections in Medan City. This can be seen from the significance of perceptions of Covid-19 (X1) with the value of 0.000 < 0.05 and the value of  $t_{table} = t(\alpha / 2; n-k-1) = t(0.05 / 2; 1100-2-1) = (0.025; 1097) = 1.962$ . Thus the t-count value is greater than the t-table ( $4,620 > 1,962$ ). This means that there is an effect of voter perceptions about Covid-19 on the increase in voter participation in the 2020 regional elections in Medan City.

Voters' perceptions about the 2020 elections (X2) did not positively affect the increase in voter participation in Medan City in the 2020 elections. This can be seen from the significance of voter perceptions about the general election (X2)  $0.550 > 0.05$ , the t-table value =  $t(\alpha / 2; nk-1) = t(0.05 / 2; 1100-2-1) = (0.025; 1097) = 1.962$ . Thus, the t-count value is greater than the t-table ( $16,929 > 1,962$ ), which means that voters' perceptions of the Pilkada significantly affect voters' participation in the 2020 elections



in Medan City.

### Determination Coefficient Test Results

The results of the determination coefficient test were carried out to measure how far the model's ability to explain the dependent variable.

Table 7. The results of the determination coefficient test (source: Primary data from 2020 research data processing)

<b>Model Summary</b>				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.510a	0.260	0.258	2,454

a. Predictors: (Constant), Perceptions of the 2020 Pilkada, Perceptions of Covid-19

From table 7, it can be seen that the coefficient of determination is found in the Adjusted R Square value of 0.260. This means that the ability of the independent variable in explaining the dependent variable is 26.0%.

### Conclusion

This research concluded, related to the perception of Medan City voters on the development of Covid-19 and also the implementation of the 2020 regional elections, 400 respondents (36.36%) did not trust the information conveyed by the mass media and social media regarding the development of Covid-19. In the 2020 elections during the Covid-19 pandemic, it was found that 553 respondents (50.30%) would attend the polling stations if only a strict safety procedure and health protocols are guaranteed. Meanwhile, 320 respondents (29.09%) believed that conducting the 2020 regional elections in the midst of the Covid-19 outbreak could potentially create new clusters for the virus spread.

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