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The Influence of Candidates' Ethnic Identity on Student Voting Participation in the Student Executive Board Elections of the Faculty of Law, UNJA

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Abstract: Student political participation in campus elections (Pemira) is influenced by various factors, one of which is the perception of the candidates' ethnic identity. This study aims to analyze the extent to which ethnic identity influences student voting behavior in Pemira BEM Faculty of Law, University of Jambi. The method used is quantitative research with a survey technique through a questionnaire distributed to 350 active student respondents. Data were analyzed using correlation tests and simple linear regression to examine the relationship between the candidates' ethnic identity and voter participation levels. The results show that ethnic identity has a significant influence on students' voting decisions, so that students' political preferences are not entirely based on the capabilities and vision and mission of the candidates, but also on the proximity of their social identities. These findings indicate that campus political dynamics are still influenced by group identity factors, and more inclusive political education is needed so that voter participation is more oriented towards the competencies and ideas of the candidates.

Keyword: Ethnic Identity, Voting Behavior, Student Political Participation.

INTRODUCTION

General Elections as a campus democratic process is an important space for students to express political choices, social identities, and value preferences that develop within the faculty environment. Student participation in elections is not only determined by the ideas, visions and missions, or track records of candidates, but is also influenced by socio-cultural factors, including ethnic identity. Ethnic identity as part of social construction can be the basis of emotional closeness and group solidarity that influence a person's political decisions (Lestari, 2019). In the context of the Faculty of Law, University of Jambi, students come from various ethnic backgrounds, such as Batak, Malay, Minang, and others. Therefore, the

dynamics of campus political preferences have the potential to be influenced by this identity closeness.

Voting behavior essentially explains how individuals make choices in the political process, both in the context of national elections and student organization elections. Voting behavior theory emphasizes that a person's political decisions are not only rational but also influenced by social factors such as family, religion, culture, social environment, and group identity (Surbakti, 2010). In this context, ethnic identity can play a role in determining the symbolic closeness between voters and candidates, thus encouraging certain political preferences. Closeness in cultural values, language, or a sense of togetherness among ethnic groups can create a sense of "representation" that ultimately influences voting participation (Tajfel, 1981).

Based on the above description, this study aims to explain the influence of ethnic identity on student voting behavior in the Student Executive Board Election (Pemira BEM) of the Faculty of Law, University of Jambi. The questions to be answered are whether ethnic identity is a significant factor in shaping students' political choices and how it influences their voting participation. Thus, this study not only provides an empirical overview of campus political dynamics but also contributes to the study of the relationship between social identity and political behavior in higher education.

In the context of campus politics, ethnic identity often doesn't emerge explicitly, but it can be seen through patterns of preference and social solidarity that naturally form within student organizations. Student groups such as regional organizations, ethnic associations, or religious communities can serve as spaces for the reproduction of these identity values (Nugroho, 2017). These group bonds then have the potential to build networks of communication, moral support, and even directed political preferences. Thus, students' political choices are not merely a matter of rationally evaluating candidates, but also a form of social affiliation that connects them to their lived cultural identities.

Furthermore, the development of campus democracy at the Faculty of Law, University of Jambi, demonstrates that the political competition that occurs is inseparable from the dynamics of group representation. In previous elections, issues of close social background—including ethnicity and region of origin—often became informal discussions among students. This demonstrates that the campus democratic process is not only a rational arena, but also a symbolic one, where identity plays a role in shaping the social legitimacy of candidates (Haryanto, 2018). Ethnic representation can be seen as an effort to bring the voices of certain groups into the institutional structure of the Student Executive Board (BEM), thereby making political participation more meaningful.

Therefore, research on the influence of ethnic identity in the Student Executive Board Election (Pemira) of the Faculty of Law (FH) of the University of Jakarta (UNJA) is crucial, particularly in understanding how social identity functions as a variable influencing student voting behavior. The findings of this study are expected to provide input for strengthening a more inclusive campus democracy process and preventing it from becoming trapped in exclusive identity politics. Furthermore, the results of this study can contribute to the literature on voting behavior in the context of higher education, particularly in the law faculty environment, which is characterized by critical intellectualism but remains within a diverse socio-cultural framework.

METHOD

This study uses a quantitative research type with an associative descriptive approach, namely research that aims to see the relationship between independent variables and dependent variables through numerical measurements and statistical analysis (Sugiyono, 2017). The independent variable in this study is Ethnic Identity, while the dependent variable

is Student Voting Behavior in the Student Executive Board Election of the Faculty of Law. The population in this study were all students of the Faculty of Law, University of Jambi, and the sample determination was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, with the criteria of active students from the 2020–2023 intake who had participated in or were aware of the Student Executive Board process. The number of samples was set at 350 respondents, adjusting the Isaac and Michael table for a 95% confidence level.

Data collection was conducted using a closed-ended questionnaire using a Likert scale consisting of five answer choices to measure respondents' perception tendencies. The questionnaire instrument was first tested through validity and reliability tests using the SPSS application, where all question items were declared valid and reliable for use as a research measurement tool. The research procedure began with the preparation of the instrument, distribution of questionnaires to respondents, data collection, and processing using cross-tabulation analysis techniques to see the relationship between answer patterns between variables, as well as simple linear regression analysis to determine the extent of influence of ethnic identity on student voting behavior in the Student Executive Board Election of the Faculty of Law, UNJA.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to determine the influence of ethnic identity on student voting behavior in the Student Executive Board Election (Pemira) of the Faculty of Law, University of Jambi. Based on questionnaire data distributed to 350 respondents, it was found that students from different ethnic backgrounds showed diverse political assessments and preferences in selecting BEM leadership candidates. This indicates that ethnic identity is one of the social variables that contributes to shaping student political behavior patterns on campus.

To examine this pattern of influence, a cross-tabulation analysis was conducted between ethnic identity variables and voting behavior indicators. The summary results are presented in the table below:

Tabel 1. Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Ethnic Category	Preferring Ethnic Candidates (%)	No Ethnic Similarity Required (%)	Total (%)
Batak	48%	52%	100%
Melayu	35%	65%	100%
Minang	41%	59%	100%
Jawa	38%	62%	100%
Lainnya	33%	67%	100%

Sumber: Data Processing Results

The table shows that some students still tend to consider ethnic affinity when determining political choices, although this percentage is not dominant across all ethnic groups. Respondents from the Batak ethnic group appear to have the highest preference for ethnic similarity compared to other ethnic groups. Meanwhile, students from the Malay ethnic group and other ethnic groups tend to demonstrate a more open voting attitude that is not dependent on ethnic identity.

This finding aligns with the concept of social identity-based voting behavior, where proximity to group identity can enhance a sense of symbolic representation (Haryanto, 2018). In the context of student organizations, candidates from the same ethnicity are seen as better able to understand the social conditions, values, and character of a particular community. However, this pattern is not binding, as most respondents still prioritize capacity, track record, and vision and mission as primary factors in their choice. A simple linear regression analysis shows that ethnic identity has a moderate influence on voting behavior ($R = 0.756$; R

Square = 0.652). This means that approximately 65.2% of the variation in student voting behavior can be explained by ethnic identity, while 34.8% is influenced by other factors, such as organizational proximity, candidate personal branding, social activity, debate performance, and inter-faculty relations.

These results illustrate that although ethnicity plays a role in shaping political choices, law students, as an academic group, do not fully consider ethnicity as the primary determinant, resulting in a strong tendency to vote based on competence. This indicates a shift in voting behavior from traditional voting models to rational choice voting, as explained in modern voting behavior theory (Norris, 2014). Furthermore, the heterogeneous social dynamics at the UNJA Faculty of Law encourage students to interact, collaborate, and compete within a shared space without ethnic boundaries. Activities within campus organizations, student organizations (UKM), and legal study groups familiarize students with building cross-ethnic relationships. This fosters a more rational and inclusive electoral pattern.

However, the distribution of support based on ethnicity remains evident in certain social clusters, particularly within friendship networks and internal organizational support. This suggests that identity politics has not completely disappeared, but is present in more subtle forms, particularly in candidate campaign strategies in the Student Elections (Pemira). Based on the findings of this study, it is crucial for Pemira organizers and campus organizations to ensure an inclusive election process by providing substantial space for debate, transparency regarding candidate track records, and a more open forum for conveying visions and missions. This can reduce the politicization of identity and encourage a more rational and democratic political culture on campus.

Based on the research results, it was found that ethnic identity significantly influenced student voting behavior in the Student Executive Board Elections (Pemira) of the Faculty of Law (FH) at Jambi University. This finding is demonstrated by students' tendency to choose candidates from the same ethnic group or with certain cultural affinities. This reinforces the assumption that emotional ties and a sense of ethnic togetherness remain the basis for forming political preferences in campus democracy. In this context, political choices are driven not only by the candidate's vision, mission, or capabilities, but also by symbolic considerations regarding the representation of group identity.

Furthermore, this preference pattern is evident in ethnic-based student organizations, such as the Batak Student Association (IMB), the Minang Student Association, and the Jambi Student Association (Hipmaja), which serve as information distributors and consolidators of political support. These organizations serve as a forum for collective discourse on which candidates are considered capable of representing the group's values, perspectives, and desires. Thus, political support does not occur individually, but through pre-established social networks (Nugroho, 2017). This finding implies that student political participation is not entirely neutral from the perspective of social identity.

To clarify the relationship between ethnic identity and voting tendencies, the following is a summary of support tendencies based on the perceived strength of ethnic ties in influencing voting decisions:

Tabel 2. Support Based On The Perceived Strength Of Ethnic Ties In Influencing Voting Decisions

Level Of Ethnic Proximity	Low	Currently	Tall	Very High	Total
Jumlah Responden	58	112	126	54	350
Percentase (%)	16.6	32.0	36.0	15.4	100

Sumber: Data Processing Results

This table shows that the majority of students (36%) fall into the high category, meaning they clearly consider ethnic factors when making political choices. Meanwhile,

15.4% of respondents fall into the very high category, strongly indicating that ethnic identity is a primary basis for campus political orientation. This finding strengthens the argument regarding the existence of identity politics in student democracy.

This phenomenon can be explained using the theory of voting behavior. This theory explains that political choices are not only based on rational considerations, but also on emotional and social affiliations (Surbakti, 2010). Students who feel a cultural affinity with a candidate tend to interpret that candidate's victory as a representation of their group's success. In this context, Pemira becomes a symbolic arena for identity struggles, not simply an administrative competition to elect an organizational leader.

However, the strength of ethnic identity in student voting behavior does not always have a positive impact. On the one hand, ethnic identity strengthens solidarity and a sense of belonging to the UNJA Faculty of Law Student Executive Board (BEM FH UNJA) as a student organization. However, on the other hand, ethnic-based political dominance has the potential to diminish the space for healthy competition, hinder objectivity in assessing candidate quality, and even foster intergroup stereotypes. If left unchecked, this can create social fragmentation and undermine the quality of campus democracy.

This situation demands strengthening political education that emphasizes not only democratic procedures but also critical awareness of the importance of creating spaces for inclusive representation within student organizations. The Student Executive Board (BEM) should be viewed as a collective institution working for all students, not as a representation of a specific group. Therefore, leadership development strategies that encourage cross-ethnic social integration are necessary, such as dialogue forums between regional organizations, strengthening diversity values in cadre selection, and campaign systems that emphasize programs over identity affinities.

Dengan demikian, hasil penelitian ini memberikan pemahaman bahwa identitas etnis adalah variabel yang nyata dalam menentukan arah partisipasi politik mahasiswa. Namun keberadaannya perlu diolah secara bijak agar tidak menghasilkan politik yang eksklusif, melainkan politik yang bersandar pada persatuan, kompetensi, dan integritas. Pemira yang ideal bukan sekadar ajang memenangkan kandidat tertentu, tetapi ruang pembelajaran demokrasi yang sehat bagi seluruh mahasiswa.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that ethnic identity has a significant yet non-dominant influence on student voting behavior in the student executive board (BEM) election at the Faculty of Law, Jambi University. Although some respondents expressed a sense of closeness and representation when supporting candidates with the same ethnic background, the majority of students tended to adopt a more rational and evaluative approach by prioritizing leadership qualities, organizational experience, and the clarity of candidates' vision and mission. This indicates a shift from identity-based voting patterns toward a more conscious and reasoned political behavior among university students. The contribution of this study lies in providing empirical evidence that the political behavior of young educated voters is shaped by both social identity and rational considerations, suggesting that political education and inclusive electoral practices can further strengthen democratic maturity within academic institutions.

Furthermore, the study highlights the dynamic environment of the Faculty of Law, where academic discourse, organizational involvement, and peer interaction play a key role in shaping political awareness. Students who are actively engaged in campus activities tend to develop broader perspectives and demonstrate more critical thinking when making political decisions. This suggests that exposure to diverse social environments reduces the dominance of ethnic sentiment in political preference. Therefore, fostering student involvement in

forums that promote dialogue, inclusivity, and critical engagement remains essential in minimizing identity-driven polarization in campus political processes.

In practical terms, these findings imply that future BEM election processes should encourage candidates to emphasize competence, programmatic agendas, and clear policy direction rather than relying on identity-based symbolism. Electoral committees and student organizations can contribute by designing political education programs, debates, and campaign guidelines that highlight the substance of leadership rather than personal or group identity. By strengthening these democratic practices, the student political landscape can continue to develop into a space that values equality, critical participation, and informed decision-making, contributing not only to the maturity of campus democracy but also to the broader democratic culture in society.

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