

## Local Democratic School: Community Social Training for Improving the Quality of Democracy

Teguh Anggoro, Tina Cahya Mulyatin, and Tofan Ibrahim\*

STISIP Bina Putera Banjar, Banjar, Indonesia

[\\*tofanibrahim94@gmail.com](mailto:*tofanibrahim94@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** The lack of awareness and knowledge among the Banjar community regarding government participation and transparency led to the implementation of the community service activity at the Local Democratic School. The purpose of this community service is to provide education to the community about democracy and governance. The community service method, using the participatory action research approach, began with an initial survey, focus group discussions, and training targeting KPU partners, attended by 25 participants serving as the Election Committee in each village or neighborhood across Banjar City. Through a series of concrete and collaborative steps, it is expected to establish a stronger foundation for inclusive and sustainable democracy at the local level, enhancing community involvement and contribution to positive changes in social structures and public policies. The duration of this PkM activity is seven months, from March to September 2023. The outcomes of the activity received positive feedback from the community, with a 91% response rate from participants indicating an understanding of various topics covered, including local content, governance, civil society, gender and democracy, welfare state, Pancasila democracy, sociopreneurship, law and human rights, and citizen participation in government. The implication is that this program can enhance community understanding and involvement in creating positive changes in social structures and public policies at the local level.

**Keywords:** community literacy training; local democratic school; voting committee

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### INTRODUCTION

Democracy forms the foundation of a just government, where the active participation of the community and the right of every individual to be involved in decision-making processes are irreplaceable principles. To ensure justice, sustainability, and progress in community life, inclusive democracy is crucial. Therefore, understanding and

engaging in the democratic process are essential.

After the New Order ended, Indonesia emerged as one of the largest democracies in the world, alongside the United States and India. Academics have noted that Indonesia's democratic achievements contrast sharply with its still-low state governance and administration standards. (Hendriawan et al., 2022) stated that the ability to manage

the state, government administration, policy-making, implementation, and law enforcement in Indonesia tends to be less optimal compared to countries like India, Thailand, and the Philippines. Meanwhile, (Octastefani, 2019; Törnquist et al., 2022) argue that Indonesian democracy is experiencing stagnation and even slowing down (Berenschot, 2018).

The form of democracy during that period was often referred to as authentic democracy, manifested through village meetings, cooperation, village head elections, and other elements. In the modern era, Indonesia has adapted its democratic system to the times (Indrawan et al., 2020).

There is a possibility that the understanding and implementation of democratic values in Indonesia led to the idea that democracy is a concept of broad or unlimited freedom. This has led to an uncondusive situation, even causing discomforts in society, such as vertical and horizontal conflicts, anarchic behaviour, acts of violence, and damage to public facilities, all considered part of freedom in democracy. Additionally, some communities do not understand democracy and do not utilize it. Ideal democracy occurs when everyone can express their desires without being influenced or forced. A country's democratic system cannot function properly without the democratic participation of all its citizens (Rini, 2022).

The challenges and opportunities for building good democracy are increasingly complex, especially when focusing on the local level. At this level, community involvement in governance and policy-making is more direct and immediately impacts their daily lives. Therefore, real efforts must be made to enhance the community's understanding of local democracy and their participation in it.

Increasing community awareness and participation in the local democratic process can be achieved through inclusive and sustainable methods. This publication discusses democracy school training, an initiative to provide the community with the knowledge, skills, and understanding necessary to engage in the democratic process actively. This publication will explore various approaches and practical experiences in implementing democracy school training as a concrete step to enhance community participation in the democratic process.

The urgency of this service program is due to numerous negative records of Indonesian democracy indicating issues with the democratic process, particularly in Banjar City. The impact of declining democracy in Indonesia is felt even in certain regions, including Banjar City and West Java. Procedural democracy trapped in money politics has spread to the regions. A 2020 LSI survey explained that 39.3% were dissatisfied with democracy in Indonesia, and 3.9% were completely dissatisfied. This figure indicates that most Indonesians are not satisfied with the democratic process in Indonesia. One of the causes is the rampant occurrence of corruption cases and the increasing prevalence of money politics.

Some major issues in Indonesian democracy include the lack of critical civil society participation in governance, the lack of political party cadre processes, the minimal presence of opposition, the high cost of elections due to money politics, the spread of fake news and disinformation, the low level of political education, the unoptimized resolution of human rights violations, restrictions on media freedom and the right to assemble and associate, and the emergence of intolerance and discrimination against religious and ethnic minority groups. Our social capital, which consists of mutual trust, tolerance, cooperation, and appreciation

for diversity, should not be disrupted by differences in political or religious views (Wijayanto et al., 2016).

The Banjar City General Election Commission (KPU), as the government's extension tasked with organizing elections, has a significant responsibility to educate the community through the PPK (Subdistrict Election Committee) comprising 20 people, the PPS (Voting Committee) at the village/kelurahan level comprising 75 people, and the KPPS (Voting Organizing Group) estimated to be more than 1,500 people. Thus, the PPK, PPS, and KPPS spearhead the Banjar City KPU in providing education about the importance of an honest, intelligent, dignified democracy that prioritizes Indonesia's future. Therefore, we feel the need to assist the Banjar City KPU in providing more in-depth education, both theoretically and practically, for PPK, PPS, and KPPS members so that when they go into the field, this team can provide the community with a clear understanding of how to practice good and correct democracy according to the constitution.

On the other hand, democracy, which should involve community participation in governance, is increasingly invisible. Fewer people are actively involved in governance, planning the future of a region, actively campaigning for regional progress, providing input to the government, and so on. The community seems passive in governance, partly because the government involves the community less and less. This hinders the community's creativity in thinking about their region.

According to (Ja'far, 2020; Wijayanto et al., 2016), local democracy includes many forms of community participation, such as elections and deliberations, allowing people to participate in local governance. Essentially, local democracy is a type of democracy highly relevant to citizens' daily lives. This is because local democracy allows the community greater

control over their future and provides opportunities to shape policies that align more closely with local needs and values. Many decisions directly impacting their lives, such as education, health, infrastructure, and the environment, are made and implemented at the local level.

The Local Democratic School (LDS) is an educational program designed to enhance community awareness and participation in the democratic process at the local level. LDS aims to educate the community about basic democratic concepts, leadership principles, and the importance of transparency in governance. Through participatory methods such as surveys, group discussions, and training, LDS seeks to strengthen community involvement in decision-making and create positive social order and public policy changes in their communities. The program, initiated by STISIP Bina Putera Banjar academics in 2023 through the nationally competitive community-based empowerment program, recognizes the declining condition of Indonesian democracy. Therefore, to enlighten the nation and contribute to improving democracy in Indonesia locally and nationally, LDS opens the Local Democratic School to the general public, starting with 20 participants from the PPK, PPS, and KPPS in the Banjar City KPU. Participants will receive education over eight sessions, or about two months, with two weekly sessions, each lasting 2 hours or approximately 120 minutes. Each session will cover two subjects.

This activity includes Constitutional Studies, Civil Society, Election Processes, Democratic Practices, Law and Human Rights, Community Participation, and Sociopreneurship. The subjects offered reflect the Main Performance Indicators and the goals of healthy democracy while aligning with the Independent Learning Campus Merdeka Curriculum implemented by STISIP Bina Putera Banjar.

This service program aims to educate the community in Banjar City about the importance of participation in democracy and smart democratic practices, avoiding issues, hoaxes, and money politics, and improving the condition of democracy in Indonesia, both locally and nationally. The program also aims to ensure that democracy in Banjar City can produce clean, integral, and responsible representatives and leaders. The output of this activity can be measured by the number of people involved, the level of community participation, increased knowledge or skills through evaluation, and positive impacts directly implemented in election activities.

## **METHOD**

The LDS targets the PPS representatives from each village or kelurahan throughout Banjar City. This initiative is led by a team of lecturers, with three students assisting in the smooth running of the community service program (PkM) through training. The training sessions were officially opened by the Chairman of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar and the Chairman of the Banjar City KPU, and they were held in the Aula of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar on Jl Gerilya, Banjar City. The event was attended by 45 people, including 25 participants, eight facilitators, and 12 guests.

The method used in this PkM is participatory action research (PAR). According to (Suwendi, 2022), PAR empowers the community. This empowerment must always consider the needs and solutions to existing problems within the community. Additionally, PAR strives to develop and mobilize knowledge within the community so that they can become agents of change, not merely objects of service. In the PAR paradigm, the community is regarded as the main actor in social and religious change. Thus, the PAR method provides a strong foundation for community service activities themed around LDS

training because it emphasizes active participation, empowerment, and joint knowledge development to achieve sustainable change at the community level.

The implementation of activities began with observation, needs analysis, and the preparation of materials, along with focus group discussions (FGD) to identify the problems faced. Subsequently, training was conducted based on a curriculum developed for the subjects to be delivered in class, where the facilitator team provided political, democratic, and social humanities materials to the PPS to be implemented in daily activities. An evaluation of the activities

followed this.

This PkM activity lasts seven months, from March to September 2023, covering field surveys, coordination, training activities, sharing sessions, and monitoring and evaluation (monev) activities. Initial observations of the target subjects were carried out on March 13, 2023, by collecting and analyzing data at the Banjar City KPU office.

The next stage involved monitoring and evaluation. After the PkM team conducted the training, participants were given questions comparing pre-test and post-test results as a benchmark to assess their understanding of all the materials taught at the LDS.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Observation and Preparation**

The observation activities were initiated the PkM team, beginning with preparatory activities, which included planning meetings with the lecturer and student service teams regarding the formulation of the implementation guidelines and technical instructions for the LDS. These meetings were held in the meeting room of the STISIP Bina Putera Banjar campus. Following the meeting, the lecturer service team contacted and scheduled a meeting with members of the

Banjar City KPU commissioners. This initiative was well received by the Banjar KPU commissioners, responsible for the PPS members in Banjar City.

The PkM team examined the needs required to address the partner's problems. Intensive communication with the KPU partners was maintained during this process to ensure that the community service efforts were targeted and effective. Several issues were identified: low public awareness in Banjar City about the importance of participation in decision-making, lack of skills and knowledge about democratic mechanisms and leadership, gender imbalances in political participation and decision-making, lack of transparency and accountability in public resource management, and the absence of dialogue spaces between the community and stakeholders.

Here is the documentation of the observational activities conducted by the PkM Team at the Banjar City KPU Office in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Observation activities at the Banjar City KPU office

Before the community service activities commenced, the service team prepared a rundown of technical and non-technical plans, including venue, facilities, and catering arrangements. This training was attended by 25 participants, comprising representatives from PPS at the village/kelurahan level throughout Banjar City. After a mutual agreement on the subjects to be covered, the topics included local content, electoral matters, civil society, gender and democracy, the welfare state, Pancasila democracy, sociopreneurship,

law and human rights, and public participation in governance.

Here is a photo from the opening event of the LDS, held in the Aula of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar in Figure 2.



Figure 2 Opening of the LDS at the STISIP Bina Putera Banjar Aula

### Training

The LDS is organized to assist the Banjar City KPU in keeping abreast of current trends and issues in local democracy administration. The service team endeavours to ensure that participants understand and apply democratic principles in their activities. One of the motivations behind this activity is the lack of skills and knowledge regarding democratic mechanisms and leadership in Banjar City. A total of 25 participants are enrolled in this democratic school.

The PkM team provides political, democratic, and social humanities materials to the PPS to be implemented in their daily activities. Several stages were undertaken. First, brainstorming sessions were held regarding the rights and obligations of Indonesian citizens, strategies to maximize community participation in democratic events, and the current political landscape. Second, understanding the urgency and impact of politics and leadership on policies to be introduced by elected leaders. Third, various digital platforms and their respective functions should be introduced.

This service activity involves the PPS, which consists of various community components such as religious leaders,

village officials, MSME activists, housewives, environmental activists, etc., to ensure that democratic events can reach all layers of society in Banjar City. The involvement of KPU partners is expected to create a conducive environment to enhance discipline and understanding of materials that have yet to be academically or formally conveyed to the PPS members in Banjar City. The insights provided to the PPS members are expected to be directly implemented in democratic activities to increase participation rates and openness there.

The implementation phase of this service program began with remarks from the Chairman of the Banjar City KPU Commissioner, representing the commission's officials. In his speech, he stated that the democratic school serves as both a catalyst and a stimulus for upgrading the skills of PPS officers. The lack of budget and time prevented the Banjar City KPU from conducting training and academic education like this for PPS officers, so the initiation of STISIP Bina Putera Banjar in conducting the LDS service was warmly welcomed and supported.

The LDS covers education on the electoral process, including the rights and responsibilities of voters and the role of election committees. The democratic school plays an integral role in educating the public about key aspects of the electoral process. This service program involves a deep understanding of the rights and responsibilities of voters, which are the main foundation for active participation in the democratic system.

In the democratic school initiated by the STISIP Bina Putera Banjar service team, voter education covers not only formal aspects such as the right to vote but also the right to obtain objective information and the right to express opinions freely.

In addition to rights, the LDS also emphasizes the responsibilities of both the committee and the voters, including

the responsibility to understand the platforms and programs of candidates and the obligation to vote based on accurate information. The LDS aims to shape critical-thinking voters who can assess the proportion and consequences of their choices, so their participation is a formality and a substantial contribution to the democratic process. Below is the documentation of the learning atmosphere at the LDS in Figure 3.



Figure 3 The Learning Atmosphere at the LDS

The Democratic School activities are delivered by speakers directly from the PkM team. The topics covered include:

- a. Electoral Affairs: The first training session discusses how elections serve as a cornerstone of democracy, leading to the emergence of leaders in a democratic nation. Participants need to adapt to social changes resulting from elections. The importance of elections is emphasized, including explaining the phenomenon of internet users' growth over the past five years and the benefits of political marketing in the campaign process.
- b. Civil Society: Introduction to the history, ideals of the state according to the mandate, and concept of 'baldatun toyyibatun warobbul ghofur' towards a civil society amidst intolerance and differences in perspectives and political preferences. This session also teaches participants how to counteract negative issues and fake news that significantly influence the democratic process in the country.



- c. Gender and Democracy: Recognizing the underrepresentation of female legislators in Banjar City, the PkM team included the importance of gender participation and women's representation in democracy. Participants are expected to become more aware of women's roles in politics.
- d. Local Democracy and Pancasila: This is a core subject in this service program to assess the extent of community participation and concern for the democratic process and government administration in Banjar City. In this subject, 30 minutes are filled with basic democracy materials, followed by a warm discussion regarding participants' views on local democracy. In this subject, the PkM team not only explains but also aims to be a compass in developing individual characters in politics and democracy so that the people of Banjar City can become mature and broad-minded citizens as mandated by Pancasila's principles.
- e. Welfare State: The PkM team explains the concept of a welfare state and its relation to democracy as a system of government actively involved in providing social and economic services to improve the welfare of its society. The provided materials cover various programs such as health insurance, education, housing, and social support to ensure every citizen has access to basic needs. The goal is to achieve a high level of welfare and reduce inequality in the Banjar City community.
- f. Pancasila Democracy: Pancasila Democracy creates a close connection between democracy and electoral affairs in Indonesia. Therefore, the PkM team felt the need to include this material in the LDS as the philosophical basis guiding the democratic principles implemented in the political system. "People's Sovereignty Led by the Wise in Consultation and Representation" reflects active citizen participation in decision-making through deliberation and representation. As the spearheads of electoral affairs, PPS officials become the main channel for the people to voice their aspirations and elect leaders democratically.
- g. Sociopreneur: It is an abbreviation for "social entrepreneur." In this service activity, the PkM team also introduces sociopreneurship as a characteristic of the STISIP Bina Putera Banjar campus subject. Sociopreneurship involves individuals or groups using entrepreneurial approaches to create positive social change. They focus not only on financial profit but also on solving or minimizing social or environmental problems. Sociopreneurship integrates sustainable and creative business strategies to address social issues.
- h. Law and Human Rights: In a democracy, law and human rights play a central role in ensuring justice, freedom, and a balance of power. The law serves as a foundation that regulates behaviour and relationships between individuals and the state and among individuals. This creates a framework that ensures the democratic process in Banjar City runs according to clear and fair rules. On the other hand, human rights are a moral foundation that guarantees the protection of individuals' basic rights, such as freedom of speech, the right to assemble, and fair treatment under the law. In a well-functioning democracy, the law must reflect human rights values, and human rights protection becomes a measure of democracy's health. The balanced combination of law and human rights

creates an environment where active participation, pluralism, and justice can thrive, providing a solid foundation for an inclusive and empowered democracy.

These subjects are expected to enhance skills and attitudes that support democracy, such as critical thinking, listening, speaking, and negotiating. The LDS aims to improve skills and attitudes that support democracy, such as critical thinking, effective listening, clear and persuasive speaking, and ethical and collaborative negotiation. This service program not only focuses on understanding the concepts of democracy but also involves the development of practical skills. Participants are taught critical thinking skills to analyze information, effectively listen to understand diverse perspectives, speak clearly and persuasively, and negotiate with ethics and a collaborative spirit. Each training session for each subject includes sharing and question-and-answer sessions, with almost all attendees enthusiastically asking questions about the subjects covered.

Some supporting research results include Sahide et al., (2022), which show progress in participants' understanding of democracy conducted in partnership with the Learning Writing Community (KBM) Yogyakarta; and Insan et al. (2022), which explains the results of their research using the Interactive Analysis

Method proposed by Miles and Huberman. The processed data results can later produce a model of democratic education in State High School 13 Sinjai in line with the procedural democracy conveyed by Schumpeter.

**Evaluation**

In the final evaluation stage, pre-and post-tests were distributed to identify the extent of understanding of democracy before and after the LDS was conducted. Out of 25 participants, it was calculated that 22 individuals scored below 50 points, while only three individuals initially scored above 50 points. After the activities, the PkM team administered the same test and achieved satisfactory results, with approximately 90%, or around 23 participants, scoring above 80 points, while only two individuals scored below 70 points.

According to statements, the success of the service activity can be measured by calculating the number of participants who attended from the beginning to the end of the activity (Setiabudi & Subarjo, 2021; Tanbiyaskur et al., 2019). Participants completed questionnaires to evaluate whether the PkM activity could be carried out effectively. This included giving quizzes to participants ready to answer by rephrasing questions about the training material. The following Tables 1 and 2 show the results of user and partner satisfaction surveys regarding the PkM program in Kota Banjar.

Table 1 Results of user satisfaction evaluation of the PkM

No	Question	Satisfaction Index	Percentage	Description
1	Suitability of the outreach activity materials	3,31	82%	Very Good
2	Suitability of the timing for delivering outreach activity materials	3.10	79%	Very Good
3	Accuracy of the outreach methodology	2.92	74%	Good
4	Level of expertise of the speakers in mastering the materials and issues	3.25	82%	Very Good
5	Level of supporting facilities and infrastructure for the outreach activity	3.03	78%	Very Good



No	Question	Satisfaction Index	Percentage	Description
6	Level of cohesion among the implementation team of the outreach program	3.25	81%	Very Good
7	Relevance and competency of the implementation team of the outreach program	3.20	81%	Very Good
8	The outreach program is capable of improving the quality, quantity, and value-added/diversification of products or resources	3.12	79%	Very Good
9	The outreach program is capable of increasing self-reliance	2.95	75%	Good
10	Satisfaction level with the outreach program	3.18	80%	Very Good
11	Suitability of the outreach activities with community expectations	3.20	80%	Very Good
12	Community interest in the outreach activity	3.01	77%	Very Good
<b>Average</b>		<b>3.32</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

Table 2 Results of partner satisfaction survey for PkM Program

No	Question	Satisfaction Index	Percentage	Description
1	Partner's opinion on the service of the PkM program	3.45	84%	Very Good
2	Partner's opinion on the usefulness of the PkM activities	3.26	83%	Very Good
<b>Rata-rata</b>		<b>3.36</b>	<b>83.5%</b>	<b>Very Good</b>

Tables 1 and 2 show the satisfaction levels of users and partners regarding the services in the Community Service Program (PkM). The data indicates that the overall satisfaction score yields an average satisfaction percentage of 3.32 with a satisfaction index of 91%. The classification category falls under excellent for user satisfaction with the PkM. Meanwhile, for partner satisfaction, the average satisfaction percentage reaches 3.36 with a percentage of 83.5%, also classified as excellent.

The post-test results conducted to identify the understanding of democracy before and after the implementation of the LDS show significant findings. Out of a total of 25 participants, 91% scored above 80 points. This indicates a substantial improvement in their

understanding of democracy after participating in the LDS program.

This significant improvement illustrates the program's effectiveness in enhancing participants' knowledge and understanding of democracy. Thus, it can be concluded that the LDS has a positive impact on enhancing understanding of the principles of democracy among participants.

The results showing that the majority of participants scored above 80 points also indicate that the program may have succeeded in providing the participants with a strong knowledge and a deeper understanding of democracy's values.

However, further evaluation is still needed to understand how the LDS program enhances participants' understanding of democracy. This can help develop better programs in the

future and provide deeper insights into the most beneficial elements of the program. Below is the documentation of the post-evaluation activities of the LDS in Figure 4.



Figure 4 Post-test activities

The role of engagement in these activities also implies that Indonesia has unique characteristics of political communication, which are also related to the country's democratic system, known as Pancasila Democracy (Hapsari & Widyastuti, 2018; Lubis, 2019). Political communication conveys political messages involving political actors and is related to power, governance, and government policy (Heryanto, 2018). The political system can be preserved through various political activities, including political socialization and political education. Both forms of political communication are steps in shaping attitudes and behaviours based on values recognized as true and beneficial for human life (Efendi et al., 2020). Another positive impact felt from the PkM program related to this is providing understanding to first-time voters to make informed decisions and not be influenced by hoax information circulating in the political context (Sjoraida et al., 2023). With political democracy education, citizens' increased participation in conveying aspirations is implied (Wicaksono & Wulandari, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

The LDS program, established by the engagement team from STISIP Bina

Putera Banjar, together with the members of PPS Kota Banjar, has shown promising results and has helped enhance democratic capabilities at the local level. The main outcome of this program is increased knowledge about local democracy and the strategic role of PPS within the community. Structured training has improved technical skills and leadership, and the reflective forums that foster a learning community have provided additional benefits to the participants.

One of the outcomes is enhancing the quality of the electoral process in Kota Banjar. PPS members involved in the program have improved transparency and community involvement by applying Pancasila values and ideas of local democracy to their work. Furthermore, the collaboration between the engagement team and the KPU Kota Banjar has increased synergy between institutions, leading to changes in electoral regulations and the exchange of best practices.

The program has successfully achieved its goals of establishing a sustainable LDS, enhancing the electoral process, and benefiting PPS members and the community of Kota Banjar through the collaboration of all members and supporters. The success of this program demonstrates the importance of cooperation between universities, government, and society in strengthening local democracy in Indonesia.

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