

INDONESIAN FAMILY COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN POLITICAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Young people tend to have low political awareness and participation. Studies conducted in developed countries show that the family plays a crucial role in shaping political awareness, attitudes, and perspectives at an early age. What about Indonesian family? Indonesian families are characterized by close bonds and togetherness, but they are not easily open in communicating their feelings. It may influence how they communicate politics. This paper explains the communication pattern of the family in educating politics. The research subjects were three (3) families who working in various sectors and living in Yogyakarta. Data was collected through focus group discussions, using phenomenology research method. This study found that political understanding is limited to issues related to the election of government leaders. Politics is also not the main message in family communication. Family communication patterns in political education tend to be linear, and the father has central role. Political education is not explicitly conducted through verbal communication but is more often carried out through role modelling. This study recommends that families actively seek out, process, and interpret political information together. In addition, the results of the research can be used by all elements in the political education ecosystem to appropriately utilize the family as an important part in building awareness and political participation among young people.

Keywords: communication pattern, education, family, Indonesia, politics

INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern democracy, political participation plays a crucial role in maintaining the sustainability of inclusive and representative political systems. However, in many countries, including Indonesia, levels of political participation often demonstrate significant disparities across social groups. One of the primary factors contributing to these differences is the role of the family in shaping individual political behaviour. The family, as the primary agent of socialisation, has considerable influence in shaping the perspectives, attitudes, and political engagement of younger generations. Nevertheless, understanding of how families function in the process of political socialisation, particularly through intergenerational communication, remains relatively limited in Indonesia. Therefore, this study is important for understanding the role of family communication in shaping children's political behaviour.

The main problem underlying the urgency of this research is the gap in understanding regarding the mechanisms of political socialisation within families. Families not only function as places where children acquire fundamental values but also serve as the initial arena where they become acquainted with and understand political dynamics. Communication between parents and children concerning political issues has significant potential to shape children's political attitudes, both explicitly through direct discussions and implicitly through behaviours modelled by parents (Janmaat & Hoskin, 2022; Turan & Tiras, 2017; Willoughby et al, 2021; Oskarsson et al., 2018, Cornejo et al, 2021). Family communication patterns also influence the development of political engagement in children. Open family communication patterns (Shulman & DeAndrea, 2014) and high conformity to political information encourage increased political

participation in children (Meadowcroft, 2020). However, family influence in shaping political attitudes is not always uniform, as it is affected by various factors such as socioeconomic status, family structure, and the broader social environment (Janmaat & Hoskins, 2022).

Indonesia can be classified as a country with a collectivistic culture that prioritises togetherness and relationships, solidarity and harmony. In communication, Indonesia falls into the category of high-context culture, which relies on implicit and non-verbal communication and is highly contextual in interpreting symbols (West and Turner, 2023). This characteristic is one of the factors that influences family communication patterns in political socialisation. In another aspect, there are two types of family communication patterns: conversation-oriented and conformity-oriented communication. Conversation-oriented communication patterns are characterised by high communication intensity, openness, dialogue and opportunities for enjoyable and free discussion, whilst conformity patterns emphasise efforts to create uniformity and compliance, avoiding conflict and fostering interdependence among family members (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 1997). Conversation-oriented communication patterns in the family encourage children to have higher political participation (Scruggs & Schrodt, 2020; Graham, 2020). Open and dialogical parent-child communication increases the accuracy of perceptions and the similarity of political attitudes (Mayer et al. 2024).

METHOD

The research used a phenomenological method, selecting three (3) families consisting of a father, mother, and one or two school-age children living in Yogyakarta, with diverse educational and occupational backgrounds. Families were selected randomly, provided they met the specified criteria. This number was deemed sufficient as the researchers found similar response patterns. Data were collected through focus group discussions with each family. This technique was chosen to observe family communication interactions when answering questions or commenting on the researcher's statements, as well as to obtain collective (family) data related to (1) family communication patterns, (2) political understanding, (3) sources of political information, and (4) political engagement of each family member. Data were processed through selection and sorting, grouping or categorisation, and drawing conclusions. Data validation was conducted through source triangulation, comparing data provided by each family member.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All families have Javanese cultural backgrounds, with higher education qualifications from various disciplines. In Family A, both father and mother work in the private sector, with two children attending senior high school and junior high school. In Family B, the father works in the private sector, and the mother is a housewife, with two children. Family C has a father who works as a private sector employee, a mother who is a housewife, and two children. All families are Catholic.

Family A's Communication About Politics

The father from family A admits he doesn't like politics and rarely makes politics a topic of family conversation. Instead, it's the mother and eldest daughter who are accustomed to discussing it. The daughter even has relatively high political participation, having written her thoughts about the TNI Bill on social media.

"Saya tahu dari media sosial tentang perubahan UU demi meloloskan Gibran mencalonkan diri sebagai wapres. Saya rasa itu tidak baik. [...] Saya awalnya tidak begitu paham tentang politik tetapi sejak dimunculkan RUU TNI yang menjadi viral di timeline twitter, saya merasa politik itu sangat berpengaruh pada kita. Karena pemerintah itu memperlakukan kita sesuai dengan politik. Jadi kita harus peduli politik. Saya nulis di story mengajak teman-teman untuk paham politik."
(Anak X1, Kel A).

"I learned from social media about the law changes to allow Gibran to run as vice president. I think that's not right. [...] I initially didn't understand much about politics, but since the TNI Bill went viral on Twitter's timeline, I feel that politics really affects us. Because the government treats us according to politics. So, we must care about politics. I wrote in my story encouraging friends to understand politics." (Child X1, Fam A).

Child X1 obtains political information from school, social media, and church, although social media plays the most significant role. School provides fundamental understanding of political knowledge, while social media provides current information about what is happening. Child X1 understands politics as rules that involve the state and society. Beyond just understanding, X1 also has experience serving as an officer in student organisations and as chairperson of event committees at school. From a broader political perspective, involvement in organisations becomes part of political participation. The family does not provide explicit education related to politics but teaches social values that provide an important foundation in shaping political views, attitudes, and behaviour, namely tolerance, justice, freedom of expression, and decision-making.

"Saya tidak mengajarkan secara langsung tentang politik. Tapi saya mendorong anak untuk berani menyatakan pendapat yang benar. Saya selalu mengingatkan anak untuk memahami dulu secara baik tentang isu tertentu, setelah itu baru berkomentar atau mengunggah story di mesia sosial." (Ibu X1, kel A)

"I don't teach directly about politics. But I encourage my child to dare to express what is right. I always remind my child to first understand an issue properly, and only then comment or upload stories on social media." (Mother X1, Fam A)

The mother in Family A also teaches her child verbally to be prepared to face situations that are disadvantageous to minority groups, including at school and in various competitions they participate in. On the other hand, X1's mother also tells child X1 not to hesitate to give an open response if treated unfairly.

"Saya pernah mengadukan seorang teman kepada sekolah karena melakukan bullying. Namun tidak ada tanggapan yang berarti. Saya membela korban bullying dengan segala resiko. Saya berani karena saya merasa benar." (Anak X1, kel A)

"I once reported a friend to the school for bullying. However, there was no meaningful response. I defended the victim of bullying despite all the risks. I was brave because I felt I was right." (Child X1, Fam A)

In political matters, the father in family A doesn't play much of a role, as the children are closer to their mother when discussing politics. The father in family A understands that politics is ruthless. This is what makes the father admit he doesn't like discussing politics, even though in other contexts, he talks extensively about government figures and the policies they create.

"Ya, saya memperbincangkan itu, tetapi lebih fokus pada tokohnya, seperti pak Jokowi. Tetapi tidak sampai ke arah politik. Saya tidak tahu politik, saya lebih suka nonton sepak bola." (Ayah X1, kel A).

"Yes, I discuss those things, but I focus more on the personalities, like President Jokowi. But I don't get into the political side of it. I don't understand politics; I prefer watching football." (Father X1, fam A).

It can be said that family A does not regard the father as a source of political information. The perception that politics is ruthless makes the father uninterested in politics. The mother discusses and educates about politics not directly, but by reviewing socio-political issues that are currently part of public discourse. The mother places more emphasis on the importance of children to express their opinion but must be based on data. The daughter of family A makes her mother a partner in political conversations, in addition to church and school friends. She has a good political participation, as well as good social activities.

Family B's communication about politics

Family B consists of a father, a mother and two children. The father had a high attachment to politics. This is shown from his work as a lecturer on courses related to politics and involvement as the Chairman of RT in his area. The source of his father's political knowledge was obtained from books, media and communication with his networking. The father became the family's sole source of political information, including political preferences at the time of the general election.

"Lingkungan sekitar tidak banyak berbicara politik, bahkan pada saat pemilihan umum. Lingkungan tetangga kami itu heterogen. Jadi tidak ada yang berusaha mengarahkan preferensi politik, apalagi melalui grup media sosial." (Ayah X2_Kel B)

"The surrounding environment does not talk much about politics, even during the general election. Our neighboring neighborhood is heterogeneous. So, no one is trying to direct political preferences, especially through social media groups." (Father X2_Fam B)

"Saya tidak banyak berinteraksi dengan tetangga. Saya juga tidak banyak berinteraksi dengan rekan kerja karena saya ibu rumah tangga. Banyak di rumah. Pengetahuan politik saya peroleh dari suami saya. Saya manut pada suami. Saya tidak perlu tahu dari pihak lain. Tetangga seputar rumah sebagian besar bekerja, jadi juga jarang berkomunikasi." (Ibu X2-Kel B)

"I don't interact much with the neighbours. I also don't interact much with colleagues because I'm a housewife. A lot at home. My political knowledge was acquired from my husband. I am obedient to my husband. I don't need to know from the other party. The neighbours around the house are mostly working, so they rarely communicate." (Mother X2- Fam B).

The child in family B (Child X2) is not interested in politics. Nor did he know much about politics. He understands politics from the subjects at school. He understood politics as limited to dealing with the government and the people. Gadgets are very close to the child's life, but not to seek political information. He is also rarely exposed to political information. Most of the gadget's function is to play games and follow whatever is going viral, while the topics are very random, not focusing on a specific topic. Social media algorithms also do not direct the child to politics. Her friends in her school environment also don't talk much about politics.

"Teman-teman sekolah tidak pernah bicara politik. Ya karena saya..kami tidak tertarik." (Anak X2_kel B)

"My school friends never talk about politics. Yes because of me....We are not interested." (Child X2_Fam B)

Apart from not being interested in politics, child X2 stated that his parents did not teach him much about politics.

"Ya..mengajarkan secara konseptual memang tidak, tetapi nilai-nilai yang terkandung di dalam perilaku keseharian. Anak akan memahaminya sendiri." (Ayah X2_kel B).

"Yes.. Teaching conceptually is not, but the values contained in daily behaviour. The child will understand it for himself." (Father X2_fam B).

Even if it is not explicitly and conceptually about politics, the father and mother admit to teaching about social values such as democracy, tolerance, and help. There is nothing more dominant between father and mother. There is also no difference in roles between the two.

"Saya belajar dari bapak dan ibu. Keduanya. Tentang beragama, demokrasi dan lain-lain, sama-sama diperoleh dari ayah dan ibu." (Anak X2_kel B).

"I learned from my parents. Both. About religion, democracy and others, both were obtained from fathers and mothers." (Child X2_fam B)

Referring to the data, family B did not talk too intensively about politics, even though his father's political knowledge and participation were categorized as high. The father did not teach politics to the family explicitly and verbally but did it through the cultivation of social values through his daily actions. Father believes that children can understand these values. Children feel that they are not interested in politics, so they are rarely exposed or deliberately looking for political information. Children also do not have high political participation, while mothers rely more on their husbands if they are curious about politics. As a housewife, mother makes the family an important network to get information about politics and social values.

Family C's communication about politics

Family C consists of a father, mother and two children. C's family lived in a village that was mostly immigrants. The local population is mostly older people. The children study at Catholic high schools. This family interaction is more with the church community, than with the activities with neighbours. The church and church members are also a reference to politics and behaviour that is considered good.

In terms of politics, the family is quite understanding, especially in terms of political elections. The father had a good political participation, by actively seeking political information, through a large family network that did have an interest in politics. Regarding the general election, father's extended family even often gives political preferences. It is common for father to share this political information with his family through digital groups, after going through the elaboration stage first.

"Tapi memang dari keluarga besar itu sering menyarankan melalui WA --(Whatsapp-pen) untuk memilih ini...memilih itu. Saya saring dulu. Sekalipun saya bukan aktifis politik tetapi saya selalu update tentang informasi politik, tentang apapun." (Ayah X3_Kel C).

"But indeed, from the big family it often suggests through WA --(Whatsapp) to choose this... choose that. I filter first. Even though I'm not a political activist, I'm always updated on political information, about anything." (Father X3_fam C).

Political discussions have become common in this family, even though the mother and daughter admit that they do not understand and like politics. However, she also gave political preferences by

explaining the pros and cons of each candidate for political and government leadership. Father and mother are used as important references for children.

“Dalam soal pemilihan walikota, saya mendengar apa yang disampaikan oleh ayah dan ibu [...] tapi ada teman gereja saya yang aktif di politik juga memberikan penjelasan yang sama, mana kandidat yang baik..mana yang tidak.” (Anak X3_kel C)

"In the matter of the mayoral election, I heard what was conveyed by my father and mother [...] But there is a friend of mine who is active in politics who also gives the same explanation, which is a good candidate. Which is a god candidate and not. (Child X3_Fam C)

“Sejujurnya saya tidak suka politik. Tapi dalam pemilihan umum saya memberikan saran juga kepada anak, penjelasan tentang latar belakang kandidat.” (Ibu X3_Kel C)

"To be honest, I don't like politics. But in the general election, I also gave advice to the child, an explanation of the candidate's background." (Mrs. X3_Fam C)

Regarding politics, family C knows information from the media, church, and friends. Nevertheless, the children admitted that father was the most decisive in their personal decision-making.

“Ya, saya sebagai ayah memberikan informasi data-data yang masuk akal. Saya menjelaskan dari sisi logika, di sisi lain, ibu dan dua anak perempuan mungkin menggunakan hati nurani.” (Ayah X3_Kel C).

"Yes, as a father, I provide reasonable data. I explained from a logical point of view, on the other hand, a mother and two daughters might use conscience." (Father X3_Fam C).

The father is dominant in the communication of the family C, not only in politics but also in the determination of education. They do not experience substantial differences of opinion. In social life, this family claims to have tolerance for other religions, but on some occasions, this family places more emphasis on religious similarities, both on educational choices, political preferences and personal life of children.

CONCLUSION

The three families in this study have relatively different communication patterns in educating children about politics. For children, fathers as a source of political information are found in two families, while another one sees the mother as a source of information and a friend to talk about politics. The discussions were found in the family C which was used as an effort to educate children about politics. In the other two families, political education is carried out through actions or communication that emphasizes more on human and social values, which are the basis for understanding and behaving in politics. The media is also the dominant source of political information for the three families, although in the family C, extended family, church friends are also important references. Regarding politics, the communication pattern of these three families tends to be oriented towards conformity, with the father as the central role of determinant or decision-maker. Discussions are conducted to result in obedience to Father's decisions. Politics is not a frequent and interesting conversation for children, even in families.

Although it is difficult to categorize Indonesian families in the category of family communication patterns based on the level of conversation and conformity (Yoanita, 2022), the findings of this study reinforce the statement that intensive and open communication, which has a conversation pattern, is supported by children's cognitive abilities about politics in the family encourages increased political engagement high in children. Indonesia, which tends to be categorized as having a high-context culture,

encourages political education for children to be carried out not verbally, but rather emphasizes non-verbal communication through parental actions and behaviours. The lack of political discussion or discussion in Indonesian families is also related to cultural characters that are not easy to tell stories and express verbally. Communication patterns that tend to be centralized and one-way can be a factor that contributes to a lack of understanding and political participation in children. Disinterest in politics encourages children not to deliberately seek political information from various sources, even from social media which is their main medium.

On the other hand, this study also shows that families always communicate and educate children about social and humanitarian values such as honesty, justice, help, concern for marginalized groups and tolerance. Children learn about this by observing their parents' daily actions and behaviours. There is no difference in the role between fathers and mothers in communicating this. In other words, parents have a role in communicating social or societal values that can be the foundation for a responsible political or political process and the welfare of society. This type of family communication is found in patriarchal cultures, where the father is the centre of power and the controller of the family. Even though a collectivist culture characterized by familiarity and openness between family members, this is not the case in terms of politics. Politics does not become a daily family conversation, but rather a structured and systematic one. In other words, planned and systematic political education rarely occurred.

This study recommends that fathers and mothers jointly and equally educate politics, relying on verbal communication to be more effective. Communication must be intensive, open and encourage discussion with all family members. Therefore, parents must have knowledge, attitudes and political participation based on social and humanitarian values because children will imitate. On the other hand, all elements that form the political education ecosystem must synergize and work together with families to form and develop the political awareness, attitudes and behaviours of young people, which will prosper human beings and society in the future.

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