

Short Communication

Political Rights and Citizenship Education for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia ahead of Village Head Elections: A Participatory Community Service Program

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Abstract. Indonesian migrant workers retain citizenship and political interests while abroad, yet physical distance, demanding work conditions, and different electoral procedures can limit effective participation in local political life. This community service program provided political-rights and citizenship education for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, with particular attention to village head elections (Pilkades). Implemented from March to November 2023 in partnership with PCIA Malaysia, the program reached approximately 120 migrant workers through six socialization sessions in the Kuala Lumpur–Selangor area, supplemented by four focus group discussions. Four modules addressed the foundations of political rights, the legal framework of Pilkades, remote and absentee voting mechanisms, and diaspora civic engagement through family and organizational communication. Evaluation combined a preparatory needs assessment, post-program survey, focus group discussions, and field observation. The intervention improved participants' ability to distinguish national overseas-voting arrangements from village-level election procedures and stimulated more critical discussion of barriers to participation. Participants also identified family communication and diaspora organizations as practical channels for maintaining civic engagement when direct participation was constrained. Because the source program records do not provide verified numerical pre- and post-test scores, the article reports the outcome conservatively as a documented qualitative and self-reported improvement rather than assigning an unsupported effect size. The program demonstrates the value of trusted diaspora organizations as platforms for sustained civic education and policy feedback.

Keywords: Migrant Workers, Citizenship Education, Political Rights, Pilkades, Diaspora Engagement.

1. Introduction

Migration does not terminate citizenship, but it changes the institutional conditions under which citizenship is practiced. Migrant transnationalism therefore raises questions about how rights, obligations, and political membership operate when citizens reside outside the territorial state [1]. Transnationalism research has long emphasized that migrants remain embedded in social and political relations across borders [2], and the concept of transnational social fields explains how activities in the country of residence and country of origin can occur simultaneously [3]. Political ideas and practices can also travel through migrants. Research on political remittances shows that migrants may transmit political information, attitudes, and expectations through family and community relationships [4]. Studies of Indonesian migrant domestic workers similarly demonstrate that overseas employment does not eliminate political agency; rather, political engagement may shift into organizational, family-based, and transnational channels [5].

Indonesia provides overseas voting mechanisms for national elections under the general-election framework [6]. Village head elections, however, are organized under the Village Law and remain institutionally centered on the village-level election apparatus [7]. This creates a practical gap for migrants who retain strong stakes in village leadership but are physically absent during local contests. Comparative external-voting practice shows that countries use combinations of in-person, postal, proxy, and other arrangements to enfranchise citizens abroad [8], while scholarship on external voting emphasizes that the

Article info

Revised:

2023-1-11

Accepted:

2023-5-15

Publish:

2023-6-6



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extension of such rights depends on political and institutional choices, not only technical feasibility [9].

Diaspora organizations can help address the information and participation gap by aggregating concerns and providing trusted channels for civic learning and claims-making [10]. This role is especially relevant for Indonesian migrant workers whose legal protection as workers is separately recognized in national legislation [11] but whose practical access to different electoral mechanisms varies by election type. The community service program reported here therefore focused on accurate political-rights education, clarification of the Pilkades framework, discussion of remote-voting options, and strengthening of diaspora-based civic engagement.

2. Method

The program adopted a participatory community-based civic-education approach. It was implemented from March to November 2023 through a partnership between Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu and PCIA Malaysia. The target group consisted of Indonesian migrant workers reachable through PCIA Malaysia, especially women domestic workers and plantation-sector workers whose work arrangements and location can restrict time, mobility, and access to civic information. Approximately 120 migrant workers participated in six socialization sessions conducted across PCIA Malaysia regional networks in the Kuala Lumpur–Selangor area. Four focus group discussions, each involving approximately 10–12 participants, were used to obtain deeper reflections on political experience, barriers to participation, and policy expectations. Table 1 summarizes the four educational modules delivered during the field-implementation phase.

Table 1. Civic-education modules

Module	Topic	Core content
1	Foundations of political rights and citizenship	Citizenship irrespective of domicile; constitutional political rights; national, regional, and village electoral tiers
2	Understanding Pilkades and its legal framework	Village Law; village election committees; eligibility and registration; differences from PPLN-administered national elections
3	Remote voting mechanisms: comparative insights and current gaps	Postal, proxy, and overseas voting approaches; structural absence of equivalent arrangements for Pilkades; reform discussion
4	Diaspora civic engagement and family-based political communication	Information sharing with families, monitoring village governance, and organizational advocacy channels

The evaluation design used four evidence sources: the initial needs assessment, participant responses in the post-program survey, focus group discussions, and field observations. The needs assessment established common misconceptions and information gaps. The post-program survey examined self-reported understanding after the intervention. FGD notes were analyzed thematically to identify recurring views on political rights, remote voting, family communication, and diaspora organizations. The available program report does not contain verified numerical pre- and post-test scores. Consequently, this article does not construct an effect size or percentage improvement. Quantitative reporting is limited to verified implementation indicators such as number of sessions, approximate participant reach, and number of FGDs. Learning outcomes are described qualitatively and with appropriate caution.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Program reach and participation

The program achieved substantial community reach through the organizational network of PCIA Malaysia. As summarized in Table 2, six socialization sessions engaged approximately 120 Indonesian migrant workers, four FGDs generated more detailed participant perspectives, and 150 printed educational-module sets were prepared in addition to digital distribution. These implementation indicators show the practical value of an embedded diaspora organization for mobilizing a geographically dispersed and time-constrained population.

Table 2. Verified implementation indicators

Indicator	Result
Socialization sessions	6 sessions across PCIA Malaysia regional networks
Participants engaged	Approximately 120 Indonesian migrant workers
Focus group discussions	4 FGDs, generally 10–12 participants each
Educational modules	150 printed sets plus digital distribution
Program outputs	Educational module, policy brief, and manuscript preparation

3.2 Improved differentiation between national elections and Pilkades

Baseline discussions revealed confusion about the relationship between overseas voting for national elections and participation in village head elections. Some participants assumed that departure for overseas work effectively ended their practical voting rights, while others assumed that mechanisms used for national elections also applied automatically to Pilkades. After the educational sessions, participants were better able to distinguish the national overseas-voting structure from village-level election administration and to identify the legal and institutional source of that difference. This outcome matters because misinformation can produce disengagement even where formal citizenship remains intact. Civic education cannot remove structural barriers, but it can improve procedural understanding and help participants separate what is legally available from what would require policy reform. In this sense, the program addressed an information barrier while making the structural barrier more visible.

3.3 Remote voting as a policy question rather than an assumed entitlement

Comparative discussion of external-voting arrangements generated strong engagement in the FGDs. Participants learned that postal, proxy, and other external-voting mechanisms exist in different institutional settings [8], and they compared these arrangements with Indonesia's existing overseas infrastructure for national elections. The discussion encouraged a shift from resignation toward more explicit policy questioning about why access differs across election levels. This shift should not be interpreted as evidence that any particular remote-voting mechanism is immediately feasible for Pilkades. External voting requires legal authority, voter-roll integrity, ballot security, administrative capacity, and credible dispute-resolution arrangements. The program's contribution was more modest: it equipped participants to frame their exclusion as a policy-design issue and to articulate questions that diaspora organizations could communicate to relevant institutions. This aligns with the argument that external-voting rights emerge through political and institutional choices [9].

3.4 Family communication and diaspora organizations as channels of civic engagement

Participants described family communication as a practical means of remaining connected to village political developments. Intended activities included discussing candidate information with relatives, encouraging informed voting among eligible family members, and monitoring village governance through digital communication. These practices are consistent with the broader idea of political remittances, whereby migrants

transmit political information and orientations across borders [4]. PCIA Malaysia also emerged as an important intermediary. The organization provided trusted access, scheduling support, contextualization of materials, and a collective setting in which participants could express concerns. This reflects the broader capacity of migrant associations to aggregate claims when individuals face barriers to direct participation [10]. Table 3 summarizes the three principal outcome domains and their practical implications.

Table 3. Principal outcome domains and implications

Outcome domain	Observed change	Practical implication
Political literacy	Clearer distinction between national overseas voting and Pilkades procedures	Repeat civic education before major electoral periods and maintain concise legal guidance
Policy awareness	Greater recognition that remote Pilkades voting is a structural/legal issue rather than a simple information problem	Channel participant concerns into documented policy feedback rather than informal speculation
Transnational civic engagement	Stronger emphasis on family communication, digital monitoring, and diaspora organization	Use PCIA as a recurring civic-education and issue-aggregation platform

3.5 Limitations and follow-up

The program had several limitations. Recruitment through an existing organizational network may have favored participants who were already more civically engaged. Work schedules constrained contact time, and the program could not directly observe whether intended family communication or political monitoring persisted after the activity. Most importantly, the source report did not preserve verified numerical pre- and post-test scores, so the magnitude of learning gains cannot be estimated reliably from the available documentation. Future programs should use a standardized political-literacy instrument, retain anonymized participant-level pre- and post-data, and conduct follow-up across electoral cycles. They should also separate education from advocacy: the educational component should provide accurate legal information, while any recommendation for electoral reform should be supported by broader consultation, legal analysis, and feasibility assessment.

4. Conclusion

The community service program demonstrates that political-rights education for migrant workers can be delivered effectively through a trusted diaspora organization. Six sessions reaching approximately 120 Indonesian migrant workers improved procedural understanding of the distinction between national overseas voting and village head elections and created space for participants to discuss structural barriers, family-based political communication, and organizational advocacy. The most defensible outcome is an improvement in documented understanding and civic articulation rather than a quantified causal effect, because verified numerical pre- and post-test scores are unavailable. Future programs should institutionalize recurring civic education within diaspora networks while strengthening data collection and longitudinal evaluation so that changes in knowledge, communication, and participation can be assessed more rigorously.

5. Acknowledgements

The authors thank the technical staff of the Universitas Muhammadiyah Bengkulu, for field assistance during the trial.

6. Declaration

Author contributions and responsibilities - The authors made substantial contributions to the conception and design of the study. The authors were responsible for the data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the results. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding - This study received no external funding. Availability of data and materials - All data are available from the authors.

Conflict of interest - The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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