

CHALLENGES IN FULFILLING THE POLITICAL RIGHTS OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN TAIWAN: A CASE STUDY FOR THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

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ABSTRACT. Political rights are part of human rights guaranteed by international law and the Indonesian constitution. However, Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs) in Taiwan face various challenges in exercising their right to vote in the 2024 elections. This research analyzes the obstacles faced by PMIs in Taiwan in the democratic process using politic of citizenship framework by Stokke. The research method used is a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews with various relevant stakeholders. The results of this study show that the main obstacles to the implementation of elections for migrant workers in Taiwan are limited access to election information, differences in regulations related to voting mechanisms, and administrative challenges due to the lack of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI) and community organizations have an important role in fighting for the political rights of PMIs by providing political education, administrative assistance, and advocacy for the political rights of PMIs in Taiwan. This research confirms the need for better coordination between the government, trade unions, and community organizations to strengthen the protection of PMIs' political rights.

Keywords: Election; Indonesian migrant workers; labor unions; political rights; Taiwan

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is one of the countries that is a favorite destination for Indonesian migrant workers or Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMIs) who want to find work opportunities abroad. We can see from the report of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency or Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia (BP2MI) that from January to July 2024, the placement of PMIs is as follows (BP2MI, 2024):

Table 1. Placement of Indonesian Migrant Workers from January to July 2024

No	Country of Placement	Total
1	Hongkong	62.164
2	Taiwan	52.128
3	Malaysia	34.403
4	Japan	7.286
5	Singapore	5.899

Source: BP2MI

From the data, it can be seen that Taiwan occupies the second position, as the largest country for the placement of PMIs. In fact, according to the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office in Taipei, or Kantor Dagang dan Ekonomi Indonesia (KDEI) in Taipei, the number of PMIs in Taiwan until 2023 is recorded at 267,194 people (Kantor Dagang & Ekonomi Indonesia Taipei, 2023b).

Participating in elections is a right of every Indonesian citizen. Participation in elections manifests the general understanding of civil and political rights. If we refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948, article 21 of the UDHR

states that “*Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.*” This includes the right to vote and be elected in free and fair elections. This includes the right to vote and be elected in free and fair elections. Moreover, democratic theory holds that states are justified by their commitment to equality, primarily expressed through citizens' equal access to collective decision-making, especially via the right to vote (Lenard, 2015).

In addition to the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), article 25 of the ICCPR recognizes the right of every citizen to participate in public affairs, including the right to vote in elections held periodically, by popular suffrage, and by secret ballot. In the national context of Indonesia, Article 43 of the 1945 Constitution states that citizens have the right to vote and be elected in elections.

This shows that the right to participate in elections is a human right for all Indonesian citizens working abroad, including PMIs working in Taiwan. PMIs who work abroad still have rights, and the government should guarantee these rights and maximally pursue their fulfillment. In the context of citizenship politics, according to Stokke (2017), in order to realize ideal citizenship, or what is called substantive citizenship, several dimensions must be fulfilled, including the membership dimension, the legal status dimension, the rights dimension, and the participation dimension.

In the context of the elections in 2024, it turns out that the facts show that in the use of their political rights to participate in politics as voters, PMIs, especially those working in Taiwan, still experience several obstacles and challenges in the protection of

their voting rights in the elections in 2024, in this case, the election of the president and vice president and the election of legislative members. If we use Stokke's analytical framework to examine citizenship stratification, the conditions experienced by migrant workers in Taiwan indicate that ideal citizenship or substantive citizenship has not yet been realized for them, as they still face challenges in the dimensions of political rights and participation.

Similar challenges are observed globally. In Nigeria, debates on granting diaspora voting rights emphasize institutional limitations and logistical burdens (Ogbonnaya, 2013), which mirror some of the administrative challenges faced by PMIs in Taiwan. Conversely, Croatia represents the opposite model, where diaspora voters are not only enfranchised but also granted reserved parliamentary seats, making political inclusion a strategic priority (Kasapović, 2012). These comparative experiences demonstrate that Indonesia's struggle to protect PMIs' voting rights aligns with a broader global conversation about how states ensure the political participation of citizens abroad.

Sudarmanto (2022), in his article, emphasizes the legal protection of PMIs in several Asian countries that frequently serve as their primary destinations, such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Taiwan. Among these countries, Hong Kong and Taiwan stand out for having more well-defined policies and regulations concerning migrant workers. For instance, in Hong Kong, PMIs employed in the informal sector are entitled to receive the Minimum Allowable Wage (MAW). Meanwhile, Taiwan enforces clear legislation on labor rights and protections through the Employment Service Act, ensuring that all migrant workers in Taiwan, regardless of their background, are granted equal access to their rights.

On the other hand, Malaysia lacks sufficient legal frameworks to ensure the protection of migrant workers, resulting in widespread legal violations against these workers, including PMIs. Additionally, domestic workers are excluded from Malaysia's labor legislation, despite many PMIs being employed in the domestic sector. The prevalence of undocumented and illegal migrant workers exacerbates this situation. Indonesian migrants, in particular, benefit from geographic proximity, allowing them easier access to Malaysia through bordering regions such as Aceh, Batam, Medan, Kalimantan, and other areas. Many PMIs also enter Malaysia without official documentation, taking advantage of illegal transportation networks (Sudarmanto, 2022).

Such issues undoubtedly demand government intervention. Like their counterparts in other

countries, PMIs in Taiwan also encounter various challenges. Ndarujati (2021) identifies several issues these workers face, including a broker system that operates independently of government oversight, racism, and labor exploitation. To address these concerns, the Indonesian government must actively engage in resolving cases of legal violations involving its PMIs in Taiwan. Due to the absence of formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan, Indonesian representation in Taiwan is managed by KDEI in Taipei. During the 2017–2018 period, KDEI in Taipei resolved 1,529 cases, accounting for approximately 94% of the reported cases involving PMIs, with the remainder still under review.

As part of its efforts to protect PMIs in Taiwan, Indonesia ratified the "International Labour Standards on Freedom of Association" issued by the International Labour Organization (ILO). This instrument outlines the right to establish and join organizations or communities, access adequate protection against anti-union discrimination, and receive fair wages. Consequently, many PMIs in Taiwan are actively involved in religious, social, and other community-based organizations. These organizations operate under the supervision and guidance of KDEI in Taipei, fostering synergy between PMI and the Indonesian government. However, the limited scope of KDEI in Taipei, focusing primarily on trade, investment, immigration, culture, and tourism, presents challenges in addressing issues related to PMIs in Taiwan (Ndarujati, 2021).

Meanwhile, Sumardiani (2014) places greater emphasis on the role of the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union or Serikat Buruh Migran Indonesia (SBMI), in addressing issues faced by PMIs, particularly through the activities of SBMI in Kendal Regency, Central Java. Although the government plays a significant role in managing these issues, non-governmental organizations such as SBMI also hold a crucial position in safeguarding the rights of PMIs. SBMI is a grassroots organization comprising former, prospective, and active PMIs, as well as their families and individuals concerned with migrant worker issues. The primary function of SBMI is to advocate for the resolution of problems encountered by PMIs abroad.

SBMI operates in various regions, including SBMI Kendal Regency, which was established in 2013 in Plososari Village, Patean District, Kendal Regency, Central Java Province. Founded by former PMIs, SBMI Kendal has addressed numerous issues faced by PMIs from the region, such as document forgery, insurance claims, lost documents, and other challenges commonly encountered after returning

from overseas employment. Additionally, SBMI Kendal plays an active role in improving the well-being of repatriated PMIs by offering various training programs, including salon and hairdressing skills, animal husbandry and agriculture, tailoring, and more (Sumardiani, 2014).

Based on the literature review presented above, it is clear that Taiwan has emerged as a favored destination for migrant workers due to its relatively clear legal framework and easy organizational opportunities for these workers. However, for Indonesian workers, there are unique challenges, one of which is the lack of formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan. This situation makes it interesting to examine further the dynamics of fulfilling rights, specifically political rights and the participation rights of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan, particularly in the context of the 2024 elections. Political rights can be defined as rights that protect individual liberty and participation in public life by shielding individuals from interference and enabling them to exercise political freedom (MacMillan, 1986). Meanwhile, (Sager, 2012) identifies political rights as the rights to political participation, such as voting, joining political parties, running for office, and political representation, that are necessary to prevent domination by the state or other political authorities. In this study, we use the definition conceptualised by Sager, specifically, political rights in terms of voting. Voting is chosen as the operationalisation of political rights in this study because voting is the most institutionally recognized and legally codified form of political rights.

Previous research has largely focused on the involvement of International Relations actors in addressing issues related to PMIs and the strategies used to advocate for their rights, particularly in Taiwan. However, none of these studies have specifically examined the realization of ideal citizenship or substantive citizenship for PMIs. Therefore, this article aims to delve deeper into this issue as a unique phenomenon within the dynamics of PMIs in Taiwan, which will be linked to the fulfillment of citizenship dimensions. This will allow us to conclude whether PMIs in Taiwan have achieved all dimensions of citizenship and whether they have obtained substantive citizenship, or whether some dimensions of citizenship are still hampered in the process of realizing them. Furthermore, this study will explain the role of PMI organizations in Taiwan in efforts to fulfill their political rights despite the many challenges related to the implementation of these political rights abroad.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative design to gain an in-depth understanding of the political rights issues faced by PMIs in Taiwan, focusing on the problems they encounter, as well as the roles of the government and civil society in addressing these issues. A qualitative approach was selected as it allows for the collection of rich, detailed data and enables an exploration of complex social phenomena that cannot be fully captured through quantitative methods. Given the emphasis on exploring individuals' experiences and perspectives, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary data collection method.

Semi-structured interviews are particularly well-suited for this type of research because they offer a balance between providing a structure to the interview and allowing flexibility to explore new ideas that arise during the conversation (Kallio et al., 2016). This approach enables interviewees to express their thoughts more freely, facilitating a deeper understanding of their experiences and perspectives. To guide these interviews, an interview guide was developed collaboratively by the authors. This guide contained key questions aimed at addressing the research objectives, yet allowed room for follow-up questions and open-ended responses that could lead to new insights.

The interview questions were carefully tailored to the specific roles and perspectives of different stakeholders involved in the issue (Bryman, 2012). For instance, government officials were asked about policies and their implementation, while civil society representatives and migrant workers were questioned about their experiences, challenges, and views on the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms. This differentiation in questions was crucial in ensuring that each interview was relevant to the interviewee's expertise and perspective, thus providing a more holistic understanding of the topic.

The data collection process took place between July and September 2024, and interviews were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on the availability and preference of the participants. The flexibility in the mode of interview allowed for greater participation, especially considering time zone differences and the busy schedules of some stakeholders. Each interview lasted approximately one hour, which was found to be a suitable length for discussing the topic in-depth while maintaining the focus of both the interviewee and the interviewer.

To ensure the comfort and privacy of the participants, interviews were conducted in a setting

where only the researchers and the interviewees were present. This setup helped to create a more open and secure environment, encouraging participants to share their experiences candidly. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure that participants could express themselves most comfortably and precisely in their native language, which is especially important when discussing complex issues like political rights. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, allowing for accurate transcription and analysis. We have conducted interviews with 6 people, consisting of 3 people from Migrant Care, 2 people from the Overseas Election Committee (PPLN Taiwan), and 1 Indonesian Migrant Worker in Taiwan who is also active in the Indonesian Migrant Workers Union (SBMI).

Interview transcripts were processed using a thematic analysis approach following Braun and Clarke (2006). The authors employed a hybrid coding strategy combining deductive codes derived from the conceptual framework and inductive codes emerging from the interviews. Coding was conducted manually due to the manageable dataset size, and cross-checking between authors ensured consistency and analytic reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Challenges of PMIs in Taiwan in Exercising Political Rights

The emergence of problems faced by PMIs in Taiwan regarding their participation in the 2024 elections is largely due to the voting mechanism in the elections for PMIs. Based on our interview with a representative from Migrant Care, voting for PMIs is carried out by three methods, namely: First, voting through postal delivery; second, voting directly at the polling station; and third, voting through the mobile ballot box. These three methods then still leave problems for PMIs in the context of their implementation during the 2024 elections (S. Badriyah, 2024).

The first issue that arose in the process of voting from voters of PMIs in Taiwan using the postal delivery method was the difference in the delivery schedule of ballot papers. When referring to the General Election Commission or Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU), Regulation Number 25 of 2023 stipulates that the schedule for sending ballots to voters abroad is carried out at the earliest on January 2, 2024, and at the latest on January 11, 2024. The letter must be returned by overseas voters and received by the Overseas Election Committee or Panitia Pengawas Luar

Negeri (PPLN) no later than February 15 (Agusta, 2023).

But then there are findings that voters in Taiwan, in this case, PMIs have received paper ballots by postal method earlier than the set schedule. From November to December 2023, there were 31,276 ballots distributed, which then reached the hands of voters in Taiwan. The PMIs who had received the ballots by post then voted and sent the ballots back to the PPLN in Taiwan. However, with the conditions of the process, it turns out that KPU has decided to annul and declare that the ballots that have circulated outside the schedule are considered damaged and invalid. KPU considers that PPLN should not send ballots ahead of the schedule set in the KPU Regulation Number 25 of 2023 (Mantalean & Rastika, 2023).

Our interview with the representatives from the election supervisory committee, or Panitia Pengawas Pemilihan Umum (Panwaslu) in Taiwan, indicates that PPLN Taiwan's decision to send out ballot papers early is an effort to maximize the use of voting rights by PMIs in Taiwan. Considering that there are obstacles for many PMIs in Taiwan who work in the informal sector as domestic workers, it is very difficult to get permission from their employers to participate in the voting process. In addition, the schedule set out in KPU Regulation Number 25 of 2023 regarding the schedule for sending ballots by post to voters and also the schedule for the voting process coincides with the momentum of the Chinese New Year (CNY) celebration. For this CNY celebration, the PMIs in Taiwan, the majority of whom work as domestic workers, will get busier work assignments than usual. Therefore, at this moment, they will find it very difficult to get permission to take a leave to participate in the election whose schedule coincides with the CNY (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition, the problem of the election schedule that coincides with the CNY will also cause delays in sending back ballots from PMIs to PPLN, because post office operations in Taiwan are also closed due to the commemoration of the CNY. At that time, PPLN was worried that the PMIs would not be able to vote because of the election schedule that coincided with the CNY celebration (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Under these conditions, PPLN Taiwan coordinated with KPU when technical guidance was held in Hong Kong in November 2023. On that occasion, PPLN Taiwan representatives conveyed the challenges faced regarding the election schedule that coincided with the CNY. PPLN Taiwan conveyed the initiative to make an early delivery to anticipate the difficulties of

PMIs in Taiwan related to carrying out the process of political participation during the election (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Moreover, the representative of Panwaslu in Taiwan added that during the event, the KPU commissioner verbally conveyed that the delivery of logistics (ballots) to PMIs in Taiwan would be carried out earlier than the schedule, taking into account the CNY event. However, it turned out that the oral statement was not accompanied by the formulation of derivative rules that legalized the decision. Therefore, the early delivery of ballots appeared to be illegal and was decided unilaterally by PPLN Taiwan. This condition shows that election organizers in Indonesia are not serious about guaranteeing the political rights of PMI, especially for PMIs in Taiwan. This political right should be obtained by all citizens without exception. However, the conditions faced by PMIs in Taiwan have not shown goodwill from the state to guarantee their political rights (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition to the problem of schedule differences that occur, the postal voting method also arises because of the case of ballots received by PMIs in a pre-printed condition. Based on interviews with the representative of Panwaslu in Taiwan, the condition of the ballots was due to violations committed by fellow PMIs in Taiwan. This is because when the ballots are sent to the workplace address of a PMI, there is a high possibility that the ballots sent are received by fellow PMI coworkers. Then, the ballots were misused by other PMIs on behalf of voters who should have received them (Febriyanti, A., & Riza, A. N., 2024).

What was done by the unscrupulous PMIs who used other people's ballots was categorized as a violation of Indonesian law. However, due to the absence of diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan, Panwaslu in Taiwan experienced difficulties when they wanted to process the case legally against the unscrupulous PMI, which committed violations by using other people's voting rights (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition to the two problems that arose from the postal method, there was also a crucial issue related to the voting method carried out by PMIs using the postal method. Due to a lack of knowledge about voting techniques, where voting should be done by striking the picture of the candidate using a sharp object such as a nail, many PMIs then voted on the ballot paper in various ways, such as giving scribbles on the ballot paper, and some even gave a "love" sign on the ballot paper. Some also cut the ballot paper, making it invalid. The main cause of this

was the lack of knowledge possessed by the PMIs regarding the voting mechanism of the ballot paper (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition to the postal method, which still leaves some serious problems related to the use of voting rights by PMIs in Taiwan, the representative of SBMI said that other voting methods, such as voting at polling stations, where the availability of polling stations is very limited and cannot reach all areas, so it can cause obstacles for PMIs who want to vote. Even polling stations located in areas where many PMIs work on ships had experienced problems, where many of them were not registered as permanent voters because when data collection was carried out, they were sailing at sea (Vicky, 2024).

Table 2. Challenges for the rights of migrant workers in Taiwan during the 2024 elections

No.	Types of Work for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan	Challenges during elections
1	Informal field (domestic workers)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The election schedule coincided with the CNY celebration, so they did not get permission from their employers. Ballot papers sent by post are prone to misuse by irresponsible individuals. Lack of information about the election
2	Formal fields (factory workers, company workers, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballot papers sent by post are prone to misuse by irresponsible individuals. Lack of information about the election
3	The ship's crew members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seafaring schedules are different from election schedules so many sailors are unable to vote Lack of information about the election

Table 2 outlines the challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan during elections based on their types of work, that are compiled from interview sources. Informal workers, such as domestic workers, struggle with obtaining permission to vote as the election coincides with the CNY. Formal workers in factories and companies, along with the ship's crew members, face issues, such as the potential misuse of mailed ballot papers and limited access to election information. Additionally, the ship's crew members often cannot vote due to conflicting work schedules at sea. These challenges highlight structural barriers that hinder migrant workers' political participation (S. Badriyah, 2024).

Therefore, the solution is that they can register as additional voters. However, additional voters could

only vote when the voters registered as permanent voters had already done so. Meanwhile, PMIs who work as crew members must immediately sail back, so it is impossible to wait for their turn to vote after the permanent voters. In this case, PPLN and Panwaslu in Taiwan agreed to provide an opportunity for PMIs who work as the ship's crew members to vote first, even though it violates the established rules. According to the applicable rules, additional voters can only vote after noon (at 12.00) or after voting by registered permanent voters has been completed. This means that there are still problems with the rules that should be able to accommodate PMIs who have limited time, especially seafarers (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition, voting is also carried out through the mobile ballot box. This method is held to make it easier for PMIs in Taiwan, especially those who are far from polling stations, where the voting committee will conduct voting by traveling to remote areas that are difficult to reach, and there are no fixed polling stations available. However, the problem is that many PMIs in Taiwan, especially those in distant areas, still lack knowledge about the election mechanism, so this is an issue that needs to be anticipated in the future (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

From the problems faced by PMIs in Taiwan in the process of exercising their voting rights in the 2024 elections, there are certainly several main things that need attention. Among them, for example, are related to the need for massive socialization to increase the knowledge of PMIs regarding political rights and the mechanisms for using these political rights in the context of elections. The election organizing committee in Taiwan should be able to take advantage of the network of PMI organizations or communities in Taiwan to conduct political education. In addition, there needs to be good and institutionalized coordination between all stakeholders in organizing elections, especially in Taiwan, so that when a certain policy is taken regarding the implementation of elections in Taiwan, it does not conflict with applicable regulations, so that voters can vote properly.

The Role and Challenges of the Indonesian Government in Protecting the Political Rights of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan

As one of the largest sending countries of PMIs, Indonesia bears a primary responsibility for the protection of its PMIs, encompassing the registration process through to their repatriation. Ensuring the protection of PMIs is crucial to preventing legal issues related to labor and immigration. Moreover,

PMIs significantly contribute to the nation's economy (Widodo & Belgradoputra, 2019). In 2024 alone, remittances from PMIs reached USD 14.22 billion, accounting for nearly 10% of the country's total foreign exchange reserves, which stand at approximately USD 136.2 billion (Nugroho, 2024).

The Republic of Indonesia Law Number 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Migrant Workers serves as the legal foundation for safeguarding PMIs. This legislation outlines the requirements for becoming a PMI, as well as their rights and obligations, and the technical aspects of their protection. In line with this, Ruhs (2016) argues that migrant rights should be understood not only as human rights but also as policy instruments through which states shape the economic, social, and fiscal outcomes of international labour migration. Furthermore, Indonesia has ratified the "International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families," as articulated in Law Number 6 of 2012. This demonstrates Indonesia's commitment to recognizing and protecting the rights of PMIs at both the national and international levels.

Meanwhile, the rights of PMIs encompass not only the protection of civil rights but also the right to engage in political activities, which often go unnoticed by the public. Akmal and Madda (2022) highlight how political rights within the constitution reflect the application of democratic principles, even in the absence of an explicit provision designating Indonesia as a democratic state. The sovereignty of the people serves as the foundation for political participation, wherein the populace holds the ultimate authority in determining the course of governance. Fundamental and universal political rights are granted to all citizens as an embodiment of popular sovereignty in electoral processes, under constitutional mandates.

Constitutionally, three political rights belong to all Indonesian citizens without exception: the equality of all citizens before the law and government, the right to freedom of assembly and expression, and the right to receive political education (Akmal & Madda, 2022). PMIs, despite being abroad, retain the same political rights as other Indonesian citizens. This right aligns with the principle of popular sovereignty enshrined in the Constitution, which stipulates that all citizens are entitled to participate in the political process, including in elections.

Elections conducted abroad are coordinated by various stakeholders, including KPU, the Election Supervisory Board or Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum (Bawaslu), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PPLN, and Indonesian representations abroad, such

as the Indonesian Embassy, the Indonesian Consulate General, or KDEI. According to Purnamasari et al. (2023), the permanent voter list for the 2019 elections overseas reached 2,058,191 individuals, accounting for approximately 10.67% of the total permanent voter list both domestically and abroad. Data from KPU indicates that the highest number of overseas voters is registered at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, with around 558,873 individuals. This is followed by KDEI in Taipei, with 277,065 individuals, and the Indonesian Consulate General in Hong Kong, with 180,232 individuals. The significant number of voters in these three locations reflects the large presence of Indonesian citizens there, many of whom are PMI.

Coordination among various stakeholders in the execution of elections is crucial for achieving democratic electoral processes abroad. KPU, as the primary stakeholder, collaborates with the PPLN to register Indonesian citizens residing in the respective countries, with assistance from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Indonesian Embassy and the Indonesian Consulate General, as well as the Ministry of Trade through KDEI to subsequently compile the permanent voter list (Suryani & Azmy, 2017).

Following this issue, KPU conducts outreach through various channels, such as Short Message Service (SMS) and mailed letters to the addresses of Indonesian citizens, including their residences, educational institutions, or workplaces, providing information regarding voter registration. This outreach effort is monitored by PPLN in the host country. Moreover, PPLN often assists KPU in conducting awareness activities aimed at the diaspora in the respective nations. This socialization effort is intended to enhance the understanding and participation of Indonesian citizens in the electoral processes abroad (Suryani & Azmy, 2017).

In Taiwan, the presence of community organizations facilitates the outreach efforts related to elections. Nearly every week, there are meetings held by various community organizations, which allow PPLN to conduct socialization efforts during these gatherings. These organizations are also quite active on Instant Messaging (IM) platforms, such as WhatsApp, where PPLN frequently joins these forums to disseminate information regarding elections in Taiwan. However, certain groups, such as those living illegally in Taiwan, tend to withdraw from the socialization activities organized by PPLN. Additionally, challenges arise for the ship's crew members residing on the smaller islands of Taiwan. Access to these islands is highly limited, leading

representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan to report that socialization activities are conducted only once (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In terms of voting methods, representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan reported that there are three methods of casting ballots: placement at polling stations, mail-in voting, and the distribution of mobile ballot boxes specifically for crew members. The determination of the voting method is contingent upon the distance of the voter's address from the polling station, the nature of their occupation, and the voter's preferences, where applicable. In the 2024 elections, Taiwan has established 54 polling stations, six mobile ballot boxes, and 90 mail delivery areas. The mail-in voting method poses significant risks of complications, as there are frequent instances of misdelivered mail, which can result in ballots being marked by unauthorized individuals (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

The 2024 elections in Taiwan were marked by significant controversy that gained considerable traction on social media, particularly concerning the early arrival of ballots. According to President Joko Widodo, this situation arose because the election day coincided closely with the CNY, prompting concerns about potential long postal delays. However, the premature delivery of ballots sparked controversy, as many voters were unaware of the rationale behind this early mailing. This issue was further exacerbated by the rapid dissemination of information on social media platforms (Mulyana, 2023).

Another issue arises from the differing perspectives between KPU and Bawaslu regarding ballots that have been marked by unauthorized individuals. KPU categorizes such ballots as invalid and replaces them with new ballots that bear a special stamp. In contrast, Bawaslu does not consider these marked ballots invalid due to the absence of a legal basis for such a classification. They argue that these instances constitute administrative violations rather than physical damage to the ballots, as stipulated in election regulations. This situation necessitates particular attention from Panwaslu to ascertain whether there have been procedural errors or violations during the electoral process (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Moreover, representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan have highlighted discrepancies in the data collected by various agencies. For instance, the records of Indonesian citizens maintained by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KDEI, and the Directorate General of Immigration occasionally do not align. There are instances where a PMI who has returned to Indonesia remains registered on the voter

list in Taiwan, or conversely, where a PMI who has resided in Taiwan for an extended period is not listed as a voter. Additionally, individuals who change their passports often encounter issues of duplicated data, as differing personal information may lead to the assumption that they are different individuals. The representatives noted that their hotline has been inundated with complaints regarding these data discrepancies (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Concerning the “One China Policy” recognized by Indonesia, there exists no formal diplomatic relationship between Indonesia and Taiwan. This situation poses specific challenges for Bawaslu in executing its responsibilities. Representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan have indicated that in countries with formal diplomatic relations with Indonesia, local authorities provide special security measures to oversee the electoral process (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Although Taiwan also has security teams in place, their role is primarily supervisory and does not extend much beyond that, in contrast to the support provided in other countries. Furthermore, Indonesia faces jurisdictional obstacles in addressing electoral fraud in Taiwan, as the enforcement of administrative or criminal violations necessitates a more complex legal process. On the other hand, according to representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan, KDEI in Taipei has been instrumental in facilitating the needs of Panwaslu and PPLN in Taiwan (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In terms of gender, representatives from the Taiwanese Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu) did not identify specific issues related to migrant workers seeking to exercise their political rights. All individuals, both men and women, are granted equal rights, and stakeholders should not obstruct anyone’s political rights, regardless of their background. However, challenges arise for female migrant workers, most of whom work in the domestic sector, as they often face difficulties in exercising their political rights due to a lack of permission from their employers. Furthermore, the 2024 election coincides with the CNY celebrations, when female migrant workers, most of whom work in the domestic sector, are busy with various tasks, making it difficult for them to exercise their political rights to participate in the election. (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Based on the issues encountered in Taiwan, it can be asserted that the 2024 elections face complex logistical and legal challenges. The voting methods, which include polling stations, mobile ballot boxes, and postal voting, are adapted to suit the conditions

of the voters. However, the postal voting method has proven to be the most vulnerable, frequently experiencing delivery errors that result in ballots being filled out by unauthorized individuals. To mitigate such inaccuracies in the future, stakeholders must reevaluate the postal voting method. Furthermore, according to representatives from Panwaslu in Taiwan, this method currently lacks a legal framework.

In addition to logistical challenges, the 2024 elections in Taiwan also encountered issues stemming from differing legal interpretations between KPU and Bawaslu. Furthermore, discrepancies in voter data sourced from various institutions have adversely affected the political rights of Indonesian citizens in Taiwan. Therefore, enhanced coordination among stakeholders is imperative. Data reconciliation must be thoroughly examined to prevent future inaccuracies. The Indonesian government should also consider establishing a real-time and accurate database system.

The Role of Gathering in Migrant Workers’ Political Rights Advocacy in Taiwan

Gathering plays an important role in constructing social capital among PMI. Events, such as *arisan*, *pengajian*, or *silaturahmi*, are often utilized as a means for PMIs to strengthen their social capital and also discuss problems related to their community. The gathering also happens during celebrations of big events, such as Eid al-Fitr, the Indonesian Independence Day, and the CNY (Yuniarto, 2015).

During gatherings held by PMIs in the years leading up to the 2024 general election, messages and guidelines related to the electoral process were often included. For example, in January 2022, a *Tabligh Akbar*—a large religious gathering featuring sermons and Islamic teachings—was held at Tainan Park, attended by PMI groups from various PMI organizations in Taiwan. During this event, KDEI in Taipei provided information about the upcoming 2024 general election in Taiwan (Kantor Dagang & Ekonomi Indonesia Taipei, 2023a). A similar event took place in May 2023, when the Special Branch of Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) or Pengurus Cabang Istimewa NU (PCINU), the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, organized a *halal bihalal*—a post-Eid gathering for socializing and seeking forgiveness—attended by thousands of participants in Taichung City. On this occasion, the KDEI Taipei representative also encouraged attendees to register and participate in the success of the 2024 general election (NU Online, 2023).

On the other hand, these gatherings among PMIs have also become a platform for politicians seeking voter support. According to an informant from Migrant Care, elections held abroad are significantly influenced by the ambassador currently serving in the host country. If the ambassador is affiliated with or has close ties to a particular political party, it becomes easier to mobilize PMIs in political activities aimed at supporting specific candidates. This finding aligns with Harjanto's (2012) research on the 2009 election observed that certain parliamentary candidates leveraged *pengajian* gatherings to garner votes from overseas electoral districts. This practice is facilitated by the strong relationship between the *kyai* (religious leader) and PMIs (S. Badriyah, 2024).

Although PMI gatherings may appear merely social, they function as informal institutions that compensate government's limited capacity to provide electoral information abroad. Community networks often become the primary political communication channels if formal outreach is deemed insufficient (Horta 2015; Putnam 2000). These gatherings serve as ambivalent spaces where they can empower voters but are also susceptible to partisan mobilization through community leaders. Therefore, gatherings should be understood not as standalone social anecdotes, but as integral components shaping both the mitigation and reproduction of political rights barriers among PMI in Taiwan.

Political Rights Still Not a Priority for PMIs

Based on interviews conducted with three informants, we identified a pattern indicating that political rights are not yet a primary concern for PMIs. Informants agreed that political issues are not prioritized in PMIs' agendas, given other pressing matters, such as economic rights and legal protections in their host countries. For instance, if denied permission by their employers, many PMIs refrain from exercising their right to vote, despite this being an individual political right. Although such cases are rare, informants reported that it especially affects PMIs in the domestic sector. This challenge is intensified when elections coincide with the CNY, restricting domestic workers' ability to take leave. Given that Taiwan receives a substantial number of domestic migrant workers from Indonesia, this sector is particularly significant for understanding the political participation of PMIs (Lan, 2000).

This tendency aligns with the logic of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which posits that individuals focus first on fulfilling basic physiological and safety needs before attending to higher-level needs such as political participation or

civic engagement. For migrant workers, securing income, ensuring legal status, and maintaining workplace safety constitute these foundational needs. Consequently, when faced with competing demands, such as the risk of losing wages or being denied permission by employers, many PMIs refrain from exercising their right to vote, even though it is an individual political right.

From a regulatory perspective, Taiwan, as a political entity, has committed to protecting civil and political rights for all individuals, regardless of nationality, by ratifying the ICCPR in 2009. This ratification requires Taiwan to consistently apply human rights standards outlined in the ICCPR, including in its business sector, to prevent and eliminate violations of migrant workers' civil and political rights (Arifin, 2022).

For PMIs, economic issues are fundamental, as they are working in a foreign country. An informant from SBMI highlighted this trend, noting that although efforts have been made to provide political awareness regarding the 2024 general election, it is challenging to bridge the disconnect between PMI and their political rights (Vicky, 2024). While human rights should ideally be viewed equally, in practice, certain rights are prioritized, following a hierarchy of needs (Quintavalla & Heine, 2019).

From the perspective of Indonesia's electoral system, certain obstacles discourage PMIs from exercising their voting rights abroad. First, there are legal barriers since PMIs can only vote for the Jakarta II electoral district (covering Central Jakarta, South Jakarta, and overseas), despite hailing from various regions in Indonesia. This policy, established during the New Order era, is rooted in the placement of overseas voters under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' jurisdiction in Central Jakarta (Siregar, 2022). Although judicial reviews have challenged this policy, the Constitutional Court dismissed them, citing jurisdictional limitations. In contrast to other countries that have established special overseas electoral districts, the absence of such a district for Indonesian diasporas limits their representation and discourages political engagement, making political rights appear less crucial to these voters (Suwartono, 2023).

The administrative and structural obstacles experienced by Indonesian migrant workers reflect boarder patterns of administrative and structural diaspora disenfranchisement, where institutional design unintentionally limits the effectiveness of overseas political participation. Existing studies show that non-adaptive voting procedures and weak representational linkages between diasporas

and their designated electoral districts reduce voter motivation and diminish the meaning of political rights abroad (Bauböck, 2006). In the case of PMIs in Taiwan, technical challenges cannot be separated from representational inequalities embedded within Indonesia's electoral architecture, indicating that the barriers faced by migrant voters extend beyond logistical issues to deeper institutional constraints.

Coordination Between Government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Coordination between the Indonesian government and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Taiwan has played a crucial role in the implementation of the 2024 general election. Based on the interview with Panwaslu, as a central actor in overseas election processes, Bawaslu has consistently collaborated with CSOs, recognizing their broader reach among voters. These CSOs vary from migrant worker unions like SBMI to more informal ones like community-driven activities. Bawaslu recruits local Indonesian citizens in Taiwan as election supervisors, leveraging their networks to facilitate smooth communication and outreach. Despite the absence of formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan, Bawaslu's collaboration with Taiwan's authorities has ensured seamless voting operations, including the establishment of polling stations and voter engagement (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

Through this partnership, Bawaslu utilizes established community networks to inform and encourage Indonesian citizens about their voting rights, relying on CSOs to bridge communication gaps and foster a supportive environment for exercising political rights abroad. This collaborative approach has significantly enhanced election participation and fostered strong civic engagement among PMI in Taiwan (Febriyanti, A. & Riza, A. N., 2024).

In addition to the structured collaboration, CSOs in Taiwan have also taken proactive steps to address logistical challenges faced by Indonesian migrant voters. Based on our interviews, several CSOs have organized community-driven initiatives, such as providing information regarding the election booth and method. These efforts benefit domestic workers with limited freedom to travel independently. By sharing that information, CSOs contribute to a more inclusive electoral process that acknowledges the unique needs of migrant workers. Furthermore, the involvement of religious and cultural organizations has strengthened the social fabric supporting electoral participation. These organizations have become key channels for disseminating voting information during

religious gatherings and community events, where migrant workers are more likely to discuss political and civic responsibilities. This culturally embedded approach not only empowers Indonesian migrants with practical knowledge about their rights but also fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose within the diaspora community, enhancing both voter turnout and collective identity.

Politics of Citizenship of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan

According to Stokke's (2017) politics of citizenship framework, the challenges faced by PMIs in Taiwan in exercising their voting rights during the 2024 general election should not be understood merely as technical or administrative failures, but as manifestations of stratified and unevenly realized citizenship in a transnational context. Empirically, PMIs in Taiwan are formally recognized as Indonesian citizens and thus members of the national political community. However, this recognition remains largely symbolic. Electoral arrangements fail to meaningfully account for the lived realities of migrant workers, particularly domestic workers and seafarers, whose labor conditions severely constrain their ability to participate. This condition reflects a case of politics of recognition in which formal inclusion coexists with substantive marginalization, where citizenship is acknowledged on paper but not supported through adaptive institutional arrangements that respond to migrant's specific socioeconomic conditions (Szulecki et al., 2021).

At the level of legal status, PMIs retain full Indonesian citizenship. However, its practical effectiveness is weakened by the absence of formal diplomatic relations between Indonesia and Taiwan. Electoral governance is mediated through non-standard institutional arrangements, producing jurisdictional and enforcement limitations. Therefore, institutional and geopolitical contexts often generate differentiated access to political rights, resulting in stratified forms of citizenship where legal status does not ensure equal participation.

The uneven realization of political rights further reveals a politics of redistribution. While voting rights are formally guaranteed, the material and informational resources required to exercise them are unevenly distributed. Rigid voting schedules, limited access to electoral information, and vulnerabilities associated with postal voting disproportionately burden migrant workers, effectively shifting the costs of political participation onto individuals. This finding supports the idea that institutional conditions

influence voters to meaningfully exercise political rights (Nemčok & Peltoniemi, 2023).

These dynamics culminate in problems of political participation and representation. PMIs are structurally incorporated into the Jakarta II electoral district, a configuration that offers limited representational relevance to their lived experiences abroad. This misalignment contributes to perceptions that voting has little political impact, leading many migrant workers to prioritize economic survival compared to political participation. Furthermore, weak representational linkages reduce migrant voters' incentives to engage, even where voting rights formally exist.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study underscores the crucial role of labor unions, such as SBMI, in advocating for the political rights of migrant workers in Taiwan. Despite Taiwan's relatively robust legal framework for labor rights, migrant workers continue to face structural barriers in exercising their political rights, exacerbated by restrictive labor arrangements, limited diplomatic channels, and cultural constraints. The unique status of Indonesia-Taiwan diplomatic relations created ambiguity in addressing the problems related to PMI's rights, including PMI's political rights. Study found that PMI in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia also face problems over their rights, but this issue is easier to address due to existing diplomatic relations between Indonesia and those countries (Arifin 2022). Regarding gender dynamics, our interview findings reveal that female migrant workers, particularly those employed in the domestic sector, experience additional obstacles, as they often lack permission from employers to leave the workplace. This condition was especially evident during the 2024 elections, which coincided with the CNY celebrations, requiring many women to prioritize domestic responsibilities and consequently forgo electoral participation.

Beyond these empirical findings, this study situates migrant workers' voting experiences within Stokke's politics of citizenship framework, demonstrating how the challenges faced by PMIs in Taiwan reflect stratified and unevenly realized citizenship in a transnational context. Although PMIs are formally recognized as Indonesian citizens and members of the national political community, this membership remains largely symbolic. Electoral arrangements fail to meaningfully accommodate the lived realities of migrant workers, particularly domestic workers and seafarers, whose labor conditions structurally

constrain political participation. This situation exemplifies a politics of recognition in which formal inclusion coexists with substantive marginalization, where citizenship is acknowledged on paper but not supported through adaptive institutional arrangements that respond to migrants' specific socioeconomic conditions.

The uneven realization of political rights further reveals a politics of redistribution. While voting rights are formally guaranteed, access to the material, temporal, and informational resources necessary to exercise them remains highly unequal. Rigid voting schedules, limited access to electoral information, and vulnerabilities associated with postal voting disproportionately burden migrant workers, effectively shifting the costs and risks of political participation onto individuals. This finding reinforces the argument that institutional conditions critically shape voters' capacity to meaningfully exercise political rights.

This tendency also aligns with the logic of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which posits that individuals prioritize the fulfillment of basic physiological and safety needs before attending to higher-level needs such as political participation or civic engagement. For migrant workers, securing income, maintaining legal status, and ensuring workplace safety constitute these foundational needs. Consequently, when confronted with competing demands, such as the risk of wage loss, job insecurity, or denial of permission by employers, many PMIs refrain from exercising their right to vote, even though it constitutes an individual political right. In this sense, political participation becomes a secondary concern subordinated to the imperatives of economic survival and personal security.

At the same time, labor unions and community organizations have proven vital in mitigating these structural constraints by providing resources, raising awareness, and creating platforms for political education and representation. A grassroots approach through unions and community meetings constitutes an important initial step toward empowering migrant workers' political rights. Moving forward, increased coordination between the Indonesian government, trade unions, and NGOs is essential to fostering a more inclusive and responsive electoral framework. A multi-stakeholder adhoc team configuration that involves elements from the government and civil society is an effective way to tackle PMI related issues. This configuration proved to be successful in tackling PMI's related issues in other countries (Maksum, 2025). Such coordination is necessary not only to safeguard formal voting rights, but also

to advance substantive citizenship by ensuring that migrant workers' political rights are upheld alongside their labor rights in transnational settings.

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