

Political Communication and Voter Response Framework in Garut for the 2024 Regional Election

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Abstract

This study analyzes the dynamics of political communication and voter responses in the 2024 Garut regional election by highlighting differences in campaign strategies, the role of the media, and the influence of local institutions. Drawing on political communication theory—including agenda setting, framing, political storytelling, and populist communication—and a neo-institutionalist approach, this study explains how formal and informal institutions shape the effectiveness of political messages. Using media content analysis, digital discourse analysis, word network visualization, and in-depth interviews, the study finds that the Helmi–Yudi ticket emphasizes an image of experience and stability, while the Syakur–Putri ticket prioritizes a narrative of change through populist and digital strategies. Social media remains a dominant arena in shaping public opinion, while Garut's socio-religious structure continues to influence voter preferences. This research contributes to the development of a model that integrates political communication and neo-institutionalism, while enriching the study of voter behavior at the local level.

Keywords: Political communication; Campaign strategy; Digital media; Media framing; Public response.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Regent Election (Pilkada) in Garut Regency is a politically complex contest featuring candidates Helmi Budiman - Yudi Nugraha (Paslon 01) and Abdusy Syakur Amin - Luthfianisa Putri Karlina (Paslon 02). The electoral

dynamics emphasize political communication strategies crucial for building electability and gaining voter support, as identified in studies on electoral democracy. Effective communication encompasses both mass and digital media and direct engagement with voters through various methods including public debates. Recent surveys

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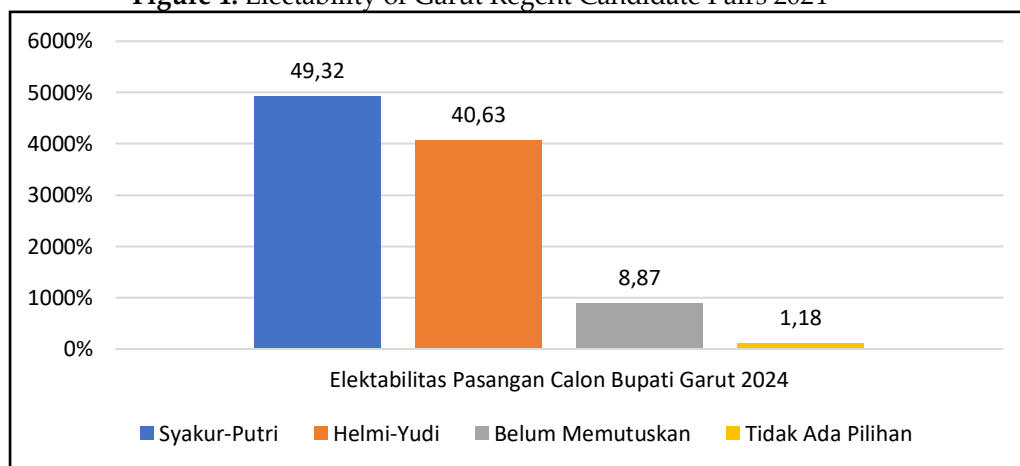
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indicate a shift in voter preferences, with the Syakur-Putri pair gaining popularity,

while Helmi-Yudi struggles to retain traditional supporters. This shift can be understood through the theory of changing voter preferences, suggesting that voters evaluate the benefits presented by each candidate. Additionally, modern campaigns increasingly utilize digital media and targeted strategies to effectively reach voters. The Syakur-Putri couple is known to be more active in using digital media

and party networks in conveying their visions and missions, while Helmi-Yudi relies on traditional approaches such as face-to-face meetings and support from local elites (Coral & Assifa, 2024). So, it can determine that there is a high enough electability on October 18-22, 2024 LS Vinus conducting an electability survey, the following are the results of the survey that has been conducted:

Figure 1. Electability of Garut Regent Candidate Pairs 2024



Sumber: LS Vinus (2024)

Based on figure 1 of the electability results of the 2024 Garut regent candidate pair. The Syakur-Putri pair obtained the highest electability with a percentage of 49.32%. This shows that the couple has significant public support in Garut Regency, with a much higher number compared to other candidates. In second place, there is the Helmi-Yudi pair who achieved electability of 40.63%. Although not as high as Syakur-Putri, this figure still shows the tight competition between these two candidate pairs.

The two couples obtained more than 80% of the total electability calculated, showing their dominance in the 2024 Garut regent election. On the other hand, there are 8.87% of voters who still have not decided their choice, while 1.18% of respondents stated that they have no choice. This figure shows the uncertainty in the election, which can change as time goes on and the intensity of the campaign. This segment of voters who have not yet decided on this choice has the potential to

be a determining factor in the upcoming election.

In examining the effect of communication strategies on public response during the Regional Elections, the study highlights that political discourse occurs in a public arena characterized by varied exchanges and critiques (Ratnamulyani & Maksudi, 2018). In Garut, responses to debates, campaign promises, and voter interactions inform electoral preferences and candidate efficacy. Cultural and social factors significantly shape voter behavior, with early political identification stemming from family and community socialization processes. The Party Identification Theory (Hatakka, 2017) suggests that political affiliations are passed through generations, leading to persistent political loyalties influenced by dominant cultural contexts (Rinenggo, 2022). Furthermore, social backgrounds—including class, religion, and ethnicity—affect individual voting behavior (Broockman & Kalla, 2023).

The rational choice theory (Kocaman & Coşgun, 2024) portrays voters as rational decision-makers, although cultural influences still inform assessments of candidates. Political culture theories (Tribowo et al., 2017) emphasize that voter engagement varies with the type of political culture present—ranging from parochial to participatory cultures. Additionally, the digital era enhances these cultural factors, with media, particularly social media, shaping public opinion and voter preferences rapidly (Rohim & Wardana, 2019).

The 2024 Garut Regional Election reveals polarization influenced by religious affiliations and socio-economic

backgrounds, where the Syakur-Putri pair enjoys support from Islamic circles, while Helmi-Yudi resonates more with urban voters and businessmen. This trend of political personalization and image strategy reflects broader shifts in electoral politics, as highlighted by (Topsümer et al., 2023). The Syakur-Putri couple focuses on an inclusive leadership narrative, contrasted with Helmi-Yudi's emphasis on experience and governance.

The study uses a literature review method to analyze political communication strategies of candidates and public responses, aiming to offer insights for campaign teams, policymakers, and scholars to enhance communication efforts in future elections, specifically in the Indonesian regional context.

Political Communication Theory

Political communication is essential for democracy, facilitating interactions between political actors and the public and influenced by mass media and public opinion. The Political Communication Model highlights five key elements: organization of communication, messages, media, recipients, and impacts, which aid in understanding how political narratives shape public perception (Valenzuela Tábor et al., 2023). Campaign communication strategies fall into four models, with the two-way symmetric model being the most ideal due to its emphasis on dialogue. This field combines communication, political science, and sociology to analyze how political messages are conveyed and processed.

The evolution of political communication now heavily features

digital media, influencing voter behavior and campaign strategies, making its study increasingly relevant (Finlayson, 2022). Key concepts include the roles of political elites, mass media, and the public, with messages ranging from propaganda to policy. The effectiveness of these messages is influenced by their structure and delivery, which can either build or hinder public trust in political actors. The media's role is pivotal, as it can set agendas and frame issues, significantly impacting public perception, especially during election campaigns.

Challenges arise, such as social pressure on political expression and the strategic use of propaganda to sway public opinion, which can lead to distortions in voters' preferences (Damayanti & Hamzah, 2017). The shift towards digital communication necessitates adjustments in campaign strategies, particularly as social media becomes predominant. Issues such as echo chambers, political polarization, and the dissemination of misinformation pose threats to democracy, underscoring the need for regulation. Understanding political communication theory is crucial for navigating today's complex political landscape, especially in addressing disinformation and maintaining democratic integrity.

Electoral Dynamics and Local Democracy

In the dynamics of regent elections, voter behavior is an important aspect in understanding how the community makes their choices. (McIntyre, 1992) in theory *Rational Choice* argues that voters act rationally by voting for the candidate who offers the policies that are most

advantageous to them. This approach explains how economic, social, and political factors affect voter preferences in the Garut Regional Election.

Further (Sahad & Bin Shahrudin, 2018) highlighting how public opinion can shape people's political attitudes. According to this theory, individuals tend to hide their political preferences if they feel that their views are not in line with the opinion of the majority. This is relevant in the context of the Garut Regional Election, where the perception of candidates can be influenced by the dominance of certain political narratives in the media.

Aspinall & Mietzner (2010) in their study of electoral politics in Indonesia show that the dynamics of regent elections are influenced by patronage networks, local elite power, and the influence of political parties. In the context of the Garut Regional Elections, these factors play a role in shaping the campaign strategy used by both candidate pairs.

Electoral dynamics and local democracy are interconnected, with electoral dynamics involving shifts in voter behavior and electoral systems impacting community participation in governance. In developing countries, challenges like money politics and patronage dominate local elections, while the rise of social media has changed voter engagement, although misinformation poses risks. Community participation is crucial for regional decision-making, correlated with social capital and public trust.

Local government accountability enhances transparency and is vital for

effective democracy. Unstable electoral dynamics, influenced by political fragmentation and social polarization, can undermine local democracy. Proportional systems might improve representation but complicate decision-making. Non-state actors and public deliberation are essential for effective local involvement. The literature asserts that improving participation, accountability, and non-state involvement is necessary to strengthen local democracy.

Media and Political Campaigns

The evolving role of media in political campaigns is notably influenced by digital technology advancements, particularly highlighted in the context of the 2024 Garut Regional Election (Fadhilurrohman & Purnomo, 2020). Traditional media such as television and newspapers remain relevant; however, social media increasingly dominates in shaping public opinion. Notably, Digital Activism underscores social media's effectiveness in political mobilization, allowing candidates to better engage with the younger demographic through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The media's framing strategies significantly impact voter perception, as demonstrated in the contrasting image portrayals between candidates Helmi-Yudi and Syakur-Putri.

Research indicates that media shapes public perception by determining what issues are vital, reinforcing candidate images through supportive or critical framing. Moreover, the transition from traditional to digital media reflects broader changes in political campaign strategies (Sulastri et al., 2020), facilitating

direct candidate-voter interactions that enhance public engagement. Despite advantages, digital media also presents challenges like misinformation and public opinion manipulation (López-Meri et al., 2017).

In developing nations, media functions as both an information channel and a propaganda tool, underscoring the need for media regulation and journalistic independence to foster quality political discourse (Scammell, 2024). The hybrid media system concept promotes integrating various media forms to engage wider voter demographics. Evidence points to significant media influence on political campaigns and voter behavior, which is crucial for effective strategy formation. Identified research gaps include the impact of local institutions on voter behavior, media consumption's role in agenda-setting and framing, and party dynamics affecting candidate messaging. This study seeks to fill these gaps by exploring the interplay between political communication strategies and voter responses through a neo-institutionalist lens, considering the diverse influences of media, social institutions, culture, and existing power structures on political actions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with the literature review, which aims to analyse political communication in 2024 Garut Regional Election. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of a candidate's political communication strategy as well as public responses through a variety of relevant secondary sources. In line with

opinion (Zuchri, 2021), the qualitative approach allows researchers to understand social phenomena more comprehensively through in-depth data interpretation, making it very suitable for use in political communication research involving social dynamics and public opinion.

In this study, the data sources encompass three main categories essential for analyzing political communication and electoral dynamics. Firstly, academic literature, including books and research articles, establishes a robust theoretical framework. Secondly, secondary data is gathered from mass media, political surveys, and reports from research institutes focusing on campaign strategies and public reactions to the 2024 Garut Regent Election. Thirdly, expert interviews with political journalist Abah Janur and political communication observer Tontowi Adnan (Abah Towi), who has firsthand experience in regional political campaigns, provide valuable insights into the political communication landscape. The integration of these sources facilitates a thorough understanding of the candidates' communication strategies.

The analytical approach employs discourse analysis and content analysis. Discourse analysis investigates how media outlets frame candidates' communication, revealing the political patterns and public responses. This method aligns with the perspective of (Damayanti & Hamzah, 2017), highlighting the interplay of language, power, and ideology in political discourse. Meanwhile, content analysis assesses communication across social media, news articles, and academic

sources to identify the political narratives crafted by candidates and their influence on voter preferences, reflecting the effective understanding of communication patterns as noted by Yusuf et al. (2020). Together, these techniques enable a comprehensive exploration of the candidates' strategies for enhancing their image and electability.

RESULTS

Candidate's Political Communication Strategy

The pair of Helmi Budiman and Yudi Nugraha in the 2024 Garut Regional Election carries a political communication approach based on personal branding and emotional closeness to the community. Based on content analysis from various local and national media, the couple's campaign strategy focuses on the image of Helmi Budiman as an experienced figure in government and has a good track record in regional development.

Their communication strategy uses social media as the main means to convey their visions, missions, and achievements during Helmi's tenure as Deputy Regent of Garut. (Coman et al., 2021) deep *Critical Discourse Analysis* emphasizing the importance of narratives built in political communication to shape public opinion. In this context, the Helmi-Yudi couple adopted an approach oriented to political storytelling, which is to display success stories and direct involvement with the community. In addition, they also utilize an interpersonal communication approach through face-to-face meetings with constituents, especially in rural areas.

According to (Damayanti & Hamzah, 2017) Communication strategies based on direct interaction can strengthen the emotional connection between candidates and voters because they display an authentic image of the candidate.

Meanwhile, the Syakur-Putri pair uses a more populist politics-based approach by emphasizing issues that are close to the grassroots community. According to (Imron et al., 2021) Populism in political communication plays an important role in building narratives *us vs them*, which is often used to attract support from certain groups. Their campaign strategy focuses on criticism of previous government policies and offers concrete solutions to the problems faced by Garut residents, such as infrastructure and social welfare.

Their campaigns are mostly carried out through open meetings, seminars, and public dialogues, as well as through conventional media such as radio and local newspapers. On the other hand, the couple is also active in digital campaigns by leveraging local political influencers to spread their message. According to (Ratnamulayani & Maksudi, 2018) The use of influencers in modern political communication is one of the effective strategies in attracting young voters who consume more information through social media.

From the comparative analysis, the Helmi-Yudi pair is superior in building a stable and experienced leadership image, while Syakur-Putri is more effective in building emotional attachment with voters through a populist approach. A political survey from an independent research institute shows that older voters

tend to support Helmi-Yudi because of his clearer track record, while younger voters are more interested in Syakur-Putri's narrative of change. This is in line with the findings (Sahad & Bin Shahrudin, 2018) which states that differences in voters' age and educational background can affect the way they receive political communication messages.

Public Response to Campaigns

Analysis of data from various social media platforms shows that the Helmi-Yudi couple gets more positive sentiments regarding leadership stability, while the Syakur-Putri couple gets more support from young people and social activists who want change. According to a report from Indonesian *Digital Democracy* (2024), discussion trends on Twitter and Facebook show that negative campaigns or attacks on political opponents appear more often in uploads that support Syakur-Putri compared to Helmi-Yudi's supporters.

This is in accordance with the concept of conflict political communication put forward by (Fadhlurrohman & Purnomo, 2020) Attack strategies are more often used by candidates who want to challenge incumbents or experienced figures. Some of the main factors that affect voter preferences in the 2024 Garut Regional Election include:

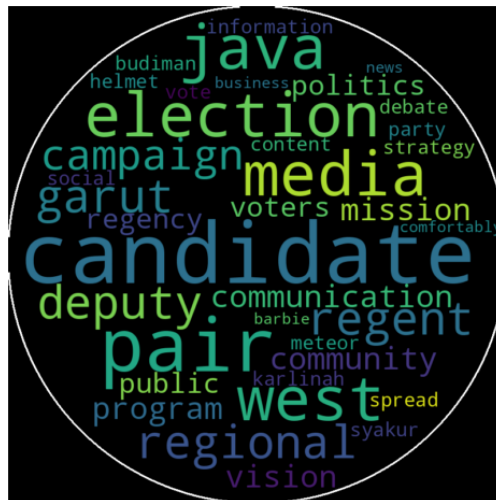
1. Candidate Image – More conservative voters tend to vote for candidates with a clear government track record (Helmi-Yudi), while progressive voters are more inclined to the narrative of change (Syakur-Putri).

2. Media Used – Voters who are active on social media are more affected by digital campaigns, while older voters still rely on conventional media such as television and radio.
3. Campaign Issues – Economic and infrastructure issues are the main factors influencing voters' decisions, with the Syakur-Putri pair being more vocal in criticizing the current conditions.

The level of voter participation in the campaign has increased compared to the

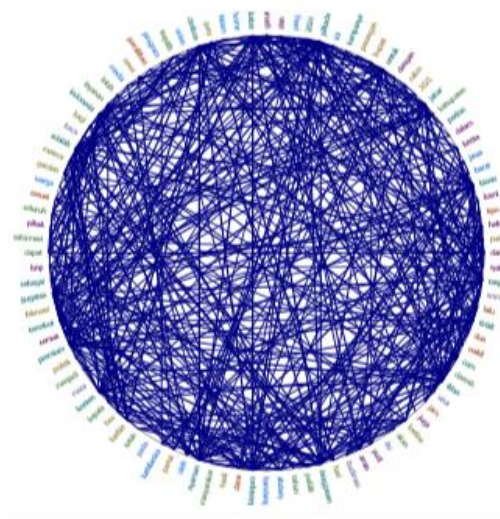
previous elections. A survey from the Indonesian Survey Institute (2024) shows that voter involvement in political discussions on social media increased by 25% compared to the 2019 Regional Elections. This shows a shift in the pattern of political communication, where voters are increasingly active in voicing their opinions through digital spaces. Here are the words that often appear in the katakana based on the mass media:

Figure 2. Word Frequency Query



This image represents a word cloud that visually conveys the most frequently occurring and relevant words from a data set related to the 2024 Regent Election (Pilkada) in Garut Regency. Key terms such as "arrow," "and," "which," and "couples" are prominently featured, indicating their significance in the local political discourse. Supporting words like "regents," "deputies," "campaigns," and "candidates" suggest a focus on the electoral process.

The inclusion of terms like "regency," "West Java," and geographical context reinforces the locale of the discussion. Additionally, words related to media, such as "media," "content," and "video," highlight the role of communication in the election narrative, possibly derived from analyses of news, social media, or related documents. The word can be seen in Figure 2 below:

Figure 3. Connectivity of Words (Nodes) in Political Campaigns

Source: Nvivo 12 Plus

This image depicts a network visualization highlighting relationships among interconnected nodes in a complex system, characterized by a dense elliptical shape and intertwined lines. Nodes on the perimeter exhibit varying colors, symbolizing specific entities like individuals or concepts. The high density of blue lines represents significant interactions, suggesting that all nodes are interconnected. This structure reflects characteristics typical of social networks, genetic analyses, or communication systems. In such contexts, individual nodes may represent entities like people or biological elements, with lines indicating relationships or interactions. Overall, the dense network illustrates a high level of interconnectedness, signifying collaboration, information flow, or inter-dependency within the system.

Views of Journalists and Political Observers

This research involves interviews with two experts who have strong backgrounds in the world of journalism

and political communication, namely Abah Janur, a political journalist, and Tontowi Adnan (Abah Towi), a political communication observer and 98 activist who has experience in political campaigns in the Garut Regional Elections. Through interviews and analysis of secondary data from various print and online media, in-depth insights were obtained into the dynamics of political communication that occurred in the 2024 Garut Regional Elections.

Abah Janur nur Bagus highlighted the change in political communication strategy in the 2024 Garut Regional Election, which experienced a significant shift compared to the previous election. He emphasized that digital media is now more dominant in shaping public opinion. The media framing in reporting on candidates also significantly affects public perception, with some media showing a tendency to side with certain candidates.

As an observer of political communication, Tontowi Adnan (Abah Towi) highlighted the dominance of

political digitalization in the 2024 Garut Regional Elections. Digital campaigns are the main tool in building candidate electability, with big data-based strategies to target specific voters. He also emphasized the importance of segmenting voters based on demographic and cultural characteristics.

The communication strategies used by both couples have a significant impact on their electability. The Helmi-Yudi pair is superior among voters who want government stability, while the Syakur-Putri pair attracts voters who crave change. The media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion about the two couples, according to the agenda-setting theory of the (Fadhlurrohman & Purnomo, 2020). Thus, the outcome of the 2024 Garut Regional Election will largely depend on the effectiveness of the communication strategy in the last weeks before the vote.

DISCUSSION

Political communication strategies are a key element in the success of a candidate's campaign (Silva & Proksch, 2022). In this case, the use of the right communication model can affect the way a candidate conveys a message to voters. According to *Elaboration Likelihood Model* (ELM), the selector can process messages through the central path and peripheral path (Rumata & Nugraha, 2020). The central path involves careful and rational voters, while the peripheral path involves emotional and symbolic factors that influence their decisions. Therefore, candidates who are able to use communication media effectively, whether through debates, social media, or face-to-face meetings, will be more

successful in building a positive image and attracting public sympathy.

The public response to a campaign depends largely on the message being conveyed and the extent to which the campaign can reach the right audience (McNair, 2017). In this context, (Taufiqurrohman, 2020) explained that voters are actively looking for media that can meet their needs, both in terms of information and entertainment. Therefore, voters who want to get information that is relevant and in line with their values will be more supportive of candidates who are able to present a message that resonates with their expectations. Candidates who understand how to use social media to respond to local issues and communicate their programs in an impactful way will get a positive response from voters (Fadhlurrohman & Purnomo, 2020).

To understand the dynamics of the campaign more deeply, interviews with experts such as journalists and political observers provide sharper insights (Rumata & Nugraha, 2020). These experts often judge the success of a campaign through the narrative built by the candidate. In this case, political communication using the media can be relevant because the media and the candidates themselves frame certain issues to shape public perception (Fadhlurrohman & Purnomo, 2020). If candidates can take advantage of the right framing, such as portraying themselves as changemakers or understanding local issues well, then their chances of gaining electoral support will be greater. Proper framing can create a positive image that sets them apart from competitors.

The electoral dynamics in the regent's campaign are greatly influenced by the political communication carried out by each candidate pair. The implications of success or failure in delivering a message can be seen from the results of electability surveys that show how much support each candidate gets. According to the theory *Rational Choice*, voters tend to choose candidates who are considered to be able to provide the greatest benefits to voters (McIntyre, 1992), especially in terms of improving welfare or regional development. However, emotional factors and perceptions of a candidate's trust and credibility also play an important role in voter decisions. Therefore, candidates who manage to touch the rational and emotional needs of voters have a greater chance of winning the election.

The success of a campaign is also heavily influenced by the selection of the right communication channels. For example, a campaign that relies heavily on social media can make candidates look more modern and close to young voters. However, if social media campaigns are not balanced with a clear substantial approach, it could instead create the impression that candidates only care about image and not substance. In this case, (Ratnamulayani & Maksudi, 2018) explained that the more relevant and relevant the message conveyed by the candidate, the higher the voter participation. Candidates who can combine the power of social media with real solutions to local problems tend to be more successful in mobilizing voters. Social media has a huge role to play in modern campaigns, given its wide and interactive reach. (Fadhlurrohman &

Purnomo, 2020) reveals that the media has the ability to influence public opinion by determining issues that are considered important. Candidates who can dominate the conversation on social media with relevant issues, such as infrastructure development, education, and health, will benefit significantly. Social media also allows candidates to build an emotional closeness with voters, provide a direct response to issues facing society, and confirm their commitment to the change desired by society.

One of the strategies that is often applied in political campaigns is negative campaigning, which is an attack on political opponents to reduce their electability. However, based on research that has been conducted by (Rahmat & Purnomo, 2020) suggests that excessive use of negative campaigning can be risky, as people tend to avoid talking about unpopular or unethical views. If the attack is perceived as unfair or too harsh, it can even worsen the image of the candidate who did it. Therefore, it is important for candidates to be careful in using these strategies and still maintain political ethics in their campaigns.

Local issues are important factors that affect the success of the campaign of the regent candidate. Voters tend to choose candidates who are able to understand and respond to their local needs. In this context, (Isnaini, 2020) shows that the community will be more active in voting if the community feels that the issues discussed are relevant to the life of the problems that occur. Candidates who successfully identify pressing local issues, such as infrastructure development, improving public services, or solving social

problems, will be better able to gain support from voters who feel their needs are heard and understood.

Electability surveys are often an important tool in predicting election outcomes, but the results can be greatly influenced by the way the survey is sampled and the questions are structured. (Topsümer et al., 2023) Research reminds us that surveys can only be accurate if the sample taken truly reflects the wider population. Therefore, although surveys provide a useful picture of voter tendencies, the results should still be read carefully, as various external factors or changes in campaign dynamics can affect the final result.

Electoral dynamics ahead of the 2024 General Election in Garut Regency depend heavily on how the candidates for regents manage their political communications and respond to developing local issues. In a majoritarian electoral system, the candidate who receives the most support will win the election even if they do not get an absolute majority. Therefore, it is important for each candidate to develop a campaign strategy that is in accordance with the characteristics of Garut voters, utilize existing media, and design messages that can attract sympathy from various community groups.

CONCLUSIONS

Research on political communication and voter response in the 2024 Garut Regional Election shows that the effectiveness of candidate campaigns is largely determined by their ability to integrate communication strategies with the institutional and social contexts developing in Garut society. Research

findings indicate that communication strategies do not operate in isolation but are influenced by local socio-cultural structures, such as Islamic boarding school networks, patronage politics, religious culture, and differing media consumption patterns across generations. The Helmi-Yudi ticket displayed a communication strategy based on portraying experience and leadership stability, which was more readily accepted by conservative voters and older groups who rely on traditional media. In contrast, the Syakur-Putri ticket utilized a populist approach by raising issues of change and criticizing the previous government, which proved more effective in attracting the attention of young voters and progressive groups active in digital media. The role of media, both traditional and digital, is very significant in shaping public opinion through the processes of framing, agenda setting, and the dissemination of political narratives.

Furthermore, this study found an increase in digital-based political participation, with voters increasingly actively expressing their political preferences and engaging in public conversations through social media. This phenomenon indicates that the Garut Regent Election has entered a new era of political digitalization, where the online space has become an arena for narrative competition that determines the direction of candidate electability. Analysis of the visualization of digital word networks and discourse also shows that the dynamics of political discussions in Garut are intense and interconnected, reflecting an increasingly complex and multidimensional political

communication process. Therefore, this study concludes that the success of political campaigns in the Garut Regent Election depends not only on the messages delivered by candidates, but also on how those messages are negotiated within the institutional, social, and media landscape that shapes voter behavior as a whole.

This study reveals several key findings that illustrate the dynamics of political communication and voter response in the 2024 Garut Regional Election. One key finding is the striking differences in the political communication strategies employed by the two candidate pairs. The Helmi-Yudi pair consistently built an image of stability, experience, and continuity of government through a personal branding approach and a narrative of success emphasized in various media, particularly traditional media and interpersonal communication channels. Meanwhile, the Syakur-Putri pair adopted a populist approach, emphasizing issues of change, criticizing previous policies, and employing a more emotional approach to attract sympathy from young voters and grassroots groups. These differences in strategy not only reflect each candidate's political preferences but also demonstrate their sensitivity to different voter segmentation and information consumption patterns.

Another finding indicates that voter segmentation plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of campaign messages. Older voters and conservative groups tend to be more easily influenced by messages emphasizing stability, experience, and continuity, while younger voters are

more responsive to issues of change, critical narratives, and creatively packaged digital campaigns. These findings are reinforced by digital discourse analysis, which shows that social media has become the primary arena for the narrative of change promoted by the Syakur-Putri ticket, while the narrative of stability promoted by the Helmi-Yudi ticket is disseminated more widely through conventional media. The role of the media also emerged as a key finding, with the analysis showing that framing and agenda-setting by local and national media directly influenced the formation of public perception and the direction of political support.

This study also found that local institutional structures, both formal and informal, influenced voter responses. Religious-based social networks, political patronage, and communal social structures in Garut play a significant role in determining public political preferences. In this context, the approaches taken by both candidate pairs demonstrate that campaign success was significantly influenced by their ability to adapt to these institutional structures. Furthermore, the digital analysis also revealed patterns of discourse polarization, where political topics in online spaces formed dense and interconnected discourse networks, indicating that narrative battles took place within a complex and dynamic ecosystem. These findings collectively illustrate that the effectiveness of political communication strategies depends on candidates' ability to manage narratives, understand social structures, and

appropriately utilize media to shape voter responses.

This study has several weaknesses that must be acknowledged to provide a more honest and proportionate picture of the research process and results. First, the main limitation lies in the data sources, which primarily come from media content analysis, secondary documents, and limited interviews with two expert informants. This reliance on secondary data has important implications for the accuracy of the representation of voter behavior, because without a broader and more in-depth primary survey, voter preferences, motivations, and response dynamics cannot be fully generalized. This condition makes the picture of voter behavior more indicative than conclusive. Second, this study still does not capture the geographic and demographic variations of voters, particularly in rural areas and among women, who in the Garut context have a significant influence on the direction of local politics. This deficiency can lead to blind spots regarding certain preference patterns, especially in a society that is highly socially and culturally heterogeneous.

Furthermore, one limitation lies in the predominance of analysis focused on media framing, potentially introducing media bias into the research interpretation. Because local and national media are not completely neutral, analysis that uses media as the primary data source can lead to representational bias toward certain candidates or issues. This study also fails to fully quantify the effectiveness of political communication strategies, for example through digital engagement, the effects of changes in voter preferences over time, or the

penetration rate of campaign messages across various voter segments. Finally, although this study utilizes a neo-institutionalist perspective to address the socio-political context of Garut, its application remains implicit and has not been fully incorporated into a systematic analytical model. This leaves the causal relationships between formal institutions, informal institutions, the media, and voter behavior unstructured. Overall, these weaknesses point to the need for strengthened methodological design and expanded data coverage for further research.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings and the identified limitations, several important recommendations can serve as a basis for further research and for political practitioners at the local level. First, future research needs to strengthen its methodological approach through more comprehensive primary data collection, particularly through structured and representative voter surveys. This is crucial for obtaining a more accurate picture of voter preferences, perceptions, and behavioral dynamics across various levels of society, especially considering the social, economic, and geographic heterogeneity of Garut Regency. Collecting more extensive field data will also help reduce reliance on potentially biased media sources in framing local political phenomena.

Furthermore, further research is recommended to more explicitly integrate a neo-institutionalist approach into the analytical framework. This approach allows researchers to formulate

clearer causal relationships between formal institutions, informal institutions, media structures, and political communication practices that influence voter behavior. By mapping institutional logics, path dependencies, and local social norms, future research can produce a more robust theoretical model to explain regional political dynamics. On the practical side, recommendations for political actors include the need to adapt communication strategies that consider voter segmentation based on media consumption patterns, age, and social background. Optimizing the use of big data-based digital media is highly relevant given the increasing political participation in the digital space, while maintaining an interpersonal approach to reach rural and conservative voters who still rely on face-to-face interactions. Thus, this research not only provides space for strengthening academic studies but also provides strategic guidance for developing more effective political communication that is responsive to the social dynamics of Garut.

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