

Political Capital, Rational Strategy, and Party Dominance in the Selection of the Vice Governor of the Riau Islands

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Abstract

This article discusses the role of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in the election of Isdianto as Deputy Governor of the Riau Islands in 2017. Using a qualitative approach, the study analyzes political dynamics, party interactions, and institutional mechanisms within the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). The findings suggest that Isdianto's election was shaped by rational political calculations and transactional exchanges between actors, particularly amidst the instability of the governing coalition. PDIP leveraged its political networks and institutional influence to facilitate Isdianto's nomination and appointment. The study also identifies procedural irregularities, including the emergence of a single candidate and acclamation voting, which contravened existing regulations. These dynamics demonstrate symptoms of cartel politics and highlight weaknesses in Pasal 176 of UU No. 10/2016. The study concludes that rational choice theory better explains observed political behavior, emphasizing power, interests, and resource exchange as key determinants. This study contributes to debates on local democracy, party system institutionalization, and political recruitment in Indonesia.

Keywords:

Rational choice; Deputy governor election; Riau islands; Political parties; Local politics.

INTRODUCTION

Local issues that previously received little attention in academic discourse began to gain wider recognition after Indonesia's reform era. The post-reform political transition introduced significant changes that reshaped local political dynamics in Indonesia. At least two major transformations significantly influenced the development of regional political processes after the collapse of the New Order regime.

The first transformation was the implementation of regional autonomy. Through decentralization, regional governments were granted greater authority to manage their own administrative affairs. One important consequence of regional autonomy was the introduction of direct regional elections.

The second transformation relates to the strengthening of political parties. After the reform era, political parties became central actors in the democratization process. Political parties are the only institutions officially

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recognized and permitted to participate in general elections, including regional head elections.

Through regional autonomy policies, regional heads have the authority to manage and administer regional government autonomously. The success of development and improving welfare in a region is determined by the competence of the regional head. In carrying out their duties, the regional head is assisted by a deputy regional head. In this study, the regional head and deputy regional head are referred to as the governor and deputy governor.

The position of lieutenant governor is often considered a supplementary and unimportant position. In Spanish, the position is called *vicegobernador*, and in the United States, Canada, and Australia, it is called lieutenant governor, which has roughly the same meaning as vice governor. In Australia, the lieutenant governor serves as an administrator or acting governor. However, in some states, if the governor is ill, he or she is replaced not by the lieutenant governor but by the Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court until the permanent governor assumes his or her duties. The lieutenant governor has no power whatsoever, except to act as a spare tire ready to assume the governor's office.

In Indonesia, the position of deputy governor has never been comprehensively regulated within a specific legal framework. Although the duties and functions of a deputy governor are outlined in Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government, previous laws, such as Law Number 1 of 1957, only regulated deputy regional

heads in special autonomous regions. In practice, the existence of a deputy governor has never been considered absolutely necessary.

Post-reform, the position of deputy governor has tended to become more political, especially after the enactment UU No. 10 Tahun 2016. As stipulated in Pasal 176 Ayat (2) regarding filling the vacant position of deputy governor, this is done through an election mechanism in a plenary session of the Provincial DPRD. This differs from previous regulations, namely UU No. 1 Tahun 2015 and PP No. 102 Tahun 2014 concerning the Provisions for Appointing Deputy Governors, which are the full authority of the governor.

During the 2016–2018 period, several provinces in Indonesia experienced vacant deputy governor positions. Of the 34 provinces, at least seven faced this situation: Aceh, Riau, Jambi, Bengkulu, Jakarta, Central Sulawesi, and the Riau Islands. These vacancies were generally triggered by political dynamics and legal issues following the enactment of the 2016 Regional Election Law.

The shift in the mechanism for selecting deputy governors (from executive appointments to legislative elections) significantly altered the local political landscape in Indonesia. On the one hand, this policy could strengthen political parties and democratic representation. However, it also opened up opportunities for political pragmatism. UU Number 10 of 2016 often encouraged political bargaining among party elites, especially when the ruling coalition party held fewer seats than the opposition party in the Regional People's

Representative Council (DPRD). This phenomenon was particularly evident in the election process for the Deputy Governor of the Riau Islands for the remainder of the 2016–2021 term. This phenomenon demonstrates how local political dynamics are heavily shaped by elite interests. There are indications of transactional politics among political actors.

This situation also demonstrates that decentralization and democratization do not automatically strengthen local governance institutions. Instead, they can create new arenas of political competition among elites. Political parties often use the vice gubernatorial election process as an instrument to consolidate power, maintain coalition stability, or secure strategic access to regional resources. As a result, the vice gubernatorial position becomes vulnerable to transactional politics and elite bargaining practices. In the long term, these dynamics can undermine the effectiveness of local government administration and erode public trust in democratic institutions. Therefore, a stronger legal framework and institutional reforms are needed to clarify the role of the vice governor and to ensure that local democratic processes operate more transparently, accountably, and in accordance with democratic principles.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article uses a qualitative method to examine the mechanism for selecting a Deputy Governor through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), proposed by the Governor through an

agreement between political parties or a coalition of political parties supporting him, a current issue. Qualitative research was chosen because it is always open and adaptable to new conditions and possibly changing conditions, along with the various realities that may be encountered. Therefore, through this method, this article seeks to answer the questions of why Isdianto was elected as Deputy Governor of the Riau Islands and how the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) played a role in his election. These two questions will be examined through the tug-of-war of interests that occurred within the Riau Islands Provincial DPRD and the Governor of the Riau Islands during the process of selecting and appointing Isdianto as Deputy Governor of the Riau Islands, up to Isdianto's political decision to join the PDIP.

In addition, this article also uses a literature review method to explain the results of the analysis of several sources of scientific papers or articles. This literature review is used through reading, reviewing, and taking notes related to the problem that is the focus of this article. This is in line with Nazir's (2003) opinion that a literature review is a data collection technique using a review of books, literature, notes, and reports related to the problem being solved. Meanwhile, to facilitate readers in understanding the application of the literature review, this article is presented descriptively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

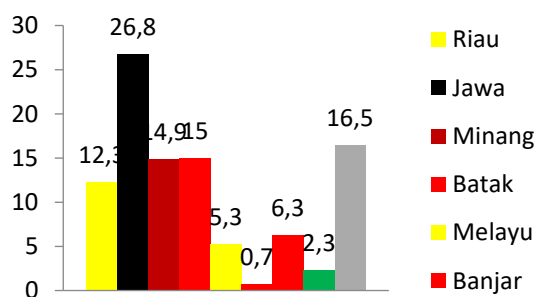
Map of local political power in the Riau Islands Province

In fact, only the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) was able to overthrow Golkar's dominance in

Batam City and the Riau Islands Regency in the 1999 elections. Meanwhile, Islamic-based parties like the United Development Party (PPP) and National Mandate Party (PAN) tended to receive fewer votes. PAN secured only 14.1% of the vote, while PPP secured 5.6%. Similarly, in the 2004, 2009, and 2014 elections, nationalist parties dominated the elections, compared to Islamic parties.

Batam contributed the most seats to the Riau Islands Provincial DPRD in the 2014 Election. With vote allocations across three electoral districts, it yielded 25 seats. In other words, more than half of the 45 members of the Riau Islands Provincial DPRD came from Batam's electoral districts (Batam A, B, and C). This supports the assertion that Batam is a target for political parties, including the PDIP.

Figure 1. Percentage of Ethnic Groups in Batam City



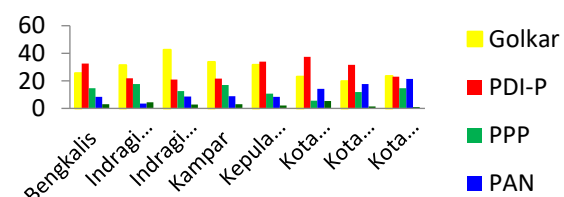
Source: Adapted from Kompas (2004)

Meanwhile, for the Riau Islands as a whole, the Malay ethnic group does not dominate, with a percentage of 29.97%. Followed by Javanese at 24.97%, Batak at 12.48%, Minang at 9.72%, Chinese at 7.70%, and others at 15.16%. The New Order government's transmigration policy is one factor in demographic change in the Riau Islands. In other words, the Riau Islands are dominated by

immigrants, especially the Javanese, whose percentage is higher than other immigrant groups. This is inseparable from the influence of the transmigration policy during the New Order era. In addition, President B.J. Habibie's policy through the Batam Authority. Industrial development accompanied by an increase in the rate of in-migration has made Batam one of the destinations for job seekers. However, Auda Murad (1977:18) identifies three types of immigrants in Riau Province: Minangkabau men who migrate to seek a livelihood, transmigrants from Java, and seasonal immigrants from Sulawesi. As a result, the demographics of the Riau Islands tend to be dominated by immigrants.

However, uniquely, those immigrants who have settled there tend to identify themselves as "Malay." This creates bias in categorizing the population based on ethnicity. The negative impact is that it is difficult to distinguish between local residents and immigrants. An exception is made for immigrants who are nomadic (not settled in the Riau Islands). The positive impact is that it minimizes friction within the community. Although, at certain times, the issue of "local sons" is sometimes raised, such as in the recruitment of Civil Servants (PNS) or elections.

Figure 2. Vote Acquisition by Five Political Parties in Riau Province in the 1999 Election



Source: Adapted from Kompas (2004)

However, in the 2004 Election, there was a change in the political map. This is in line with the view of Timothy J. Power in Cipto (2000:4-5), that: "The growth and development of a multi-party system will go through two stages. The first stage is the initial stage with an uncertain time span of between five to ten years. At this stage, many new parties that grow are often irrational, due to the simultaneous uncertainty that plagues the political community. Meanwhile, the second stage, involves strong party institutions and takes place after the first stage ends. At this stage, society in general is just beginning to realize how important it is to build a strong and institutionalized party system, where the number of parties becomes rational."

The success of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in electing Jokowi-JK marked a turning point in its control of the executive branch. PDIP returned to the government coalition. After two terms (2004-2009), they became the opposition. Previously, in the 1999 elections, they had won and become the governing party. However, it is difficult to categorize the opposition within the Indonesian party system. With a presidential system, the concept of opposition becomes blurred. It can be said that the opposition referred to here refers to parties that lose the election.

These parties do not receive ministerial positions in the current cabinet. Therefore, they are considered outside the government. Although this interpretation is somewhat loose, because the movement of parties is not static. The party that receives ministerial positions is not always the one that wins the election.

In the formation of this cabinet, there is a cartel phenomenon that Firman Noor (2018) calls a pragmatic coalition, or "nano-nano coalition" according to Moch. Nurhasim (2018).

This pragmatic party stance tends to be due to the high political costs of direct elections. Thus, parties will minimize losses from election defeat and adopt a more advantageous stance by joining the winning party after the election. Regarding this, Down (in Marsh and Stoker, 2010) once stated that parties are solely motivated by the desire for office and compete for votes by changing their policy foundations.

In the context of local politics in the Riau Islands, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) also saw an increase in seats in the 2014 elections. Interestingly, PDIP, which nominated the Soerya-Ansar ticket, lost in the 2015 Riau Islands regional elections. However, calculations indicate that the pair could have won the election. The difference in calculations for legislative and regional elections is due to the "figure" factor. During elections, the public or voters tend to focus on the "figure" of the candidate, rather than the party.

As a result, there is a significant difference in vote acquisition between legislative and regional elections. Previous research by Nankyung Choi (2005) found that there were additional votes cast for the Ismeth-Sani ticket in the 2005 gubernatorial election, compared to the number of votes cast for the coalition party in the 2004 legislative election. However, when PDIP returned to the gubernatorial election in 2015, it again failed. PDIP's victories and failures in

political contests (the 2014 and 2015 elections) influenced PDIP's bargaining position in the 2017 Riau Islands Deputy Gubernatorial Election.

Political Capital and Rational Strategy in Isdianto's Election as Deputy Governor of the Riau Islands

Although Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) held only nine seats in the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) of the Riau Islands Province, it exercised significant political influence through its control of the chairmanship of the legislature. Moreover, PDIP has been widely regarded as a respected political force in the region. Empirical findings from interviews and document analysis indicate that its local elites, such as Soerya Respationo, Lis Darmansyah, and Jumaga Nadeak, possess substantial social and political standing, reinforcing the party's influence at the local level.

Following the submission of candidacy documents to the electoral committee, Isdianto strategically initiated political engagement with Soerya Respationo, a key PDIP figure in the province. Interview evidence suggests that this approach began at the early stage of nomination. Initially, however, Isdianto had been nominated by Partai Demokrat through Apri Sujadi, with the intention of recruiting him into the party. This is corroborated by the minutes of a coalition meeting dated 27 December 2016.

The decision by the Democratic Party to nominate Isdianto was based on his symbolic and cultural capital. Nonetheless, this political calculation proved counterproductive, as Isdianto

eventually emerged as a rival rather than an ally. Party representatives later characterized this development as a form of "political drama," reflecting internal dissatisfaction.

From a theoretical perspective, Cheleen Mahar (2009), as cited in Halim (2014), argues that political legitimacy is rooted in symbolic capital. In this regard, PDIP possessed a comparative advantage over other supporting parties. Its institutional strength, particularly through the legislative authority of Jumaga Nadeak, constituted a decisive factor that attracted Isdianto. Amid the fragmentation and competing interests among coalition parties, PDIP appeared capable of offering political security and strategic support.

However, this dynamic also reveals a paradox. As noted by Halim (2014), public trust in political parties has declined in recent years. Consequently, political legitimacy depends not only on institutional strength but also on adherence to procedural norms. In this case, although formal legitimacy was achieved through institutional mechanisms, it remained contested due to procedural irregularities, specifically, the endorsement of a single *pancaindera* and the use of acclamation, both of which were inconsistent with established regulations.

Isdianto's decision to align with PDIP can be understood as a rational strategic choice shaped by political uncertainty. The coalition parties failed to provide a stable guarantee for his political advancement, as they were primarily driven by competing interests. His nomination was not the result of a unified agreement but rather a compromise

within a fragmented coalition. In contrast, PDIP offered a more coherent and reliable political pathway.

Importantly, PDIP's support extended beyond the selection process to the final stage of formal appointment. This reflects a reciprocal exchange of political resources: PDIP sought to consolidate its influence by incorporating Isdianto, while Isdianto required institutional backing to secure the vice governorship. Such interaction illustrates a mutually beneficial political arrangement grounded in shared interests in power acquisition.

Within the broader framework of regional autonomy, this case highlights the intensification of political competition at the local level following the implementation of decentralization policies, particularly under UU No. 10 of 2016. As argued by Kacung Marijan, such conditions increase the likelihood of elite fragmentation and shifts in power structures.

Following his inauguration, Isdianto openly demonstrated his political alignment with PDIP, including participation in party-related activities linked to the 2019 presidential election campaign. This public affiliation further confirmed the consolidation of his relationship with PDIP elites.

This relationship may be partially interpreted through the patron-client framework proposed by James C. Scott. While certain elements of the model, such as hierarchical dependency and resource asymmetry, are not fully applicable, key characteristics remain evident. These include PDIP's influence over Isdianto's political decisions and the subsequent

allocation of strategic positions within the party structure.

Additionally, Isdianto's prior association with Partai Demokrat, which had intended to recruit him as a cadre under the leadership of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, underscores the fluidity of party affiliation in Indonesian local politics. His eventual shift to PDIP reflects a pragmatic recalibration based on political opportunity structures.

As the ruling party at the national level following the 2014 general election, PDIP possessed structural advantages that extended to the regional context. Although it was not the dominant party in the Riau Islands DPRD, its national influence enhanced its bargaining power locally. This factor contributed significantly to its success in securing Isdianto's appointment.

The party's achievement was ultimately recognized by Megawati Soekarnoputri, who commended the performance of local party elites. Notably, this recognition was not solely based on resolving the institutional vacancy of the vice governorship, but also on PDIP's success in integrating Isdianto into its political structure.

The mutually beneficial relationship between Isdianto and the PDIP is best understood through this rational choice perspective. Both parties implicitly acknowledge the existence of an informal agreement, where political decisions are guided by calculated benefits. This transaction involves two rational actors: Isdianto as a candidate and PDIP as a non-coalition party with substantial political influence at both the regional and national levels.

The exchange itself revolved around power and position. Isdianto secured the position of deputy governor and, in return, demonstrated political loyalty to the PDIP. In return, the PDIP provided institutional support and political protection, thereby expanding its influence within the executive branch of the provincial government.

Several factors underpin the conclusion that Isdianto's appointment was fundamentally a political transaction. These include: (1) the designation of Isdianto as a single candidate, (2) his appointment through acclamation without voting, and (3) procedural inconsistencies with existing legal frameworks. Furthermore, PDIP's continued involvement throughout the process (including its role in ensuring his formal inauguration) reinforces this interpretation.

The relationship also reflects an exchange of political services: Isdianto sought support and legitimacy, while PDIP gained loyalty and strategic access to executive power in the Riau Islands, an influence it had previously failed to secure in the 2015 gubernatorial election. While no direct evidence was found regarding the involvement of other parties in this transaction, the possibility cannot be entirely dismissed and warrants further investigation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the rational choice approach provides the most effective analytical framework for understanding the relationship between Isdianto and PDIP. Political decisions in this context were driven by strategic calculations of cost and benefit, leading to the conclusion that a political transaction indeed

underpinned the selection of the vice governor.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the political transaction between the elected vice governor and Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) can be traced back to the candidacy stage within the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). PDIP's extensive political networks within government institutions became a decisive factor influencing Isdianto's choice to align with the party as his political vehicle. This decision was largely shaped by the unstable and fragmented condition of the SANUR governing coalition. Internal tensions, largely invisible but structurally significant, emerged among coalition parties and intensified following the passing of Muhammad Sani. Consequently, the coalition formed during the 2015 gubernatorial election began to weaken, as constituent parties increasingly prioritized divergent interests and political self-preservation.

Eventually, the coalition reached an agreement to nominate two candidates: Isdianto and Agus Wibowo. These names were formally resubmitted to the DPRD. Under normal circumstances, this would have led to a standard electoral process consistent with institutional regulations. However, complications arose when Agus Wibowo was disqualified for failing to complete the administrative requirements set by the selection committee.

The situation subsequently deteriorated. Coalition parties faced dual pressures: the urgent need to fill the vice gubernatorial vacancy and persistent

internal disagreements. Political fragmentation intensified, with the governor and coalition parties shifting responsibility among themselves. The governor—who also chaired the regional leadership of Partai NasDem—remained committed to his preferred candidate, Rini Fitrianti, despite the agreement of other coalition parties to nominate Mustofa Wijaya as Agus's replacement. Notably, in the final coalition meeting, no representative from NasDem endorsed the agreement.

This fragmentation became evident in the process of filling the vacant gubernatorial position. An initial proposal involving five candidates was rejected as inconsistent with legal regulations. Although the coalition later agreed on two candidates (Isdianto and Agus Wibowo) the process was disrupted when Agus was disqualified. Subsequent disputes among coalition parties, particularly involving the NasDem Party, further deepened the deadlock.

This political deadlock was strategically utilized by PDIP, particularly through the authority of the DPRD leadership and the selection committee, to exert pressure on both the governor and coalition parties. This was evident in the imposition of strict deadlines for nominating a replacement candidate. Ultimately, Isdianto emerged as the sole candidate in the DPRD plenary session held on 7 December 2017.

Significantly, both the designation of a single candidate and the final appointment of the vice governor were decided within the same plenary session. These decisions were formalized in DPRD Decrees No. 40 and 41 of 2017. This

moment represents the central empirical finding of this study, revealing the increasingly evident alignment between Isdianto and PDIP. Although not explicitly declared, PDIP's support was signaled through the presence of Soerya Respatono, the provincial party chairman, along with party cadres who attended the session.

Several procedural irregularities marred the decision-making process. First, although the DPRD leadership declared a quorum for the session, representatives from two coalition parties (NasDem and PKB) were absent, as directed by their respective party leaders. Their absence constituted a form of political defiance against the decision.

Second, the DPRD's decision to approve a single candidate, as stipulated in Decree No. 40 of 2017, was formally challenged by Surya Makmur Nasution of the Democratic Party, who led the special committee responsible for drafting election procedures. He argued that the decision violated both statutory law and the DPRD's own procedural regulations. However, this objection was ultimately rejected.

Third, the decision to appoint Isdianto was made by acclamation, not through a formal voting process. This directly contradicts Pasal 26 of DPRD Regulation No. 2 of 2017, which requires a secret ballot during plenary sessions. The absence of a voting process constitutes a significant deviation from established democratic procedures.

These findings can be interpreted through the lens of rational choice theory, particularly as articulated by James Samuel Coleman, which emphasizes the

interaction between actors and resources within a framework of power and interests. In this case, the position of deputy governor represents a scarce political resource. PDIP has the institutional power to facilitate Isdianto's appointment, while the coalition parties have the formal authority to nominate candidates. Both actors operate within a framework of strategic calculations aimed at maximizing political gain.

However, the process featured several procedural irregularities: the absence of coalition parties, Democratic Party representation, and the use of acclamation instead of voting, which violated existing regulations. These irregularities raised questions about the legitimacy of the process.

Using James Samuel Coleman's rational choice framework, this study interprets the case as an interaction between actors and political resources. The position of deputy governor is a scarce resource, while the PDIP has the power to secure Isdianto's appointment. Both actors engaged in strategic calculations to maximize political gain.

The relationship reflects a mutually beneficial exchange: Isdianto gains political power, while PDIP gains loyalty and expands its influence within the provincial government. This reciprocal arrangement supports the conclusion that the selection process was shaped by rational political calculations and constituted a form of political transaction.

Theoretical Implications

This study shows that political decision-making in the Riau Islands deputy gubernatorial election was

primarily driven by rational calculation, challenging Richard Scher's argument that electoral success relies more on emotional appeals. The behavior of Isdianto, the coalition parties, and the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) reflects the logic of rational choice, where actors pursue maximum gain. The coalition parties supported Isdianto for his electoral achievements, while PDIP supported him to expand its political influence and recruit him as a cadre.

These findings also reveal institutional weaknesses in UU No. 10/2016, particularly Pasal 176, which allows for procedural irregularities and indications of cartel politics, such as the nomination and confirmation of a single candidate. These practices, combined with passive resistance from parties like NasDem and PKB, suggest elite collusion. Consistent with James Samuel Coleman's argument, political actors strategically exchange power and resources. Overall, this case highlights weak party institutionalization, regulatory gaps, and the need for clearer mechanisms to ensure democratic and accountable regional leadership elections.

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