

## THE ROLE OF ELECTORAL CAMPAIGNS IN STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION (A Case Study of The 2024 Legislative Election In North Sumatra)

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**Abstract :** This study aims to examine how electoral campaigns contribute to strengthening democratic participation in the 2024 Legislative Election in North Sumatra. Conceptually, electoral campaigns serve as a vital instrument in democratic systems, functioning as a communication bridge between candidates and voters that can enhance political awareness and encourage civic engagement in the electoral process. The research explores the dynamics of campaign implementation in North Sumatra, including the strategies employed by political parties and legislative candidates, the influence of social media, and the role of civil society. The findings indicate that informative and inclusive campaigns have a significantly positive impact on voter participation, particularly among young voters and first-time voters. However, several challenges remain, such as vote-buying practices, the spread of misinformation, and low political literacy, all of which can hinder democratic consolidation at the local level. This study highlights the importance of implementing stricter campaign regulations, continuous political education, and collaboration among the General Elections Commission (KPU), political parties, and civil society organizations to foster a more participatory and democratic electoral process. A qualitative case study approach was adopted to examine the function of electoral campaigns in enhancing democratic participation during the 2024 Legislative Election in North Sumatra. The qualitative method was chosen for its ability to investigate socio-political phenomena in a contextual and in-depth manner, based on the experiences and perspectives of individuals directly involved in the campaigns. Campaigns that emphasized information-sharing, inclusivity, and the use of social media were found to be effective in stimulating participation, especially among youth and novice voters. Nevertheless, persistent challenges such as money politics, the spread of hoaxes, and weak political literacy continue to hinder the improvement of democratic quality at the local level. Therefore, campaign regulations particularly those concerning digital media must be reinforced, and public political awareness must be improved so that voters can think critically and are not easily influenced by disinformation or transactional politics.

**Keywords:** Electoral Campaign, Democratic Participation, 2024 Legislative Election, North Sumatra, Local-Level Democracy

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## Introduction

General elections are a fundamental pillar of contemporary democratic systems, serving as a primary channel through which citizens participate in shaping political leadership and direction. In the context of Indonesia, legislative elections are not only arenas for competition among political parties, but also act as benchmarks for evaluating how well democratic values are developing and taking root within society. One of the most essential elements of the electoral process is the electoral campaign, which functions as a bridge between candidates or parties and voters. Electoral campaigns are not merely tools for political promotion, but also serve as strategic communication spaces to build public awareness, influence decision-making, and encourage active civic engagement in democratic processes. The transformation of information technology and the rise of social media have significantly altered campaign practices, shifting them from conventional approaches to more interactive and segmented formats.

This study focuses on the 2024 Legislative Election in North Sumatra Province, a region characterized by rich social, cultural, and political diversity. One of the noteworthy phenomena in this election is the variety of campaign strategies adopted by candidates, as well as the dynamic patterns of voter participation, which differ considerably from previous election cycles. Therefore, it is crucial to analyze how electoral campaigns are implemented and the extent to which they impact the enhancement of democratic participation among the public. Using a case study approach, this article aims to evaluate the role of electoral campaigns in strengthening political engagement, particularly in relation to voter participation in the 2024 Legislative Election in North Sumatra. The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the advancement of electoral democracy in Indonesia.

## Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach using a case study method to explore the role of electoral campaigns in enhancing democratic participation during the 2024 Legislative Election in North Sumatra. The qualitative method is employed due to its ability to investigate socio-political phenomena in a contextual and detailed manner, based on the experiences and perspectives of individuals directly involved in the campaign process. The research was conducted in selected areas of North Sumatra that reflect political and social diversity, including Medan City, Deli Serdang Regency, and Padangsidempuan City. These locations were chosen based on their high electoral dynamics and variation in voter participation levels. The fieldwork took place between March and May 2024, covering the campaign period through to the post-election phase.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants, including legislative candidates, campaign teams, election officials (KPU and Bawaslu), political observers, and voters from various backgrounds. In addition to interviews, the researcher conducted direct observations of campaign activities to examine political communication patterns, mass mobilization strategies, and interactions between candidates and the public. The researcher aimed to capture the meanings and dynamics that emerged from informants' narratives and the observed social contexts. To ensure data validity, triangulation techniques were applied in terms of sources, methods, and timing. Furthermore, interview findings were cross-checked with multiple informants

to verify the accuracy of the collected information. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive picture of how electoral campaigns contribute to building more substantial democratic participation at the local level.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Concept of Electoral Campaigns and Democratic Participation**

Electoral campaigns are political communication activities aimed at influencing voter preferences by conveying the vision, mission, and programs of candidates or political parties. In an election-based democratic system, campaigns serve as a primary tool for building political image and gaining public support. Campaigns can be conducted through various channels, including mass media, social media, and direct meetings with voters (Rahmatullah, 2024). In the digital era, social media plays a crucial role in political campaigning. Through social media, candidates can interact directly with voters and disseminate information quickly and broadly. However, challenges such as the spread of fake news and increasing polarization of public opinion have also intensified alongside the growing use of social media in political campaigns (Afrita, 2024).

Democratic participation refers to the active involvement of citizens in political processes, including elections, public discourse, and political decision-making. Such participation is a vital indicator of democratic health, as it reflects the extent to which the public feels they have a voice and influence within the political system. The level of political participation can be influenced by several factors, including educational attainment, access to information, trust in political institutions, and the effectiveness of political campaigns. To enhance democratic participation, it is necessary to empower citizens through political education, transparency in political processes, and the provision of effective communication channels between the government and the people (Setiawan, 2023).

### **The Dynamics of the 2024 Legislative Election Campaign in North Sumatra**

The General Election for members of the People's Representative Council (DPR), the Regional Representative Council (DPD), and the Regional House of Representatives (DPRD) in 2024 commonly referred to as the 2024 Legislative Election is a nationwide political event scheduled to take place on February 14, 2024. This election aims to select representatives at the national (DPR and DPD) and regional levels (provincial and municipal DPRD) for the 2024–2029 legislative period. The legislative election is held concurrently with the 2024 Indonesian presidential election.

This study highlights the candidacy of Irham Buana Nasution, whose political background offers a unique and compelling case. As a former Chairperson of the North Sumatra Provincial General Election Commission (KPU) and a legislative candidate from the Golkar Party in the 2014 election, he possesses extensive experience and insight into the political landscape. His involvement in electoral management and candidacy reflects a rich political trajectory (Sahala Fransiscus Marbun, 2025).

Furthermore, his contributions in articulating public aspirations and engaging in political party activities make his case particularly relevant to this study. The exploration of Irham Buana Nasution's political journey is expected to provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of legislative campaign strategies in enhancing political participation. As a former KPU Chair, he stated that his involvement in politics

through a political party represents a step toward realizing political parties as the "fourth pillar" of democracy. By joining a political party, he aims to achieve democratic goals more effectively. In addition to spending 14 years as an advocate at the Medan Legal Aid Institute (LBH) and 10 years serving on the KPU, Irham Buana Nasution aspires to advance the interests of North Sumatran society through politics. He chose the Golkar Party for its perceived political stability and long-standing history of navigating national dynamics. He expressed no concern about being viewed as an "opponent" by other parties after resigning from the KPU, stating, "Although we represent different parties, our goals remain the same."

There are four notable differences between the 2019 and 2024 elections: the scheduling of regional elections (pilkada), the profiles of presidential and vice-presidential candidates, administrative verification processes, and the level of inter-party competition. The 2024 election has also been marked by unexpected developments, including the resurgence of identity politics and debates surrounding the flagship programs of the presidential and legislative candidates. One major change is the reduced campaign period now limited to 120 days (approximately four months) a measure intended to simplify the election process and address prior criticisms of excessively long campaign durations. This change may also reflect adaptation to the increased efficiency enabled by digital technologies in modern political campaigns (Manullang, 2024).

According to the Final List of Legislative Candidates released by the North Sumatra Provincial General Election Commission (KPUD) for Electoral District (Dapil) North Sumatra I, which covers Medan City A (including sub-districts such as Medan Kota, Medan Denai, Medan Deli, Medan Belawan, Medan Amplas, Medan Area, Medan Marelan, Medan Labuhan, Medan Tembung, Medan Perjuangan, and Medan Timur), 18 political parties have nominated a total of 172 legislative candidates for the 2024 election. However, only 10 seats are available in this electoral district, meaning that approximately just 5.5–6% of candidates will be elected. Therefore, political communication and campaign strategy will play a critical role in the success or failure of Irham Buana Nasution's political branding efforts as a legislative candidate in the 2024 election. This study seeks to analyze the political campaign of Irham Buana Nasution within this context (Amanda, 2024).

### **The Impact of Campaigns on Voter Participation**

Political campaigns are one of the primary tools in a democratic system, serving as a means of communication between candidates or political parties and voters. Through campaigns, information regarding candidates' visions, missions, work programs, and personal characteristics can be delivered to the public. The success of a campaign in conveying persuasive political messages significantly influences voter decisions, particularly among undecided voters or swing voters. Therefore, campaigns play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, attitudes, and ultimately, political participation (Koli, 2024).

The extent to which campaigns influence voter participation largely depends on how effectively the campaigns are executed whether through mass media, social media platforms, or direct face-to-face meetings. Campaigns that are engaging, informative, and aligned with the needs of the community can enhance political awareness and motivate citizens to cast their votes on election day. Conversely, campaigns that are negative, filled with misinformation, or treated merely as formalities may lead to

political apathy and a decline in voter turnout. Hence, the quality of campaign content and its delivery method are critical factors in building public trust and engagement.

In addition, campaigns can create broader avenues for public participation, especially when they involve communities, civil society organizations, and young people in political activities. Active public engagement in campaigns such as volunteering, participating in political discussions, or sharing campaign content via social media can foster a sense of ownership over the democratic process. In this context, campaigns not only influence voting decisions but also serve to strengthen political education and citizen involvement in national and civic life (ARY Fauziah, 2024).

### **Challenges and Implications of Electoral Campaigns in Strengthening Local Democracy**

Electoral campaigns are a critical element of the democratic process, particularly within the context of local democracy in Indonesia. Through campaigns, candidates and political parties are given the opportunity to present their vision, mission, and policy agendas to voters. However, campaign implementation at the local level faces numerous challenges that can affect the quality of democracy. These obstacles are not only technical and administrative in nature but are also related to political culture, advancements in information technology, and the integrity of political actors.

One of the primary issues in contemporary electoral campaigns is the growing phenomenon of disinformation and opinion manipulation through social media. According to the *Journal of Digital Democracy Challenges in the 2024 Election* published by the General Elections Commission (KPU), the use of trolls and the spread of hoaxes during campaigns can significantly undermine the quality of democracy. Digital campaigning, which should ideally modernize voter participation, has instead become a tool for polarization, damaging the public's capacity for critical thinking. This polarization leads to social fragmentation and makes it difficult for citizens to distinguish between credible and misleading information, ultimately weakening the decision-making process in elections (Yulianto, 2018).

Moreover, existing regulations governing digital campaigns have not kept pace with the dynamics of the social media era. The lack of strict oversight on digital campaign content encourages political actors to pursue popularity through quick and superficial means, rather than engaging in meaningful and constructive discourse. This situation is further exacerbated by low levels of digital literacy among the public, which makes them more vulnerable to political manipulation. A study titled *The Dynamics of Political Campaigning in Electoral Democracy*, which examined the 2018 gubernatorial election in Central Java, showed that although conventional campaign methods such as face-to-face interactions and print media remain in use, they have undergone significant transformation due to the emergence of social media. While campaign strategies have become more innovative and are able to reach wider audiences, classic problems such as money politics continue to hinder efforts to achieve a high-quality democratic process. Money politics undermines the integrity of elections and reinforces political patronage systems that are fundamentally at odds with the principles of equality and fairness in democracy.

The impact of unhealthy campaign practices on local democratic strengthening is substantial. Democracy, which should ideally guarantee rational and deliberative political participation, has instead been replaced by pragmatic and transactional practices. Voters are increasingly inclined to choose candidates not based on

competence or integrity, but rather on emotional connections, identity, or material incentives. This trend compromises the accountability of elected leaders and erodes public trust in democratic institutions.

To strengthen democracy at the local level, urgent reforms in campaign governance are necessary. This includes enhancing regulations on digital campaigns, increasing public political and digital literacy, and strictly enforcing laws against campaign violations. Electoral campaigns should serve as an educational platform for the public to assess leadership candidates objectively, rather than becoming arenas for identity-based conflicts or the distribution of short-term political incentives (Sinaga, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

Electoral campaigns play a crucial role in fostering democratic participation, particularly in North Sumatra during the 2024 Legislative Election. Campaigns that are informative, inclusive, and utilize social media have proven effective in enhancing voter engagement, especially among the youth and first-time voters. However, serious challenges such as vote buying, the spread of misinformation, and low political literacy continue to hinder the improvement of democratic quality at the local level.

To increase democratic participation, electoral campaigns must be conducted in a transparent, educative, and accountable manner. Campaign regulations, particularly in digital platforms, need to be strengthened, and public political awareness must be improved to enable voters to think critically and resist manipulative or transactional political practices. Collaboration among electoral institutions, political parties, and civil society organizations is essential in building effective campaigns and fostering a more substantive and inclusive democratic process.

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