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POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF THE INCUMBENT REGENT OF BANGGAI TO INCREASE ELECTABILITY IN THE 2024 BANGGAI REGIONAL ELECTION CONTESTATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the political communication implemented by the incumbent Regent of Banggai in an effort to increase electability in the 2024 Banggai Regional Election. Amidst increasing voter rationality and the complexity of local political dynamics, political communication has become a crucial instrument for building image, expanding support, and strengthening leadership legitimacy. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design and applies Harold D. Lasswell's communication model of Who says what in which channel to whom with what effect? to analyze the communication carried out. The main informants in this study consisted of eight figures, including the incumbent, his winning team, and coalition party leaders. The results show that the incumbent acts as the main communicator with a political narrative that emphasizes development success, increased regional budget (APBD), religious character, and social

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closeness. The communication channels used include formal channels (mass media, billboards, and government forums), informal channels (field visits, face-to-face), and digital channels (Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook), which are tailored to voter segmentation, such as religious voters, millennials, rational voters, and swing voters. The communication effects showed a significant increase in electability, public engagement, and the formation of a positive image of the incumbent as a religious, responsive, and visionary leader. By integrating a media convergence approach, values-based messaging, and structured audience segmentation, the incumbent's political communication strategy proved effective in maintaining and expanding public support. This research contributes to the development of political communication studies, particularly in the local context and regional head elections.

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the democratic process is realized through the implementation of general elections and regional head elections, which aim to ensure the election process is carried out openly and democratically with freedom of opinion and association, reflecting the participation and aspirations of the community. (Elita et al., 2024) The principle of a democratic state is to uphold the constitution and ideology within a country. (Lutpiani, 2021) Freedom in social and political rights is an indispensable guarantee for achieving a state order that upholds democracy so that existing aspirations can be properly channeled (Nuna & Moonti, 2019). Democracy is widely recognized as the most ideal system of government by most countries in the world, including Indonesia. Since the beginning of independence, Indonesia has demonstrated a consistent commitment to the principles of democracy (Tanrasula & Akbar, 2022),

even though along the way it has experienced various forms of change and dynamics (Azhar, 2020). The political stage is understood by some as a stage full of intrigue. Of course, this opinion is not entirely correct. Politics itself is actually born from a system of justice and the struggle to achieve prosperity, which has been proven to create widespread shared goals. (Alamsyah & Misnan, 2021) Political communication is a part of political activity that aims to convey messages (Aminulloh, 2010) that are characterized by politics and carried out by politicians who are targeted, namely the public. In the current digital era and the acceleration of information, social media (Syarbaini et al., 2021) also influences political communication. A political actor, a candidate for regional head, needs to build, maintain, and manage their self-image (Hayat et al., 2024).

This interesting phenomenon can be seen in the regional political dynamics of Banggai Regency, Central Sulawesi, particularly in the lead-up to the 2024 regional elections. Banggai Regency is a strategic region geographically, economically, and socio-politically. In recent decades, Banggai Regency has experienced significant growth in infrastructure and economic development, paralleled by increasing regional political dynamics. A structured political communication approach is used to maintain the candidate's image and increase electability among the public (Transformative, 2024).

The incumbent Regent of Banggai's strength lies in his accessibility (Adita et al., 2022) to government resources, high public visibility, and the success of previous programs directly experienced by the public. However, this strength does not guarantee success in the Banggai regional elections, as the public is now increasingly rational, critical, and selective in choosing leaders. Therefore, an appropriate political communication approach (Junadi et al., 2023) is crucial not only for maintaining a base of support but also for expanding the reach of new constituents. The incumbent must demonstrate that his or her leadership during office has had a real impact and addressed the needs of the pluralistic and dynamic community of Banggai Regency (Kalah et al., 2021). In this context, the political communication approach (Lopulalan & Pendahuluan, 2023) employed by the incumbent Regent is particularly interesting to examine, as it

reflects how an incumbent constructs a narrative of success, strengthens electability, and effectively utilizes communication media (Aisyah & Sutan, 2024) to create positive political resonance among voters. This political communication approach is inextricably linked to the use of social media (Politics, 2015), direct meetings, programmatic campaigns, and intense interpersonal communication with various community groups, religious and traditional leaders, and youth.

The 2024 Banggai Regional Election (Pilkada) was also marked by various political dynamics, such as the emergence of strong political opponents, sensitive local issues, and the tendency to polarize public opinion on social media. (Nurul Hasfi, 2019) Amidst this situation, an adaptive, participatory, and locally focused political communication approach (Abda, 2024) is key to maintaining and increasing an incumbent's electability. The ability to respond to strategic issues, engage various elements of society, and present concrete solutions to existing problems are indicators of successful political communication (Azhar, 2020).

Through this study, the author aims to analyze the political communication approach used by the incumbent Regent of Banggai as a candidate in the 2024 Banggai Regional Election (Setiadi, 2025), particularly in the context of increasing electability amidst increasingly fierce competition. This research is not only important for understanding local political phenomena in Banggai Regency but also contributes academically to the study of political communication in the context of regional head elections. This research uses a qualitative approach with Harold D. Lasswell's political communication theory, which emphasizes the questions, "Who says what, through what channel, to whom, and with what effect?" (Lasswell, 2022).

Thus, the political communication approach in the 2024 Banggai Regional Election, particularly that undertaken by the incumbent Regent of Banggai, is a relevant object for study to understand how political communication is used as a strategic tool to maintain power and strengthen electoral support at the local level.

Provide background of the study in easy words. In this section author should

discuss the research problem in very clear words. Also discuss the motivation of the study. Provide intext references in APA style for all the facts that are presented here.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Communication

Political communication is the process of conveying political messages between political actors and the public or voters, with the aim of shaping political perceptions, opinions, and behavior. According to McNair (2003), political communication encompasses all forms of communication used by political actors to influence public opinion, directly or through the media. In the context of regional elections, political communication encompasses not only conventional campaigning but also digital activities, social media, and even interpersonal interactions. Political communication becomes highly strategic when carried out by an incumbent, as they not only convey their vision and programs but also maintain the legitimacy of their past performance. In regional head elections, successful political communication is a key indicator of winning voters, as it can shape public perceptions of the candidate's competence and integrity (Wahid & Luhur, 2020).

Incumbents in the Context of Regional Elections

Incumbent status offers both advantages and challenges. On the one hand, incumbents have advantages because they already have a platform of power, access to resources, and a track record of performance that can be capitalized as electoral capital. On the other hand, incumbents must also face criticism, high expectations, and negative sentiment regarding previous policies. Incumbents tend to leverage their institutional capacity to maintain power, but without the right communication strategy, this can backfire. Therefore, it is crucial for an incumbent to build persuasive, open, and responsive communication to the public's needs (Norris, 2014).

Media and Political Communication Convergence

In the digital era, political communication is inextricably linked to the use of social media and media convergence. Media convergence combines various communication channels, from print, electronic, and digital media, into a single political communication ecosystem. Political figures, such as incumbents, utilize social media to reach voters directly, build two-way interactions, and disseminate narratives of success quickly and widely. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become key tools in modern political communication. Using these platforms, political messages can be conveyed visually, emotionally, and segmented, tailored to the demographic characteristics of voters. This suggests that candidates' intensive use of social media can enhance emotional connection with voters, especially the younger generation (Political Communication in the Social Media Era, Faridhian Anshari, Lecturer, STT PLN Jakarta, 2013).

Harold D. Lasswell's Communication

The communication model developed by Harold D. Lasswell (1948) serves as an important framework for understanding the dynamics of incumbent political communication. This model explains five main components in the communication process: "Who says what, in which channel, to whom, with what effect?" In this study, Lasswell's model is used to analyze how the Regent of Banggai, as a political communicator, conveys his electoral messages through various channels to the public with the aim of increasing electability. The "who" element refers to the incumbent's credibility and influence. "Says What" encompasses political narratives about development, service delivery, and religiosity. "In Which Channel" describes the various communication media used, from face-to-face to digital. "To Whom" refers to voter segmentation in Banggai Regency, and "With What Effect" measures the impact of these communications on public opinion and electability (Lasswell, 2022).

Lasswell's model provides a simple yet powerful analytical framework for examining how political communication strategies are systematically implemented and have a real impact. In the context of the 2024 Banggai Regional Election, the use of this

model allows researchers to evaluate the extent to which the incumbent's political communications are able to reach the target audience and change their political attitudes and preferences.

Previous Studies

Several previous studies have strengthened the relevance of this approach, including a study discussing the resilience of incumbents in maintaining their candidacy in the Probolinggo Regency regional elections, highlighting the role of political parties and civil society in the incumbent's re-election process. Key findings indicate that the incumbent's success is not driven by a positive image or achievements, but rather by the practice of power dominance, intimidation of civil society, and political opportunism from supporting parties. The incumbent is depicted as using a semi-authoritarian approach, where fear and obedience are systematically cultivated, rather than through participation and positive influence. Furthermore, a study on the Political Campaign Strategy of Incumbent Candidates in Loss-Prone Areas (Case Study in Garut) explores a new phenomenon in local politics in Garut Regency: the success of the incumbent pair Rudy Gunawan and Helmi Budiman (RGHB) in re-election for a second term in 2018. This victory is particularly noteworthy because Garut is known as a region prone to defeat for incumbent candidates. The results of this study indicate that the success of the RGHB is determined by the strategy of selecting the right communicator, effective message delivery, and media support that strengthens the loyalty of existing voters and attracts new ones. This study makes an important contribution to the development of political campaign strategy concepts, particularly for incumbent candidates seeking to retain power in areas with high levels of resistance.

Table 1: Informant Data Table

No	Name	Position	Party
1.	Ir. H. Amirudin Tamoreka, MM., AIFO	Banggailncumbent Regent of Banggai,	Golkar Party's main supporter
2.	Dr. Abdul Ukas Marzuki, SH., M.H	Position as a member of the legal team during the Banggai Regent's victory,	Nasdem party
3.	Hasman Balubi, S.H	Position as party chairman and winning team	Perindo party
4.	Irfan Bungaadjim, S.H	Position as deputy chairman of the Regional Representative Council (DPD) and winning team	Demokrat party
5.	Muhamad Ramdan S.I.Kom	Position as license official	Golkar party
6.	Deny Chahyarso	Position as license official	PPP party
7.	Wahyu Faturrahman, S.Pd	Position as license official	Pan party
8.	Muh Syamsul Alam, S. Ak	Position as deputy secretary for election winning 1	Golkar party

Source: Banggai, 2025

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore the political communication employed by the incumbent Regent of Banggai in an effort to increase electability in the Banggai Regional Election. The research subjects included the incumbent Regent of Banggai, his campaign team, and representatives from the coalition political parties involved in the election process. Informants were selected purposively based on predetermined criteria, resulting in eight key informants. These

informants ranged in age from 28 to 40, with the majority residing in the Luwuk area of Banggai Regency.

The selection of these eight informants was based on the consideration of obtaining in-depth data and rich experience related to political campaign activities in the Banggai Regional Election. These considerations align with the principles of qualitative research, which emphasize depth of information over quantity of informants. The selection of research subjects was conducted purposively, taking into account the informants' backgrounds and experiences as political actors with a contextual understanding of local political dynamics, particularly in the Banggai Regional Election.

This research focuses on the political dynamics occurring in the Banggai Regional Election contest, particularly in relation to the political communication approach that can increase electability and enable the incumbent Regent to be re-elected for a second term. This study also highlights the incumbent's efforts to navigate the political competition with two other candidates, Sulianti Murad and Herwin Yatim. Through the involvement of the winning team and key figures from the supporting political parties who wield significant influence, this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the incumbent regent's political communication approach.

This research yields an in-depth description based on direct interviews with eight informants selected according to predetermined criteria. The data collection process was carried out through interview, observation, and documentation techniques, which holistically provide an overview of the political communication approach implemented by the incumbent Regent of Banggai in his efforts to maintain electability and re-win the 2024 Banggai regional elections contest. The empirical findings from the field were then systematically analyzed by researchers using Harold D. Lasswell's political communication theory approach, namely, Who says what, through what channel, to whom, and with what effect?. in order to understand how communication strategies are implemented in the local political context. This model shows five main elements in the communication process, which are also the basis for the study of political

communication, especially to understand how political messages are delivered, received, and influence society.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

This research yields an in-depth description based on direct interviews with eight informants selected according to predetermined criteria. Data collection involved interview, observation, and documentation techniques, which holistically provide a picture of the political communication approach employed by the incumbent Regent of Banggai in his efforts to maintain electability and re-elect the 2024 Banggai Regional Election. The empirical findings from the field were then systematically analyzed by the researcher using Harold D. Lasswell's political communication theory to understand how the communication approach is implemented in the context of regional politics.

1. The incumbent's central role as the primary communicator, who enjoys legitimacy due to his position and experience.

The incumbent Regent of Banggai is the primary actor in this political communication. As the incumbent, he must hold a strategic position due to his already well-known public reputation through his performance during his previous term. In Lasswell's model, the element "who" refers to the communicator delivering the political message. The incumbent Regent of Banggai's identity as a regional leader reflects his religious credentials, and the acceleration of development can provide him with symbolic power and credibility in conveying his message.

The incumbent Regent does not work alone; he receives significant support from a coalition and campaign team comprised of prominent figures from the supporting parties Golkar, Perindo, PAN, Demokrat, and PPP; religious figures; and young volunteers active on social media. This communication network strengthens message distribution and broadens the reach of political communication.

The incumbent's role in designing the campaign rhythm, determining campaign points, and crafting the narrative demonstrates his communicatorship, not only symbolically

but also operationally. He builds his message based on a deep understanding of the Banggai Regency community, both sociologically and culturally.

In this context, the primary communicator is the incumbent Regent of Banggai. However, communication is also carried out by supporters, political parties such as the Perindo Party, and volunteer networks. They play a key role in shaping the public narrative about the incumbent's image and capabilities.

As reported in interviews with Perindo Party cadres, the incumbent Regent of Banggai is portrayed as a leader with a strong sense of structured development. In other words, the communicative actors here are not only the incumbent Regent himself but also representatives of the parties supporting him.

2. Delivering Political Messages Based on Performance and Social Closeness

The main messages conveyed in the incumbent Regent's political communication revolve around his success in regional development, increased regional budgets (APBD), his religious character, and his closeness to the community. This message also reflects his visionary leadership, which cares not only about regional development but also about spiritual matters.

For example, the incumbent regent is considered successful in renovating the office complex in the Halimun area, the city's economic center, and designing a sports center in the northern region. All of this is packaged in a narrative that the incumbent Regent of Banggai has a clear plan and understands the direction of development, with a proven track record. This message from political communication is reinforced by data such as the increase in the regional budget from 1.3 trillion to 3.2 trillion during his term.

3. Holistic Utilization of Communication Channels in the Incumbent's Electoral Strategy

Political communication is conducted through various channels, both formal and informal. Formal channels include government activities, local mass media, billboards, and official campaigns. Meanwhile, informal channels include direct face-to-face

interactions with the community, visits to Islamic boarding schools and mosques, and personal outreach.

Interestingly, the communication process also involves emotional engagement through symbols and concrete actions such as the laying of the cornerstone for the construction of an Islamic boarding school and the making of personal donations. This represents a strong cultural and religious channel in the context of the religious community of Banggai Regency.

In modern political communication, the choice of communication channel is crucial. Amirudin utilizes various communication channels simultaneously, both formal and informal, digital and face-to-face. This demonstrates the optimal use of Lasswell's "in which channel" principle.

Some of the main channels used include:

- a) Social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Facebook, which are effective tools for reaching young voters and fostering emotional closeness.
- b) Local media outlets like Radar Sultim and Kabar Luwuk convey performance achievements and administrative legitimacy.
- c) Face-to-face meetings, Ramadan field trips, and development visits strengthen physical presence and social connectedness.
- d) Religious and cultural activities, deepening closeness with religious and traditional communities.

This multi-channel strategy creates strong communication synergy, connecting all elements of society with diverse characteristics. The success of this channel can be seen in the high level of community engagement in online and offline activities initiated by the incumbent Regent of Banggai.

4. Voter Segmentation as a Pillar of Effective Political Communication for the Incumbent

The target audience for this political communication is the entire community of Banggai Regency, with an emphasis on religious voters, rational voters, and loyal voters. Communication is directed at constituents who desire sustainable development and government stability.

The message is also directed at swing voters who are skeptical about alternative candidates. With a narrative of concrete success and strong leadership, the incumbent's political communication is engaged with this group with a convincing, data-based, and action-based communication approach.

The incumbent's political communication is directed at strategically segmented audiences. The "to whom" element of Lasswell's model demonstrates that the political communication approach is not generic but specific to the characteristics of the audience.

There are three main groups:

- a) Religious voters, approached through religious activities and spiritual programs.
- b) Young and millennial voters: approached through social media campaigns, political concerts, and visual content.
- c) Rational and professional voters, civil servants (ASN), and entrepreneurs, targeted through the presentation of data on development successes and national awards.

This segmentative approach demonstrates that the incumbent Regent of Banggai is able to accurately read the voter landscape and tailor messages and channels based on audience needs. This concept is also implemented spatially, namely by intensifying communication in areas such as Toili and Balantak, which were voter strongholds in the previous regional elections.

5. The Effect of Political Communication in Shaping Collective Perception and Public Support

The targeted effect of this political communication approach is to increase the electability of the incumbent Regent of Banggai ahead of the 2024 Regional Elections. Interviews revealed that many parties have begun to change their views and re-support the incumbent Regent, even those from parties that previously did not support him.

Figure 1: Electability Data Image



Sources: Banggai Times, 2024

Another effect is the formation of a collective perception that a leader is worthy of being continued, not only because of their position as incumbent, but also because of their achievements and character. In the terminology of this political communication approach, victory in the realm of public perception is often more decisive than the program itself.

The final element of Lasswell's model is the impact or effect of communication. In the context of the political communication of the incumbent Regent of Banggai, this effect can be seen across various dimensions, including:

- Electoral effect, demonstrated by a significant victory in key voter bases.
- Image effect, where the public views the incumbent Regent of Banggai as a religious, responsive, and non-populist leader.
- Public trust effect, where the public demonstrates loyalty based on direct experience with the incumbent regent's response to public complaints.

- d) Psychological effect, where emotional attachment, especially among young voters, is reflected in a positive response to the campaign in the media.

This effect is multi-layered, ranging from the cognitive dimension of knowledge to the affective dimension of emotion to the conative dimension of action. This positive effect also serves as an indicator of successful political communication.

Provide logical, and scientific analysis of findings of the study. Present evidences to support your analysis by citing work of earlier researchers or existing theories. In order to support the display of articles that make it easier for readers, it is limited to a maximum of seven (7) tables and/or images and/or graphics.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the political communication conducted by the incumbent Regent of Banggai to increase electability ahead of the 2024 Regional Election is a structured, adaptive, strategic process based on voter segmentation and the use of multiple communication channels. This approach is analyzed using Harold D. Lasswell's communication model, which encompasses five elements: who says what in which channel to whom with what effect.

- a) The incumbent acts as the primary communicator, possessing political credibility, symbolic prominence, and concrete leadership experience. He not only serves as the primary face of the campaign but also designs his own communication rhythm and political message, supported by a network of coalition political parties and volunteers.
- b) The political message conveyed emphasizes development success, increased regional budgets, religious values, and social closeness with the community. The narrative constructed is tailored to the psychological and rational needs of voters while also demonstrating a track record and vision for sustainability.
- c) The incumbent's communication strategy utilizes various channels, including formal (mass media, billboards, official government forums), informal (face-to-

face meetings, impromptu visits, religious outreach), and digital (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook). This media convergence approach reaches a broader and more heterogeneous spectrum of voters.

- d) Communications are targeted at sociologically and demographically mapped voter groups: religious voters, young millennial voters, professional/rational voters, and swing voters. This segmentation allows for the delivery of relevant, personalized, and emotional messages.
- e) The effects of the political communications conducted show positive results in the form of increased electability for the incumbent in various local surveys, the formation of a public image as a religious and accomplished leader, increased public engagement in the campaign, and emotional loyalty from young voters. These effects encompass cognitive (knowledge), affective (perception/emotion), and conative (support for action) aspects.

Overall, the political communications conducted by the incumbent Regent of Banggai have proven effective in maintaining and expanding electoral support. The combination of values-based communication, diverse channels, and sharp audience segmentation are key to successfully managing his image, strengthening legitimacy, and increasing electability ahead of the 2024 Banggai Regional Election.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses solely on the political communication of the incumbent Regent of Banggai during the 2024 election, limiting generalizability to other regions. Second, the qualitative approach with eight key informants makes the findings highly influenced by subjective perspectives. Third, the analysis is centered on Harold D. Lasswell's model, leaving factors such as social media algorithms underexplored. Fourth, time constraints prevented a longitudinal analysis of public perception shifts during the campaign. For future research, longitudinal studies, mixed-method approaches with large-scale surveys, comparative studies across regions, and investigations into social media algorithms, big data, and digital technologies are recommended.

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