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## The Role of Local Community Leaders in Electoral Mobilization: A Case Study of the 2024 Deli Serdang Regent Election

Maya Br Ginting<sup>1</sup>, Prayetno<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This study employed a narrative inquiry method. It used qualitative techniques such as in-depth. The lack of understanding and participation of the people of Pematang Johar village in the Regional Election contest is a big challenge for local community leaders in winning the candidate pair. Local community leaders use their positions, relationships, and social networks to attract the people's voices. This research aims to find out the role of local community leaders in attracting the voices of the people of Pematang Johar Village, Labuhan Deli District, Deli Serdang Regency, in the 2024 Deli Serdang Regent Election. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive. The theories used in this study are John T. Sidel's theory of local bossism and Joel S. Migdal's theory of local strongman. The type of data used is primary data and secondary data. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documents. Data analysis techniques are reduction, display, verification, and triangulation. The study results show that local community leaders actively participate as mobilizers, motivators, and facilitators in winning Asriludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo candidate pairs. Hermawan, as a youth leader and sub-district coordinator, plays his role in the electoral system by capturing many people's votes, assisted by other important figures such as businessmen, youth, and religious figures, in launching his role as social, economic, and political capital. Hermawan takes advantage of his position and spreads his network to various circles, ranging from millennials to political elites. Local community leaders use economic capital for campaign purposes. Local community leaders also play a role as socio-political control that becomes a locking and motivating force to support the candidates loyally.

**Keywords:** *Regional Head Election, Leadership Roles, Local Community Leaders.*

### A. Introduction

The implementation of democracy occurs in various regions of Indonesia, one of which is the regency area. The contestation of the regional head election (Pilkada) at the district level is one of the indicators of the implementation of democracy at the local level. The regional elections are a forum for people's aspirations to actualize their voting rights and determine a leader believed to be decent, qualified, and able to provide better changes for their regions. The election is defined as the stage of selection and the determination of a representative who is worthy of occupying a position in the government (Ndona & Yasmin, 2024). The election of regional heads is considered a means for the community to show its legitimacy to the leaders based on the principles of direct, general, free, secret, honest and fair (luber jurdil). However, its implementation is often not in accordance with the basic principle of general elections. This is due to the involvement of certain parties that influence

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<sup>1</sup>Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia [mayaginting.3212411004@mhs.unimed.ac.id](mailto:mayaginting.3212411004@mhs.unimed.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia .

the voice of the people, such as local community leaders who are commonly referred to as local strongmen.

Local community leaders significantly influence society, especially ahead of electoral contests in Indonesia. This is due to the strong resources owned by local community leaders. The prevailing political system also affects the existence of local community leaders, such as the implementation of regional autonomy decentralization, which opens up opportunities for community elites to be freer to exercise their power. Decentralization is the forerunner of the formation of local power because of the authority and opportunities for local strongmen to move (Mukmin, 2012b). Implementing this direct electoral system also impacts the formation of this patronage relationship, which makes the position of local community leaders in Indonesia more widespread and stronger. Patronage is considered the distribution of material resources through clientelist relationships with the personal power to achieve a political goal and benefit (Prayetno et al., 2023) The client-patron relationship is considered to be a relationship that occurs between two unbalanced groups that have nothing in common in terms of both economic, social and power (Pinem et al., 2023).

The presence of local community leaders who use power, positions, and social networks has a negative impact on elections in Indonesia. One of these adverse impacts can be seen from the injury of the principle of free choice in elections. The injury to the principle of freedom in elections certainly impacts the problem of the fading of one of the civic competencies, namely civic disposition. Civic disposition is the most important dimension because it is a place where civic skills and civil knowledge come together (Wahyudi et al., 2020) Civic disposition is a characteristic of citizenship that describes characters and personalities that are important in the formation of community democracy (Pinem et al., 2021).

Regional elections are one of the important instruments that determine the direction of development of a region. However, in its implementation, some challenges come from the quality of the voters. This is also related to the weakness of political education built into society, which impacts the fading of civic competence and weakens the realization of a healthy democracy. This is why political education in society is important. Through the role of education, people's thinking skills and moral skills will be formed (Jamaludin et al., 2023). Education can also form the ability to think critically and participate in creating a democratic life (Mukmin & Sihaloho, 2024) Not only through education, the application of Pancasila values to society must also be carried out because the values contained in the foundation of this state function to fortify Indonesian society in terms of thinking and to behave and forming a good socio-moral awareness (Dharma et al., 2021) Citizenship politics is also one of the moral protectors of society, and can strengthen civic competence through civic politics to strengthen the implementation of democracy in Indonesia (Mukmin et al., 2019)

The phenomenon of local strongmen has been flourishing throughout Indonesia since the implementation of the open electoral system. This phenomenon touches the province, district, and village areas in the Pematang Johar village area. At the initial observation pre-research stage, it was found that there was a lack of public interest in voting and the role of local community leaders in the Pematang Johar village community in the 2024 Regional Elections. Local community leaders in this village have strong modalities (social, economic, political) and socio-political control so that their presence impacts the community's suffrage. The local community leaders came from several figures such as religious leaders, youth leaders, and business people, including Mr. Hermawan as a youth leader who became the

coordinator of the Labuhan Deli sub-district to win the pair of Asri Ludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo.

Hermawan expanded his relationship by involving Mr. Gunawan Purba as a businessman, Mr. Muhammad Saiful as a youth leader and Mr. Muhammad Munawir Alhafiz S.Ag as a religious figure in Pematang Johar Village. Through a strong position and relationship with the community it makes it easier for local community leaders to play their role in attracting the people's vote to win the pair of Asriludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo in the midst of the siege of the political culture that has been built in the people of Pematang Johar village.

The lack of public interest in voting and the formation of a political culture in the Pematang Johar Village area can be seen from the data findings, as many as 11,840 permanent voter lists, only 4,313 used their voting rights, 64% of the golput numbers were printed. This indicates that community participation is still passive because many do not use voting rights. Political participation is still weak, many people who passively do not participate in creating a participatory political culture (Ivanna et al., 2018) In the election event, the role of local community leaders in attracting votes from the people became a big challenge. It is a big challenge because the society that forms the political culture is a relatively more advanced but still passive in terms of participation. Local community leaders in this condition should be wise in educating, providing information and direction to the community to use their voting rights appropriately and neutrally actively.

The reality that was encountered, the role of local community leaders in attracting the people's votes was not entirely wise because they still took advantage of their positions, positions and relationships to the people of Pematang Johar village in addition, in carrying out their roles, local community leaders also capitalized on candidate pairs to attract many people's votes. Hermawan as a youth leader and the Coordinator of Labuhan Deli District took advantage of the position of the candidate pair in attracting the people's votes to affect the community's civic disposition. Based on this background, the researcher is interested in researching the role of local community leaders in capturing the people's voice amid the political culture formed in the Pematang Johar village community. The author chose the village area because the village is an important place to observe the democracy that is formed to build a developed country with integrity starting from the smallest level, namely the village (Ivanna & Siboro, 2024).

## **B. Methods**

The type of research used is qualitative descriptive because it aims to explain a condition in which the researcher observes the object of study and then is exposed to what has been observed (Morissan, 2024). The method used is qualitative; this method makes the research results more complete, flexible, and in-depth. The research variable in this study is a single variable. Research variables are defined as concepts with diverse values (Wahyudi et al., 2022). Research variables are used to highlight the research and then draw conclusions.

Subjects were selected using the purposive sampling technique, a technique used to select informants to match the research criteria so that the results achieved were precise and accurate. The subjects in this study include the main speakers from community leaders, namely Mr. Hermawan, Mr. Saiful Bahri, Mr. Gunawan Purba and Mr. Muhammad Munawir Alhafiz S.Ag. Other supporting informants were fellow local community leaders

who were attracting the voices of the people, which amounted to three people, including Mr. Muhammad Safril, Mr. Suhartono, and Mr. Sumariyono. The researcher also strengthened this research by involving the community as key informants as many as three people, namely Mrs. Isnaini Novita Sari, Muhammad Badawi Kurniadi and Dina Rindiani.

The research instruments used were interview sheets, observation sheets, and documentation. The data sources used in this study are primary and secondary data sources. The data analysis technique used by the author is in the form of data reduction, at this stage, the author will collect various kinds of data sources, both through the results of interviews, observations and documents found, then select and classify according to the research category and summarize the data obtained according to the theme raised by the author, while for data that is not used, the author will throw it away. The next stage is the presentation of data, the author will construct the categories of data collected presented through a brief description or narrative text so that the research produced is directed and does not produce biased meanings, then the author verifies and triangulates the data so that the findings are scientific and easy for readers to understand.

### **C. Results and Discussion**

The open proportional system provides convenience for local community leaders in capturing the people's votes, but behind this convenience, there are obstacles in the form of a lack of community participation in voting. To overcome this, local community leaders play their role in order to win the candidate pairs that are carried. The roles include local community leaders in the open proportional system and local community leaders mobilizing the people's votes to choose candidate pairs carried by this system to have a positive impact and provide an easy gap for local community leaders to enter.

The role of local community leaders as a social, political and economic modality is as a mobilizer and facilitator who bridges the community's convenience, especially in the health sector such as the creation of BPJS and KIS. Through the social capital owned in the form of social networks and beliefs formed in the community, both from millennials such as IPK mass organizations, PP, youth organizations, BKPMRI mosque youths, civil servants and PKK, the taklim council makes it easier for local community leaders to play their roles. The next capital is political capital, which includes positions held by local community leaders. This capital is the main capital in shaping legitimacy and capturing the people's vote. Finally, in economic capital, this capital has a considerable impact in winning the carried candidate pairs. Through this capital local community leaders play the role of facilitators who bridge and provide easy public access to the government, especially in the fields of health and mail administration. The economic capital owned by local community leaders is sourced from the winning candidates, themselves and joint non-governmental organizations. The funds are used to launch their role as facilitators to capture the people's votes, campaign, facilitate pick-ups on election day, become a fleet for sick people, eat and drink to celebrate victory.

The last role in winning the candidate pair is socio-political control. Local community leaders carry out socio-political control and carry out their role as motivators to pay attention to the team and the community, evaluate network performance, provide an in-depth understanding, approach to winning teams, political parties, and direct the community to participate, obey the law, and supervise control of black campaign violations. The implementation of this control certainly has an impact on the ease of local community leaders in attracting the votes of the

people, and relations, and, of course, the big impact felt is an absolute victory for the candidate pairs that are carried. The discussion is explained in more depth as follows

### **1. The Role of Local Community Leaders in the Electoral System**

Based on the theory initiated by John T. Sidel and Joel S. Migdal, local community leaders are included in the local strongman cluster, namely, local strongmen who influence the local area of their community. Local community leaders include religious leaders, youth leaders, and business leaders. This is in line with Soerjono Soekanto's role theory, which defines role as a behavior caused by several factors such as position, certain positions, and a person's personality. Data found in the field of Hermawan as a youth figure in the community, with his position as a sub-district coordinator in the 2024 Regional Elections, by carrying the candidate pairs Asriludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo, who acted as mobilizers, mobilized the support base and social networks to support the candidate pairs being carried. Hermawan, in launching his action, was supported by other important figures such as Muhammad Saiful as a youth leader and village coordinator, Gunawan Purba as a businessman and secretary in the Pematang Johar village food brigade, and Muhammad Munawir as a religious figure and the founder of the Ayatul Mubarak Islamic boarding school.

The current state of democracy in the 21st century hit various countries, including Indonesia, and this current situation has brought changes in political sustainability in Indonesia (Sihaloho, 2017). The power of the new order ended precisely from 1967 to 1998, when Indonesia underwent political changes, one of which was marked by regulatory reforms. Elections in Indonesia have changed from closed to open, Indonesia has successfully held elections since 1999 and the continuation of the Regional Elections began in 2005. The regional elections, which are carried out with a direct open proportional system, are an instrument that strengthens the solid establishment of autonomous democracy in each region in Indonesia (Mukmin, 2012a).

Based on a review of several studies, it is said that the open proportional system can be interpreted as a general election procedure that allows people to use their voting rights to choose the leader candidate they support (Ansor et al., 2023). Both closed and open proportional systems cannot eliminate dirty practices in democratic parties, such as political money, gratuities, and clientelism (Safitri & Nurdin, 2024). According to Jimly Asshiddiqie, the open proportional system brings various negative impacts and uncommendable acts such as money politics, gratuities, local strongmen and other frauds, but behind that of course there are positive impacts achieved as stated by Al Muzammil Yusuf, a PKS politician and deputy chairman of commission 3 of the House of Representatives who considers that the proportional system can strengthen the position of political parties and political education among ordinary people (Halim, 2014). Agreeing with the speakers who said that the open proportional system provides many opportunities and positive impacts for community leaders.

The open proportional electoral system produces a positive impact on local community leaders themselves because this system provides a gap for the entry of local community leaders and makes it easier for local community leaders to play their role as facilitators and mobilize people's votes, in addition to that through an open proportional electoral system, local community leaders are more likely to be close to candidates even though there are many positive impacts and opportunities that local community leaders get cannot be denied. The challenges in the field are in the form of lack of community participation, public confusion due to the large number of candidates chosen and educated people so that it is difficult to be influenced to choose the candidate pairs that are carried. In line with the results of observations that show the role played by local community leaders and the winning team in carrying out their role as mobilizers

to capture the people's votes, the facilitators distributed existing resources to educate the community.

## **2. The Role of Local Community Leaders as Social Capital**

The role of local community leaders as social capital in winning the number 2 candidate pair has a considerable contribution; the greater the capital accumulation owned by community leaders, the greater the chances of victory achieved. According to Robert Putnam, social capital is one of the potential sources owned by society, which is established in the form of relationships, values, beliefs, norms, and other knowledge that make parties interdependent with each other. This capital includes social networks, norms and values of beliefs, knowledge, and skills local community leaders possess (Mulawarman et al., 2023). Pierre Bourdieu also defines social capital as any form of actual and potential resources related to social networks. Social capital is a form of candidate support because of the work of personalities who create a sense of trust in the community and create a network that will support candidates (Mbolang et al., 2020).

Social capital is obtained from the existence of social networks and trust formed in the community. The social network was built through his role as a motivator, emotional closeness with various groups ranging from millennials such as IPK mass organizations, PP, youth organizations, BKPMRI mosque youths, PKK, taklim councils. The social network has been built for many years directly and indirectly through social media to launch its role as a mobilizer and facilitator that bridges the ease of public access to the government, especially in the health sector by providing assistance in managing BPJS and KIS. Trust in the community is built by socializing, not lying to the community and playing their speaking ability. The results of the observations show that there are indications of the use of social capital during the campaign period, and local community leaders often involve their social networks to win the candidate pairs.

## **3. The Role of Local Community Leaders as Political Capital**

The role of local community leaders as political capital is also no less important in winning the 02 candidate pair. Based on the opinions of J.A. Booth and P.B. Richard, political capital is defined as citizens' activities to achieve power and democracy. Political capital can be interpreted as the basis of support and power obtained from political parties and political elites, both from political and social organizations (Mbolang, Tokan, and Boro 2020). Political capital comprises the support of political parties and winning teams (Irsat, 2022). The role of local community leaders as political capital based on the results of interviews and observations is obtained from social capital, which is then converted into political support by proving performance, deepening communication so as to attract other political elites to collaborate together in addition, in terms of converting social capital into a form of political support, local community leaders capitalize on the position of *paslon* 02 in launching their role in facilitating the community, especially in the in the health sector. Local community leaders are also actively using social media to play their role in winning the candidate pairs.

The political support that has been formed certainly makes it easier for local community leaders to win the election and makes it easier for local community leaders to establish relationships with political parties in order to contribute to facilitating operational finances and of course through the position of local community leaders themselves provides opportunities to strengthen their position as community leaders and their work becomes a great capital to attract the people's votes. Local community leaders maintain legitimacy among the community through their political capital by socializing, consistently supporting and inviting the community, providing service assistance, and distributing aid funds to make it easier for the team to carry out its role as facilitators, motivators, and mobilizers. Local community leaders in this case,

collaborated with a coalition of political parties such as Hanura, Gerindra, PDI Perjuangan and other parties assisted by the support of council members such as Amit Damnik

#### **4. The Role of Local Community Leaders as Economic Capital**

The role of local community leaders as economic capital has a considerable impact in winning the candidate pair. Economic capital is very important because it is the main driver or lubricant of the political machine in campaigning (Mbolang et al., 2020). Economic capital plays an important role in a decision-making contest, especially if the decision-making contest tends to be influenced by money (Mulawarman et al., 2023). The economic capital local community leaders own is sourced from the winning candidates and the joint non-governmental organizations.

To obtain the source of funds, the winning candidates choose local community leaders. Local community leaders allocate the source of funds to the team that has been formed, as the flow of the sub-district coordinator is directly chosen by the winning candidate. The sub-district coordinator chooses the coordinator in each village, and the village coordinator chooses the hamlet coordinator to facilitate the allocation of funds. Then, special teams were formed again to launch the role of local community leaders as facilitators and mobilizers. The funds collected are used to capture the people's votes, campaign, facilitate pick-ups on election day, and provide fleets for sick people and food and drink funds for the victory party.

#### **5. The Role of Local Community Leaders in Socio-Political Control**

The last role in winning the candidate pair is socio-political control. Travis Hirschi introduced the theory of social control, which essentially states that criminal behavior is caused by an event or condition in the social environment, and therefore, social control is necessary. This theory is centered on techniques and strategies used to control human behavior to conform to and obey the rules that apply in society (Reyhan, 2022). Based on the results of observations and interviews in the field, local community leaders carry out social control by becoming motivators who pay attention to the team and the community. Other social control is carried out by evaluating network performance, providing in-depth understanding, maintaining communication and providing service assistance and always inviting cooperation with the community as a form of political control by approaching the winning team, legislative candidates, and political parties and directing the public not to violate the law and provide control supervision of black campaign activities.

Implementing the control certainly has an impact in the form of making it easier for local community leaders to attract the voice of the people, and expand relationships and brotherhood. In addition to the holding of control based on public recognition, they become reluctant if they do not vote and of course the big impact felt is an absolute victory for the candidate pair that is carried out.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The main role of local community leaders in Pematang Johar village is to win the number 2 candidate pair, namely Asriludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo through the time base they have. Hermawan as a local community leader, youth leader as well as the coordinator of Labuhan Deli sub-district assisted by other community leaders in launching his role as a mobilizer, motivator and facilitator. The role of local community leaders is influenced by other supporting factors including the electoral system, modalities and socio-political control carried out. Local community leaders play the role of mobilizers, in the open electoral system the community has the opportunity to elect their candidate leaders directly, this is a golden

opportunity and makes it easier for local community leaders to capture the people's votes through their follower base, in addition to their role as a modality, be it social, political and economic capital, making it easier for local community leaders to capture votes and become people's facilitators. Local community leaders also play a role in socio-political control, making it easier for local community leaders to become motivators for the people to remain loyal and confident in choosing the candidate pairs they carry. This is the role played by local community leaders in capturing votes, increasing community participation, and winning the candidate pair Asriludin Tambunan and Lom-lom Suwondo.

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