LEGISLATIVE *INCUMBENT* VICTORY STRATEGY IN BINTAN REGENCY, RIAU ISLANDS IN 2024

Rayhan Sabrina[1], Bismar Arianto[2], Rizky Octa Putri Charin[3]
Government Science Study Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences,
Raja Ali Haji Maritime University, Tanjungpinang City, Indonesia
Email: rayhansabrina1717@gmail.com[1], ongahbismar@yahoo.com[2],
rizkycharin@umrah.ac.id[3]

Keywords:	Abstract
Political Strategy, Incumbent, Electoral Victory	*This study aims to analyze the winning strategy of Suhardi, SE, an incumbent legislative candidate for the Bintan Regency Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the 2024 election. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The findings reveal that Suhardi successfully implemented two offensive strategies: market expansion and market penetration. The market expansion strategy targets new voter segments, including first-time voters, interfaith communities, and local social groups, by distributing constituency programs sourced from DPRD initiatives and collaborating with various local government agencies. The market penetration strategy focuses on maintaining voter loyalty through consistent communication and active participation in social and religious activities. This success was supported by an active campaign team and structural backing from the NasDem Party. Notably, Suhardi, as a candidate from a religious minority, gained substantial support in Muslim-majority areas. The study concludes that success in local politics is significantly influenced by social proximity, concrete public service performance, and inclusive, consistent communication strategies.*

INTRODUCTION

Elections are a concrete form of popular sovereignty guaranteed in the national legal system and provide broad participation space for the community to form a legitimate government based on law and the principles in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution (Sholahuddin et al., 2023) . According to (Salampessy et al., 2023) , elections are a democratic process in which the people elect their representatives to guarantee the

legitimacy of the government. Law Number 7 of 2017 guarantees direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair elections (UU RI, 2017) .

The first simultaneous elections were held in 2019, with the legislative and presidential elections held on the same day, aimed at strengthening the presidential system (Budiatri et al., 2020) . Constitutional Court Decision No. 14/PUU-11/2013 underpinned this format to reduce political costs, prevent the politicization of the bureaucracy, and simplify government administration (Gultom F, 2023) .

Local political phenomena, such as in Bintan Regency, Riau Islands, also reflect the dynamics of elections. This regency has a population of 175,861 (Bintan Statistics Agency, 2024) , with a predominantly Malay ethnic group and a Muslim majority. In the 2024 election, the number of registered voters reached 123,355 (Bintan Election Commission, 2024) . The 2024 Bintan Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) seat allocation is 25, divided into four electoral districts (Bintan Election Commission, 2023) .

Electoral District I has attracted attention due to significant changes in the composition of elected legislative candidates between 2019 and 2024. The Golkar Party dominated with three seats, displacing the Democratic Party's previous dominance. Several incumbent candidates, such as Fiven Sumanti (Golkar), Siti Maryani (PDIP), Suhardi (NasDem), and Sahak (PKS), were re-elected with significant vote increases. Suhardi experienced the highest vote surge, from 491 to 1,445 votes (194%) (KPU Bintan, 2024) .

Suhardi attracted attention because, despite being a Buddhist—a practice practiced by only around 4.77% of the population in Electoral District I (Bintan Statistics Agency, 2024)—he successfully retained his seat. This demonstrates that voters' political choices are not always determined by religious affiliation. In addition to Suhardi, two other Buddhist legislative candidates, Alex Sugianto (Golkar) and Herman (PSI), also received significant votes, even surpassing the number of Buddhists in the region. This phenomenon indicates that Suhardi's political strategy is able to transcend religious identity boundaries and reach voters across segments.

Based on the background that has been explained, the main focus of this research is to examine the winning strategy of incumbent legislative candidates in the 2024 Election in Bintan Regency, especially in Electoral District (Dapil) I. An interesting phenomenon emerged from the success of Suhardi, SE, a Buddhist legislative candidate, who was re-elected with a significant surge in votes amidst the dominance of Muslim voters. This success prompted the formulation of the problem in this research, namely: what winning strategy is implemented by the incumbent legislative candidates in Bintan Regency in the 2024 Election?

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the political strategies employed by incumbent legislative candidates, particularly in expanding their support base across social and religious identities. Theoretically, this research is expected to enrich the body of political science, particularly in the study of political strategy and voter behavior. Practically, this research is beneficial for the author in fulfilling his final assignment for a bachelor's degree in Government Science, providing the public with a new understanding of local political dynamics, and serving as a reference for further research related to winning strategies in legislative elections.

REVIEW LIBRARY

The literature review serves to examine various previous scientific works relevant to the research topic. Several previous studies serve as primary references, including research by (Aldi et al., 2024) on offensive strategies for winning legislative candidates in Musi Banyuasin; (Siregar et al., 2022) analyzing Royal Simanjuntak's victory using a political marketing approach; (Gultom F, 2023) highlighting offensive political strategies and political marketing in the election of Junedi Singarimbun in Jambi; and (Rizeki, 2024) emphasizing market segmentation and personal qualities as the keys to Fitriana Mugie's victory in Central Aceh.

Conceptually, strategy in politics is understood as a long-term comprehensive plan designed to achieve certain goals, including winning the contest for power (Amnillah, M et al., 2023). Political strategy according to (Idjo, 2021)is a conscious and systematic step taken by legislative candidates to gain public support, closely related to social capital, political networks, and self-image. (Rangkuti, 2020) , Marijan in (Muthar, 2024) , (Yanto, 2022) and (Maharani, 2020) reinforces that this strategy involves aspects of communication, organization, funding, and local political issues.

Peter Schroder (2010) classifies political strategies into offensive and defensive. Offensive strategies consist of market expansion—reaching new voters through fresh political offerings, both in campaigns and public policy—and market penetration, strengthening the existing voter base through intensified communication and loyalty. Defensive strategies, on the other hand, aim to maintain existing markets and close unprofitable ones, even ceding them under certain conditions, such as in the second round of elections.

Furthermore, the discussion of political parties refers to the definition of Law Number 2 of 2011, which defines political parties as political organizations that fight for the interests of the people and maintain the integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Parties play a vital role as a liaison between the people and the government and as a channel for the people's political aspirations. In Indonesia's presidential system, parties are key to a democratic political system and play a role in the aggregation and articulation of public interests.

In the context of legislative elections, the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) is an element of regional government administration, tasked with forming regional regulations, approving the Regional Budget (APBD), overseeing regional policies, and carrying out the function of representing the people (Law No. 17 of 2014; (Azzahri et al., 2021) emphasizes the importance of analyzing vote acquisition data and strategies for placing legislative candidates based on electoral districts.

Factors that influence voting behavior are explained by (Widnyani, 2020) through sociological, psychological, and rational choice models. Meanwhile, (Repi, 2020) and Firmanzah identified factors such as candidate profiles, social networks, media, public figures, work programs, family influence, and money as the main determinants of voters' decisions in choosing legislative members.

Finally, the discussion of incumbents refers to candidates currently in office. They possess advantages in the form of social and political capital, such as public trust and party support (Simanungkalit, in *Kompas* ; KBBI; other structural definitions in the document). Incumbents like Suhardi, SE in Bintan Regency utilize offensive strategies through direct campaigns and aspirational programs to expand and penetrate the voter market. Their strategies are tailored to five main segments: first-time voters, fishermen,

farmers, religious-based voters, and social communities—each with a specific approach relevant to local characteristics.

METHOD STUDY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which according to Simangunsong (2016) is a method commonly used in preparing scientific reports such as undergraduate theses and dissertations. This approach aims to understand the meaning, characteristics, and symbols related to political strategy (Firmansyah et al., 2021) . Bahri (2017) in (Hanyfah et al., 2022) states that this approach is carried out without data manipulation, but rather through direct interviews. The researcher chose this method to be able to describe in depth the winning strategy of Suhardi, SE as the incumbent legislative in Bintan Regency for two consecutive terms, with a focus on the context, policies, and views of various parties (Firmansyah et al., 2021) .

The object of this research is the winning strategy of the legislative incumbent in Bintan Regency, specifically Suhardi, SE. The research location is focused on Electoral District (Dapil) I, which includes the districts of Gunung Kijang, Teluk Bintan, Telok Sebong, and Toapaya. The primary focus is directed at the political strategy implemented by Suhardi in the 2024 Election.

The data sources consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews with Suhardi, his campaign team, the Chairman of the NasDem Regional Representative Council (DPD) in Bintan Regency, and the community (Warahmah et al., 2023) . Secondary data included books, journals, theses, and relevant documents. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews (Utama et al., 2023). with structured question guidance and documentation in the form of supporting documents and photos (Fadilla Rizky et al., 2023) .

The research informants consisted of ten individuals: Suhardi, Drs. Khazalik, Chair of the NasDem Regional Leadership Council (DPD) in Bintan Regency, three members of the campaign team, and five community members. Data analysis techniques included data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This analysis process aims to explain, classify, and connect phenomena with existing theories (Rofiah, 2022) .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to examine the winning strategy of Suhardi, SE, a member of the Bintan Regency DPRD from the NasDem Party who was re-elected in the 2024 General Election. The strategy used is interesting to study because Suhardi not only managed to retain his seat for two terms, but also experienced a significant surge in votes despite coming from a religious minority in his electoral district.

One of Suhardi's main strategies was a direct approach to the community. He consistently built social relationships through visiting people's homes, attending celebrations, religious activities, and informal discussions at coffee shops. This strategy brought him emotionally close to the community. He also maintained ongoing communication, even after being elected. This approach aligns with the opinion of (Firmansyah et al., 2021). which emphasizes the importance of social relations and meaning in a qualitative approach.

Another strategy that strengthens Suhardi's position is support from the party structure. As a NasDem Party cadre, he received full support from the Chairman of the NasDem Party Regional Leadership Council (DPD) for Bintan Regency, Drs. Khazalik.

This support was not only formal administrative, but also tangible, in the form of campaign coordination assistance, strengthening the campaign team, and moral and logistical support. (Simangunsong, 2016) explains that in local political dynamics, party structures play a crucial role in strengthening the position of candidates, especially incumbents.

Suhardi's success is also inseparable from his track record as a legislative member. The public believes he actively engages with and champions citizen aspirations in official forums. Many people claim to have voted for Suhardi because they know him personally and have seen his performance firsthand. This reinforces Bahri's (2017) argument in (Hanyfah et al., 2022) that , in a descriptive qualitative approach, public perception and experience are the primary sources of information for understanding the meaning of political success.

Interestingly, despite Suhardi's non-Muslim background, he still garnered support from the majority of the Muslim community. This suggests that religious identity is not a dominant factor in determining political choices. This study found that voters tend to consider personal closeness, empathy, and evidence of actual work rather than shared religious identity. This finding indicates a shift in voter mindsets, leading to a more rational and inclusive approach, opening up new opportunities for identity politics in pluralistic electoral districts.

Public support for Suhardi was also strengthened by the presence of a solid and organized campaign team. The campaign team served not only during the campaign period but also played a role in maintaining communication between Suhardi and voters on a daily basis. In interviews, the campaign team revealed that their primary strategy was to convey positive messages and Suhardi's track record directly to the public, while maintaining two-way communication. In this context, as explained by Suriani et al. (2023) , campaign success is largely determined by the team's effectiveness in translating the candidate's vision to the public.

Suhardi's campaign funding came primarily from personal funds and voluntary donations from supporters. He chose not to rely on large financial aid, instead focusing on low-cost yet directly impactful social and religious activities. Documentation of these activities provides strong evidence of Suhardi's commitment to the community (Fadilla Rizky et al., 2023) . This funding strategy helped him maintain his image as a humble and down-to-earth representative.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method, utilizing in-depth interviews and documentation. Interviews were conducted with 10 informants: Suhardi himself, the Chairman of the NasDem Party Regional Leadership Council (DPD), three members of his campaign team, and five members of the public. The interviews were conducted openly and in-depth, allowing researchers to fully understand Suhardi's strategy from various perspectives (Utama et al., 2023) . Data sources were also supported by documents and photographs of campaign activities and legislative work reports.

In data analysis, researchers perform data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions, as outlined by Rijali in (Saadah et al., 2022) . The reduction process involves filtering important information from interviews and documents and presenting it thematically to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions are drawn continuously throughout the research process to ensure that the collected data can be logically and empirically justified (Rofiah, 2022) .

This research focuses on the winning strategy of Suhardi, SE, an incumbent member of the Bintan Regency Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) from the NasDem Party, who was successfully re-elected in the 2024 election with a significant surge in votes. Suhardi's strategy is divided into several key aspects obtained through interviews with key informants and other supporters, such as the Chairman of the NasDem Party Regional Representative Council (DPD), his campaign team, and the public.

First, a direct approach to the community is key. Suhardi consistently maintains social and religious outreach, whether through social and religious activities, community celebrations, or discussions at coffee shops. He maintains two-way communication and never severes ties, even after being elected. This strategy has demonstrated its effectiveness in building voter loyalty, as demonstrated by (Firmansyah et al., 2021) , which demonstrates that a qualitative approach can provide a more comprehensive picture of social relations.

Second, the role of political parties in supporting Suhardi's re-election was also a determining factor. Structural support from the NasDem Party, particularly from the Regional Representative Council (DPD) Speaker, facilitated the mobilization of political and social resources. This reinforces the argument (Simangunsong, 2016) that political organizations play a strategic role in strengthening a candidate's position in the electoral district.

Third, visible legislative performance is also a rational factor for voters. Suhardi is seen as actively engaging with public aspirations and championing them in the regional parliament. The public views this track record as evidence of integrity and commitment to work, which contributes to increased voter turnout. This aligns with Hanyfah et al.'s (2022) argument that political success is inextricably linked to public perception of legislative candidates' actual performance.

Fourth, the influence of religious identity was not a dominant factor in Suhardi's election. Despite being from a non-Muslim background, he still garnered broad support from Muslim voters, who constitute the majority in Electoral District I. His inclusive strategy and rapport with all groups rendered identity boundaries politically irrelevant. This is supported by observations and interviews, which showed that voters prioritized emotional connection and a candidate's commitment to the needs of the local community.

Fifth, the campaign team and volunteers were managed in an orderly and systematic manner. This team played a role in conveying Suhardi's political message to the public and maintaining relationships with constituents. Volunteers from diverse backgrounds also helped expand the reach of support.

Sixth, campaign funding largely comes from individuals and supporters. Funds are managed transparently and efficiently, and focused on activities that directly impact the community, such as community service and religious activities.

Overall, Suhardi's strategy demonstrates a relationship-based political approach, direct presence, and fulfillment of community aspirations. This research also confirms that in local contests, social proximity, concrete action, and consistent communication are more important than political identity alone .

The research findings indicate that a combination of personal approach, party involvement, legislative performance, and a systematic campaign strategy were key to Suhardi's victory. He was able to build strong cross-identity relationships, demonstrate consistent performance, and efficiently utilize political and social networks. This strategy

merits further study in the context of local politics in other regions with similar social characteristics.

Furthermore, these findings contribute to the development of political representation theory at the local level, where success is determined not only by a candidate's social background but also by their capacity to build social relations, political communication, and respond to community needs. (Warahmah et al., 2023) emphasize that community social and cultural data are crucial in shaping the basis of political support.

Thus, Suhardi's winning strategy was the result of an integration of a socially-based approach, strengthening party structures, and delivering performance that could be directly verified by the public. This strategy is relevant not only in an electoral context but also in strengthening public trust in legislative institutions at the regional level.

CONCLUSION

This study found that Suhardi, SE's victory as the incumbent member of the Bintan Regency DPRD in the 2024 Election was significantly influenced by his successful implementation of two offensive strategies: market expansion and market penetration. The market expansion strategy was implemented by reaching new voters, such as first-time voters, interfaith voters, and local communities. This approach was realized through social interactions, the distribution of aid from the DPRD's main ideas program, and cross-sectoral collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Fisheries, and the Social Welfare Division. The programs distributed targeted concrete community needs such as agricultural equipment, infrastructure improvements, and support for religious activities in various communities.

Meanwhile, the market penetration strategy focused on maintaining the loyalty of existing voters through intensive communication, door-to-door visits, and involvement in various social and religious activities. The success of this strategy was also strengthened by the active role of the campaign team in areas such as Teluk Sebong, Gunung Kijang, and Toapaya, as well as strategic assistance from the NasDem Party Regional Leadership Council (DPD) in Bintan Regency from the early stages of the nomination process. A concrete action-based approach and inclusivity were key elements in maintaining the support of existing voters while attracting new support from cross-identity groups, especially in Muslim-majority areas, despite Suhardi's Buddhist minority. This strategy proved effective, with a significant increase in votes, from 491 to 1,445 votes, a 194% increase.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that legislative candidates implement a balanced offensive strategy, both in expanding and penetrating the political market, through direct presence in the community, building relationships across social and religious groups, and utilizing core program ideas in a concrete and targeted manner. Political parties are expected to not only provide structural support, but also actively provide communication strategy training, electoral district mapping, and mentoring for the political programs being implemented. Campaign teams, as liaisons between candidates and the community, need to maintain good communication, convey political messages honestly, and strengthen long-term relationships without discrimination against residents. The community of Electoral District I of Bintan Regency is expected to remain critical in expressing their aspirations and base their political choices on track records and actual performance, not merely personal closeness or campaign promises. For future

researchers, it is recommended to examine similar strategies in a wider area or by comparing several candidates within a single electoral district to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of local political campaign strategies.

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