

Responsive Elections: Political Campaign in 2024 Local Election

Fatmawati Moekahar¹, Norhayati Rafida², Fitri Hardianti¹, Elfa Sabilal Hikmah³

¹Communication Science, Universitas Islam Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

²Communication Science, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

³Communication Science, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

e-mail: fatmawatikaffa@comm.uir.ac.id^{1*}; norhayati@usim.edu.my²; fitrihardianti@comm.uir.ac.id¹; elfa.23179@mhs.unesa.ac.id³

*Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze public responses to political campaign messages delivered by candidates in the 2024 Riau Local Election. In this local political contest, each candidate highlights issues, narratives, and cultural symbols that reflect regional identity, with the aim of building emotional closeness with the voting public. This study used a qualitative approach by exploring public opinion on political campaign messages disseminated through social media, billboards, and local mass media. The results show that public responses to campaign messages in the 2024 Riau local election tend to align with cultural values, particularly those of Riau Malay culture. The visions, missions, programs, slogans, and campaign activities of all candidates contain symbols of Riau Malay culture. The political messages contained in this political campaign are considered part of an effort to preserve Riau Malay culture, although often not accompanied by concrete policy plans especially regarding crucial issues in Riau. The approach to Riau Malay cultural values in a symbolic form can increase emotional resonance and moral legitimacy. These findings indicate that the resonance of political messages with local culture is a key factor in shaping public perception and support in the 2024 Riau local election. This research contributes to the study of local political communication by showing how the meaning and acceptance of campaign messages are determined by the regional socio-cultural context.

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INTRODUCTION

Regional head elections are a local political arena where campaign messages become the main instrument for forming voter opinion, legitimacy and preferences (Rizal & Aesthetika, 2021). Candidates not only compete through face-to-face meetings and billboards, but also through social media platforms which are the main arena for image formation, issue framing,

and mobilization of support (Fitri, 2022; Lestari et al., 2018; Oktama & Dewi, 2023; Simanjuntak & Athahirah, 2024). Various creative approaches are taken by candidates and their successful teams to gain public attention and support, including through cultural, religious and nationalist approaches (Moekahar et al., 2024; Abdillah & Zulhazmi, 2021; Ridwan, 2015; Setyo, 2013). The results show that public responses to campaign messages in the 2024 Riau local election tend to align with cultural values, particularly those of Riau Malay culture. Candidate 1 (Abdul Wahid – SF Hariyanti supported by parties: Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) dan Partai Nasional Demokrasi (Nasdem). Candidate 2 (M. Nasir – M. Wardan) is supported by the following parties: Partai Demokrat, Partai Gerindra, and Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP). Meanwhile, Candidate 3 (Syamsuar – Mawardi M. Saleh) is supported by Partai Golongan Karya (Golkar) and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS). The official results of the vote count for the three candidates are as follows Table 1.

Table 1 Voting Results in Riau Local election

Number of Candidate	Votes	Procentage
Candidate 1	1.224.193	44,31 %
Candidate 2	877.511	31,76 %
Candidate 3	661.297	23,93 %

Source: KPU Riau, 2024

During the election campaign period in the Riau regional election, the candidates not only focused on conveying their vision and mission but also on building emotional bonds with voters (Andres, 2013; Kam, 2006; Lin et al., 2023). One of the approaches used is cultural values (Darmastuti, 2014; Hairini et al., 2018; Sumarlina et al., 2023; Ridwan, 2015; Yenrizal, 2003). The candidates' approach to local cultural values in campaign messages appears prominent, particularly those related to Malay culture. These cultural representations appear in various formats: billboards and banners in public spaces, public debates, video and photo uploads on Instagram and Twitter, and even dialogues that emphasize narratives of togetherness and local values. As a political campaign strategy, messages embodying cultural values are considered an emotional approach employed by candidates, not only serving as a rational persuasive tool but also as a strategy to activate symbolic closeness, collective identity, and a sense of togetherness between the candidate and the community.

Riau, as one of Indonesia's provinces, has a highly diverse population, characterized by diverse customs, regional languages, traditional clothing, and other cultural symbols. Riau's population comes from various ethnic groups in Indonesia, including the Minangkabau, Batak, Javanese, Chinese, Sundanese, and the Malays, the indigenous people of Riau Province. With this ethnic diversity, a cultural approach presents both a challenge and an opportunity, as it can lead to cultural polarization and division. This phenomenon is interesting to study from the perspective of political messages in political campaigns in Riau. Researchers want to explore public opinion as a form of community response to political campaign activities in the 2024 Riau local elections.

This research is one of the initial studies that specifically examines the strategy of using cultural values in political campaign messages in the 2024 Riau election. Previous research has focused more on the issue of identity politics in general (Abdillah, 2001; Edwi, 2015; Hidayat et al., 2023; Rizal & Aesthetika, 2021; Rosdiana & Annis Azhar Suryaningtyas, 2024; Sugianto et al., 2024), without examining how local cultural values (especially Malay culture) are used symbolically to build emotional closeness with voters. This research focuses on how the public (the Riau community, who are also voters in the 2024 Riau Regional Election) responds to political messages using this cultural approach. Public response is important to use as a strategy to influence the public and win elections (Green-Pedersen & Stubager, 2010; Mukroman et al., 2024; Spoon & Klüver, 2014).

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method, namely a research approach that aims to understand a particular contextual situation with all its uniqueness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Researchers try to understand the nature, meaning, and what is happening in their environment by analyzing to gain a deep understanding. This approach was chosen to explore public opinion on political campaigns in the 2024 Riau local elections. The public in this study is the research subject, consisting of: community leaders, political observers, media, election practitioners and the community as permanent voters in the 2024 Riau local elections. The data consist of primary data derived from focus group discussions with research subjects and the researcher's observations. Secondary data are obtained from documentation, including social media, journals, and newspapers that are relevant to this research topic. The research subjects were determined by purposive sampling technique with the following provisions: a) being voters in the 2024 Riau local elections, b) knowing the political messages of the candidates' political campaigns in the 2024 Riau local elections. Based on these criteria, the following are the informants in this study in Table 2.

Table 2 Informant's Research

Informant	Number
Media	2
Opinion Leader	2
Election practitioners	2
Researcher's election	1
Voters	5
Total	12

The research results are expected to provide an overview of the public response to the political campaign strategies carried out by candidates in winning the 2024 Riau local elections. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of a more responsive political campaign model, as well as provide practical recommendations for candidates and political parties to increase public participation and trust in the local elections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political messages are expressed in various forms of campaign methods. Based on Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning Elections, campaign methods consist of: a) limited meetings, b) face-to-face meetings, c) distribution of campaign materials, d) installation of campaign materials, e) social media, f) advertisements in print, electronic, and internet media, g) public meetings, candidate debates, and i) other activities. Campaign materials are contained in the vision, mission, and programs of candidate pairs which are conveyed through various forms of campaign. The following are the visions and missions of the candidates for the 2024 Riau local election in Table 3.

Table 3 Vision Candidate

Candidate	Vision
Candidate 1	<i>Riau berbudaya Melayu, Dinamis, ekologis, Agamis dan Maju</i> (Riau is Malay-cultured, dynamic, ecological, religious and advanced)
Candidate 2	<i>Riau berdaya saing, berintegritas, maju, dan berbudaya melayu, menuju Riau emas</i> (Riau is competitive, has integrity, is advanced, and has Malay culture, towards a golden Riau)
Candidate 3	<i>Terwujudnya Riau maju dan Bermartabat sebagai pusat ekonomi Sumatera dan gerbang utama ekonomi ASEAN tahun 2029</i> (Realizing a developed and dignified Riau as the economic center of Sumatra and the main gateway to the ASEAN economy in 2029)

All three candidates' visions contain editorial narratives about culture, particularly Malay culture. Candidates 1 and 2's visions explicitly mention Malay culture, while candidate 3 only mentions culture, but by that, they mean Malay culture itself. The following is an excerpt from an interview with a political practitioner in Riau:

"The visions of all three candidates place a strong emphasis on Malay culture. This is good, at least the candidates understand where to fight. I think the candidates know how to build a strong emotional connection in this Malay nation," said informant ZN.

(Visi dari ketiga kandidat memberikan penekanan yang kuat kepada budaya Melayu. Ini hal yang bagus setidaknya kandidat paham dimana harus berjuang. Saya pikir, kandidat tahu bagaimana membangun emosional yang kuat di negeri Melayu ini)

The candidates' missions translate or operationalize their visions. The missions of all three candidates also contain cultural values. Candidate 1 provided 1 point out of 7 missions, with cultural content located in the 7th mission. Candidate 2 included two cultural-related points out of six missions, while Candidate 3 included one cultural-related point out of eight missions. Of the candidates' mission statements, only candidate number 3 did not specifically mention Malay culture. This aligns with the visions of all three candidates, which generally

emphasize cultural values. The following is a description of the candidates' missions containing cultural content in Table 4.

Table 4 Mission Candidate

Candidate	Mission
Candidate 1	<i>Mewujudkan kebudayaan Melayu sebagai alat pemersatu dan Perwujudan nilai-nilai kearifan lokal serta mendorong kehidupan bermasyarakat yang kondusif, aman, nyaman dan adil untuk semua</i> (Realizing Malay culture as a unifying tool and the embodiment of local wisdom values and encouraging a conducive, safe, comfortable and just community life for all)
Candidate 2	<i>1. Meningkatkan kualitas SDM Riau yang unggul dan berdaya saing dengan masyarakat yang cerdas, sehat, religius dan berbudaya</i> <i>2. Memperkokoh nilai-nilai budaya Melayu dalam rangka menciptakan masyarakat Riau yang religius, toleran, harmonis, aman dan damai.</i> (1. Improve the quality of Riau's human resources to be superior and competitive, with an intelligent, healthy, religious, and cultured society. 2. Strengthen Malay cultural values to create a Riau society that is religious, tolerant, harmonious, safe, and peaceful)
Candidate 3	<i>Meningkatkan kerukunan antar umat beragama dan melestarikan keberagaman kebudayaan daerah</i> (Increasing harmony between religious communities and preserving regional cultural diversity)

The candidates' slogans are also colored by cultural values. Candidate 1 uses the slogan "Bermarwah," Candidate 2 uses the slogan "Nawaitu," and Candidate 3 uses "Suwai." The slogans of all three candidates use a very strong approach to Malay cultural values. Candidate number 1 uses a popular term in Riau society, namely Bermarwah, which means honor, self-respect, and good name. Although this word is an abbreviation of "Bersama Membangun Riau," the word Bermarwah itself was chosen because of its popularity in the Riau Malay community. Candidate number 2's adopt a religious nuance, *Nawaitu*, derived from the Arabic term meaning "I intend." The word Nawaitu is also an abbreviation of the combined names of the candidate pair, namely M. Nasir and M. Wardan. Nawaitu has a deep philosophical meaning and is also a popular abbreviation for the two candidates. This choice of words also reflects a sense of closeness to Malay culture, which is rooted in Islamic values. Therefore, the candidates want to convey the message that this candidate pair has sincere intentions as leaders based on Malay (Islamic) cultural values. Candidate number 3 has the slogan "Suwai" in Malay language. The word Suwai is an abbreviation of the names of the candidate pair, namely Syamsuar and Mawardi. The term Suwai is also very popular among the Riau people to express a sense of support or a sign of agreement.

Cultural values are also seen in various photos of candidate pairs spread across various campaign media in Figure 1, both in outdoor media and other campaign moments. For example, the photo of the candidate pairs on the Riau KPU ballot paper (Picture A) shows the use of visual symbolism in the campaign. In the picture, all three candidate pairs are wearing Malay clothing, particularly the head covering (kopyah). However, candidate pair number 1 does not wear the baju teluk belanga, which is traditional attire for men in the Riau Malay community. This clothing is characterized by a distinctive collar and five buttons that symbolize the pillars of Islam. The nuances of the Riau Malay are also seen when the candidates register themselves at the Riau KPU. All three candidates wear complete red and white teluk belanga clothing complete with the typical Riau Malay songket (Picture b). During the balloting, candidates number 1 and 3 continued to wear the traditional Malay dress code, the Teluk Belanga. Candidate 1 chose to wear a green and blue Teluk Belanga. This color choice represents the party supporting this candidate.

Political parties PKB is represented by the color green, whereas Nasdem parties is represented by the color blue. Meanwhile, candidate number 3 chose white and pink as their campaign colors. Only candidate number 2 did not wear Teluk Belanga clothes at this moment, but still showed Malay uniqueness with a combination of white shirt and black pants equipped with black Kopyah which is a characteristic of Muslim clothing (Picture c). The public debate moment held by the KPU also still saw Malay cultural nuances in the clothing worn by the candidates. Candidates 1 and 3 were still consistent with Teluk Belanga clothing, while candidate number 2 chose to use a more neutral clothing choice but still with Malay cultural symbols in white Muslim clothing combined with Kopyah (picture d).



Figure 1 The Candidates

The priority work programs promised during the political campaign by candidate number 1 consist of: Smart Riau, Healthy Riau, Steady Riau, Competitive Riau, and Riau Village

Development. Candidate number 2 proposes several programs, including the development of education and health sectors, the promotion of Malay cultural values, village development, support for MSMEs, infrastructure development, and the advancement of the agricultural sector. Meanwhile, candidate number 3 proposes several work programs. These include ensuring the availability of basic necessities, repairing damaged roads, reducing poverty, and improving public services. The candidate also aims to continue the free education program and provide free health care. In addition, the program emphasizes interfaith harmony, the preservation of religious and cultural diversity in Riau, and the strengthening of gender equality. It also includes protecting the rights of women, children, and people with disabilities. From this work program, candidate number 1 does not focus on Malay cultural issues, while candidates number 2 and 3 have work programs related to Malay cultural issues in Table 5.

Table 5 Melayu Value of Message Campaign

Candidate	Vission	Mission	Programm	Slogan	Campaign activity
Candidate 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Candidate 2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Candidate 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Campaign messages can also be seen in various political advertisements displayed in various media, both mainstream and digital. These political advertisements are part of the Campaign Props (APK). Creative design is one factor in a candidate's success in attracting public attention. In various APKs, candidate number 1 is said to have duplicated the creative designs of President Prabowo-Gibran in the 2024 Election. The candidate pair's choice of clothing, and the approach to political messaging used also bear similarities to Prabowo-Gibran's creativity. This strategy is said to be part of an effort to persuade Gen-Z and Millennials, who make up the majority of the voter base (more than 60%) (Turnip, 2024). Although Gerindra is not a supporting party for candidate number 1, this effort to influence the public with similar designs is said to be effective because the public is still feeling the euphoria of the previous presidential election.

In the political advertisement design show in Figure 2, for candidate number 2, the symbol of Malay culture is emphasized through the clothes worn by the candidate, complete with the tanjak, a traditional head covering of the Riau people. As a candidate who received support from Gerindra, the creative design of the advertisement uses a reference group relation approach by providing the sentence "Governor chosen by Prabowo Subianto". This is also often found in advertisements for candidate number 1 which include a photo of a popular religious figure, namely Ustadz Abdul Somad. Meanwhile, candidate number 3 uses a fairly simple design with a distinctive Malay nuance reflected in the candidate's clothing. The yellow and white background reflects the colors of the supporting political parties Golkar (Yellow) and PKS (White). The creative design in this candidate's political advertisement is part of the

candidate's political communication efforts to shape public opinion (Fatmawati, 2021). Overall, the creative designs of the three candidates' political advertisements are of the ID political advertising type, advertisements that emphasize the candidate's identity with the aim of providing voters with an understanding of who the candidate is. This type of political advertisement is no less creative because it only includes a photo of the candidate with information about the candidate's personal data consisting of the full name, supporting political party, and a short slogan. In Indonesia, this type of ID political advertisement is the most common in every election. According to Robert Baukus, types of political advertisement that exhibit highcreativity and have the potential for greater influence include attack advertisements, argument advertisements, resolution advertisements. Candidates and their campaign teams need to try to attract public attention with creativity that is different from the usual because political advertisements are a major force in political communication, both in terms of election campaigns and decision-making (Kaid, 2015).



Figure 2 Political Advertising's Candidate

The cultural values emerging in the political campaign activities of candidates during the 2024 Riau local elections emphasize the actualization of Malay symbols, for example, the use of Baju Teluk Belanga (Baju Teluk Belanga), Muslim clothing, Kopyah (Kopyah), and Songket (Songket). Candidates during the elections often utilize these symbols to express cultural affinity, generate cultural legitimacy, and build a collective identity among voters. However, the use of these symbols has the potential to be inclusive, mobilizing Malays while simultaneously being exclusive (alienating non-Malays).

This mobilization of people with a Malay cultural background can obscure more important public issues. Riau, as a province with abundant natural resources and various problems, still requires concrete solutions to maintain Riau's progress. The public also needs to be given non-symbolic political promises, especially regarding solutions to the problems of forest fires that continue every year, flooding in various regions of Riau, poverty, and a lack of employment. This Malay mobilization also has the potential to alienate the large non-Malay community in Riau province. It is estimated that around 30–40% of Riau's population is Malay,

while 60–70% are non-Malay. The non-Malay population is quite large, so any alienation from non-Malays could trigger horizontal divisions.

Table 6 Value's Tunjuk Ajar Melayu

Values	Content	Objective
Godliness	Faith, Piety, Sharia	Forming a Religious Personality
Humanity	Good manners, shame, politeness, manners	Maintaining dignity and honor
Social	Deliberation, mutual assistance	Strengthening solidarity
Leadership	Fair, trustworthy, wise	Forming moral leaders
Science and education	Learning, knowledge etiquette	Upholding a culture of intelligence and politeness
Environment	Maintaining nature, balance	Sustainability of life together
Nationality	Patriotism, culture diversity	Affirming your identity and being Malay

The public hopes that the use of the Malay cultural value approach is not only symbolic, but rather prioritizes the non-symbolic values of Malay culture, as stated in the Malay Teaching Guidelines from Cultural Figure Tenas Efendy (Moekahar, 2021). Malay society has a system of values, norms, and life guidelines rooted in religious teachings, customs, and collective life experiences. Candidates and their campaign teams need to re-socialize and internalize the cultural values of the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu into the lives of the people of Riau Province. Candidates can package political messages in election campaigns by incorporating the core values of the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu.

CONCLUSION

Public response to campaign messages in the 2024 Riau Local Election is consistent with cultural values, particularly those of Riau Malay culture. The visions, missions, programs, slogans, and campaign activities of all candidates incorporate symbols of Riau Malay culture. The political messages expressed in this campaign are considered part of an effort to preserve Riau Malay culture, despite being artificial and lacking concrete policy plans—especially regarding crucial issues in Riau. The symbolic approach to Riau Malay cultural values can enhance emotional resonance and moral legitimacy. The public expects the use of a Malay cultural value approach not only to be symbolic, but also to prioritize the non-symbolic values of Malay culture, as stated in the Tunjuk Ajar Melayu (Malay Teaching Instructions). These findings indicate that the resonance of political messages with local culture is a key factor in shaping public perception and support for the 2024 Riau Regional Election.

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