



## MOBILIZING VOTERS THROUGH POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: THE ROLE OF PKS IN THE 2024 SOUTHEAST ACEH ELECTION

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### ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the political communication strategy of the Regional Leadership Council (DPD) of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Southeast Aceh Regency during the 2024 General Election. It focuses on the forms, media, and approaches used to gain voter support, as well as the enabling and constraining factors influencing the communication process. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study method, data were obtained through in-depth interviews with party administrators and community leaders, direct observations of party activities, and documentation analysis. Findings reveal that DPD PKS integrates Islamic values, social service activities, and interpersonal approaches to build trust and mobilize support. Political communication is carried out through four strategic stages: "PKS Listens," "PKS Engages," "PKS Speaks," and "PKS Wins." These are implemented via direct meetings, religious gatherings (pengajian), community empowerment, and the use of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tik'Tok. The party's religious image and cadre solidarity serve as strong assets, although limitations such as low political literacy, limited access to media, and inter-party competition pose significant challenges. This research contributes to the study of political communication in Islamic parties by offering a hybrid model that blends da'wah-based activism with modern digital strategies. It recommends enhancing the communication capacity of party cadres and maximizing digital engagement to appeal to younger, tech-savvy voters.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a democratic country, upholds the principle of popular sovereignty as enshrined in Article 1 Paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution, Fourth Amendment, affirming that "sovereignty is in the hands of the people and is exercised according to the Constitution." In this system, political parties serve as essential channels for articulating citizens' political aspirations and participation in public decision-making. General elections play a pivotal role in this process, functioning as the main mechanism through which leadership direction is determined and democratic values are practiced.

In the context of electoral politics, political communication becomes a vital instrument to bridge the gap between political actors and the public. It not only disseminates information but also fosters trust, shapes perceptions, and mobilizes voter support. According to Nimmo (1989), political communication encompasses message exchanges that have political consequences, particularly in influencing collective behavior. McNair (2011) further emphasizes the role of political communication in distributing power-related information within democratic systems. In the Indonesian post-reform era, such communication has evolved, marked by the rise of digital media and increased public access to political narratives.

Contemporary political communication strategies involve a blend of mass media campaigns, interpersonal engagement, and ideological framing. Pito (2009) classifies four strategic forms reinforcement,

rationalization, persuasion, and confrontation which are applied based on context and goals. From an Islamic perspective, these strategies must adhere to ethical principles, promote justice, and serve public welfare. Islamic political parties, in particular, are expected to integrate da'wah values with political engagement. Surah At-Taubah [9]:7 highlights the importance of integrity and justice in social-political interactions, underlining that Islamic politics is not merely about power acquisition but also about manifesting religious values in governance.

The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamic party rooted in the 1980s Tarbiyah movement, officially formed in 2002, has consistently emphasized cadre-based development and ideological consolidation. In Southeast Aceh Regency a region predominantly Muslim yet traditionally leaning towards nationalist parties PKS has faced challenges in electoral competition. The party's repeated failure to secure legislative seats in 2009, 2014, and 2019 was reversed in the 2024 general election, where it successfully won one seat in the local legislature. This electoral gain reflects a notable transformation in PKS's political communication strategy and its ability to appeal to voters in a competitive landscape.

Despite the strong Islamic identity of the electorate, Islamic parties such as PKS often struggle to convert religious affinity into electoral success. This raises a critical question about the effectiveness of their political communication efforts. How do Islamic parties navigate the tension between ideological identity and pragmatic voter engagement in local electoral contexts? What communicative strategies enable them to build trust and resonate with grassroots communities?

Therefore, this study aims to examine the political communication strategy of the PKS Regional Leadership Council (DPD) in Southeast Aceh in the context of the 2024 General Election. The research focuses on identifying the forms, media, approaches, and contextual factors both enabling and inhibiting that shape PKS's engagement with the public. By analyzing these dimensions, this study offers a nuanced understanding of how da'wah-based political parties adapt their communication to local sociopolitical dynamics, especially in regions where Islamic values are culturally dominant but electorally underrepresented.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. This approach was selected to deeply explore the political communication phenomenon conducted by the Regional Leadership Council (DPD) of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in gaining voter support during the 2024 General Election in Southeast Aceh Regency. The qualitative method emphasizes the meaning behind social activities and the interaction processes between actors and their context. Bogdan and Taylor, as cited in Lim, (2025), define qualitative methodology as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behavior. This approach is considered suitable for examining complex and meaning-laden social phenomena, such as political party communication strategies in the context of elections. Furthermore, descriptive research aims to provide a systematic, factual, and accurate portrayal of specific individuals, groups, or situations (Moleog, 2004).

The study was conducted at the DPD PKS office located on Jalan Perapat Hilir, Babussalam Subdistrict, Southeast Aceh Regency, Aceh Province. This location was selected based on the consideration that the area consists of a predominantly Muslim electorate, yet it has demonstrated unique electoral dynamics in previous elections. The data collection process took place between March and June 2025. During this period, the researcher carried out a series of stages including preliminary studies, field observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation of relevant data. These steps were followed by a structured analysis and reporting process. Data were collected gradually, beginning with instrument design, pilot testing, primary and secondary data collection, and concluding with the final interpretation of findings.

The sources of data in this study consisted of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through direct interviews with key figures within the DPD PKS Southeast Aceh structure, namely the Chairperson, Secretary, Head of the Election Winning Body (BAPILLU), and legislative candidates for the 2024 election. Additionally, three community leaders were interviewed to represent the voter perspective. Data collection techniques for primary data included semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, and documentation of political communication activities. Secondary data were obtained from relevant sources such as internal party documents, election results, journal articles, news media, and literature reviews related to political communication, electoral strategy, and voter behavior (Sugiyono, 2015). The use of secondary data was intended to strengthen theoretical understanding and support the interpretation of primary data.

Data analysis in this research followed the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, 2014). Data reduction involved filtering and condensing raw data into meaningful information aligned with the research focus. The data display was conducted in descriptive narrative form, linking interview findings, observations,

and documentation with the theoretical framework. Conclusion drawing was performed iteratively through repeated verification of emerging themes. To ensure data validity, the researcher applied triangulation techniques involving sources, methods, and timing. The trustworthiness of qualitative data was assessed using the four criteria proposed by Guba and Lincoln: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The application of these principles ensures that the research findings are scientifically sound and can serve as a reference for developing future political communication strategies.

### 3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

#### A Strategic Model of Educational Political Communication

The DPD PKS Southeast Aceh implemented a four-stage communication strategy encapsulated in the sequence: PKS Listens, PKS Engages, PKS Speaks, and PKS Wins. This strategy was not only designed to boost electability but to cultivate political awareness through dialogic and participatory methods. According to one informant (Chairperson of DPD PKS Southeast Aceh):

*“We don’t just ask people to vote we listen to their needs, engage in community activities, and only then do we present our programs. That’s why we start with ‘PKS Listens’.”*

This approach aligns with the theory of communicative rationality (Habermas, via Kurniawati et al., 2025), in which communication is not merely persuasive but mutual, aiming to build consensus and trust. The educational function of each stage reflects a pedagogic dimension of political messaging, as also emphasized by Suttman-Lea et al. (2025), wherein political engagement becomes a civic learning process.

#### Da’wah as Ideological and Practical Communication

PKS’s strategy integrates religious mission (da’wah) and civic service. Political messaging is channeled through both personal and institutional approaches, including social programs like free health services, food aid, and Islamic study circles (pengajian). One PKS cadre remarked:

*“Our campaign is not just to get votes—it’s part of da’wah. When we offer free health checks, it’s both service and message. People feel cared for, and that’s powerful.”*

This reflects the model of ideological framing in political communication, where da’wah becomes both symbolic capital and practical engagement (Rustandi & Aliyudin, 2025). As Zuhdi (2021) notes, da’wah can function as social engineering—altering collective behavior through embedded religious norms.

#### Grassroots Mobilization through Interpersonal Communication

PKS emphasized door-to-door outreach and the use of local religious and cultural figures as message bearers. These personal encounters allowed candidates to contextualize their platform directly with constituents. As one legislative candidate stated:

*“We don’t just put up posters. We knock on doors, sit on the floor, listen. That’s how we win their hearts.”*

Such efforts reflect Perloff’s (2021) proposition that interpersonal communication has stronger persuasive impact due to its reciprocal and emotional nature. In rural Aceh, where digital penetration may be limited and trust in elites is low, face-to-face dialogue remains the most effective means to build voter identification.

#### Political Image and Populist Narrative

To overcome its image as an exclusive Islamic party, PKS adopted a populist, inclusive brand under the slogan “PKS Cares”. This was supported by visual symbols (banners, uniforms, digital branding) and populist proposals like lifetime driving licenses and the elimination of motorcycle taxes. A social media volunteer explained:

*“We highlight programs that matter for people—low taxes, free health, practical needs. Religion is important, but so is daily life.”*

This shift illustrates strategic political branding (Farkas & Bene, 2021), where ideology is blended with public interest messaging to enhance appeal. PKS successfully repositioned itself from doctrinal rigidity toward social responsiveness, signaling inclusivity while retaining its moral platform.

#### Framing of Political Issues for Emotional Resonance

PKS centered its campaign narratives around issues of corruption, public welfare, and minority rights. These were selected for their emotional and moral salience among voters. Campaign leaflets consistently

featured anti-corruption slogans and support for education and affordable healthcare. As a community leader interviewed observed:

*“What made PKS different was their consistency—they kept talking about issues people care about, not just about themselves.”*

This approach reflects the issue ownership and agenda-setting functions in political communication (Arslantaş & Arslantaş, 2024). By framing issues within a moral context and repeating them across platforms, PKS sustained narrative coherence and emotional engagement with diverse voter groups.

#### **Digital Engagement with Young Voters**

Understanding the growing influence of youth voters, PKS leveraged social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. These were used not just to disseminate content but to interact with followers via polls, Q&A sessions, and religious content. A youth volunteer shared:

*“We post funny, relatable content—quotes from the Qur’an, political updates, even memes. That’s how we connect with Gen Z.”*

This aligns with Castells’ (2009) notion of networked communication, where power lies in the capacity to shape narratives in digital space. PKS’s approach demonstrates a transition from one-way messaging to dialogic engagement, wherein audiences become co-creators of political discourse.

The communication strategy of PKS Southeast Aceh demonstrates a hybrid model of political messaging: integrating da’wah-based ethics, interpersonal outreach, populist imagery, and digital interactivity. The empirical findings support McNair’s view that political communication must adapt to social, technological, and cultural shifts to remain effective.

This study shows that political success in religious regions is not guaranteed by ideological affinity alone. Instead, strategic narrative construction, trust-based interaction, and contextual responsiveness are key determinants of electoral performance. PKS’s approach, therefore, serves as a replicable framework for other Islamic parties navigating similar sociopolitical terrains.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of field research, it can be concluded that the political communication strategy implemented by the Regional Leadership Council (DPD) of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) in Southeast Aceh during the 2024 General Election was not limited to annual and periodic programs. PKS carried out a comprehensive approach that integrated both public service and da’wah activities, which became the main instruments in their effort to enlighten and empower society. These efforts were conducted through two main approaches: a personal approach carried out directly by party cadres and a structural approach executed by the organizational leadership. This dual strategy allowed PKS to build strong networks of power at the local level, carry out political campaigns and public events, shape a favorable political image, and navigate the realities of money politics that often influence electoral dynamics.

Furthermore, the political communication framework utilized by PKS aligns well with Harold Lasswell’s classic communication model, which includes five essential components: communicator, message, media, audience, and effect. In this context, party leaders, legislative candidates, and volunteers played central roles in the dissemination of political messages. Volunteers, in particular, acted as intermediaries between the party and society, enhancing the effectiveness of face-to-face communication and grassroots engagement.

The content of the messages conveyed by PKS resonated strongly with the aspirations of the local community. Through slogans such as "PKS Defenders of the People," "PKS Cares," and "The Party of the Ulama," PKS positioned itself as both a socially committed and religiously grounded political entity. Concrete programs such as free BPJS healthcare and anti-corruption campaigns further demonstrated the party’s dedication to public welfare and justice. These messages were distributed through a variety of communication channels, including door-to-door campaigns, physical events, and digital platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok. The multi-channel approach enabled PKS to expand its reach, particularly among young voters who are active in digital spaces. Nevertheless, the implementation of these strategies faced notable challenges, particularly regarding the relatively low electability and limited popularity of some candidates, as well as significant financial constraints that impacted campaign operations.

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