

## **Political Leaders' Views on Political Communication and Public Opinion at Legislative Election 2014-2019 in North Aceh Regency, Indonesia**

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**Abstract:** *The Moslem community in Aceh is considering having a different assessment of the political situation. Aceh's history has been heavily influenced by violence, and efforts have been made to resolve the conflict. The protracted conflict in Aceh is finally solved by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Helsinki in 2005 through the mediation of the CMI (Conflict Management Initiative). The agreed points of agreement becomes the basic principle for building a democratic New Aceh and based on self-government. The most obvious manifestation of this testimony is the implementation of campaigns, political socialization and various activities exploring political messages to the people through channels of organization and mass media. Therefore, candidates must be involved early in political communication with the people, not only at the time as candidate in short time, but also the candidate fight from beginning to get the aspiration of people where it is a necessity that must be run consistently.*

**Keywords:** *political communication; public opinion; legislative election; violence*

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Elections held in democratic countries are a tool to give people the opportunity to society in influencing the policies of government and the prevailing political system. Meanwhile, political participation is an activity undertaken by citizens to engage in decision-making processes with the aim to influence decision-making by the government. In practice, political decisions will affect the citizens life. Thus, the certain society has the right to participate in influencing the process of making and executing the decision. Participation is also related to the interests of society, so what people do in political participation shows their degree of importance. One of the activities that shows political participation in a country is the election process. Besides being the core of democracy, political participation is also closely linked to the fulfillment of citizens' political rights. The realization of the fulfillment of political rights is the freedom for every citizen to express opinions and get together. The political awareness of the community is a determinant factor in the political participation of the community, it means that it relates to knowledge and awareness of rights and obligations related to the environment of society and political activity to be the size and the degree of a person involved in political participation process.

Political participation is related to the interests of the people, so what people do in their participation shows their importance. Actually what people do in their political activities is nothing more than an expression of their responsibility towards the Government. Thus, the election as an institutionalization of democratic life is an implementation means of the sovereignty of the people held to elect representatives of the people who will have position in the legislative and executive institution. Recognizing the importance of elections as a means of democracy, it is indispensable for political participation of the people especially in voting. Participation forms can also be seen from activities as a political activist, including being a leader or a member of a political party. One of the factors influencing political participation is political communication between government and people as the interaction between the two parties that apply ethics. It means that election is not the only tool to measure the level of public participation because the election results only give a representative of political participation. The meaning of political participation is not only seen from the number of votes that have been won by political parties, but it is also seen based on the ability of society and the level of public awareness in determining the best choice with the conscience without any pressure from other parties. What is interesting about this political

phenomenon is that not all people actively participate in politics, not a few people who do not want to take care in the politic activities, and many factors that affect. The successful implementation of the Election is seen from the participation of the Voters. Participation can be divided into several categories, namely: 1) *apatitis*, it means that people who do not participate and withdraw from the political process; 2) *spectator*, it means that a person who has voted in elections; 3) *gladiator*, it means that they who are actively involved in the political process, ie communicators, specialists making face-to-face contact, party activists and campaign workers, and community activists. Therefore, being the successful and democratic elections, voters must understand their rights and responsibilities, and must adequately understand valid legal voting information. This becomes one of the media to increase voter participation. The Moslem community in Aceh is considering having a different assessment of the political situation. Aceh's history has been heavily influenced by violence, and efforts have been made to resolve the conflict. The protracted conflict in Aceh is finally solved by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Helsinki in 2005 through the mediation of the CMI (Conflik Management Initiative). The agreed points of agreement becomes the basic principle for building a democratic New Aceh and based on self-government. One of the agreements is about political participation which reads: "Full participation of all Acehnese in local and national elections will be guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia".

Furthermore, the law of the Republic of Indonesia number 11 of 2006 about Aceh Government, and Government Regulation Number 20 of 2007 about Local Political Parties. The existence of Local Political Parties is an additional means to deliver the political aspirations of the people in Aceh. Arrangement of political participation in Aceh is a public space that has been opened for the involvement of community groups in Aceh in the political field. Aceh's political participation is a means to voice aspirations for the betterment of Aceh. The existence of political participation, they have the media to develop a political system, so the political mechanism is active and runs with the process. The direct legislative elections on April 9, 2009 takes place simultaneously throughout Indonesia including in North Aceh District. This legislative election gives the right of the people of Aceh Utara Regency to directly elect the legislative candidates for the period 2009-2014. Based on the legislative election in two periods, 2009-2014 and 2014-2019, voter participation in legislative elections in North Aceh tends to increase.

Based on data of Choice Independent Commision North Aceh District using the right to vote in legislative election in 2009-2014, voters only reaching 56% of the total number of voters having total 370,036, is 208,626 voters. Meanwhile, the legislative election of 2014-2019 reaching 76.34% of the total of 390,747 voters is 298,296 voters and 23.66% who does not use their right to vote. Meanwhile, when viewed from the experience of elections in some areas, it proves that the party of democracy (legislative elections) occurs political violence such as intimidation. It means that many factors affect the high or low level of political participation of the community.

## II. THEORETICAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Political Communication

In the beginning, communication is in a simple and narrow scope. However, along with the development of human communication begins to be faced with a more complex and complicated problems, so the study of communication science cannot isolate from the influence of other social studies, such as political science. One of studies that attract political scientists and communications scientists is the study of political communication. The study of political communication is dimensional and casuistic because it deals with various and the complexity of the problem.

The study of political communication originally begins from political science, although naming is more commonly known as propoganda. In Indonesia, at first the attention to discuss political communications grows among the scholars of political science rather than the scholars of communication science, but in the 1980s, the department of communicational science has begun to teach political communication studies. Although the discussion about the role of mass media and public opinion is partially done to support political theory and political strength, it has not yet tended to political power. Therefore, the nuances of political communication more tend to political behavior, and not too touching on the role of mass media that can be used to deliver the news itself.

Talking about political communication is not as easy as talking about political movements. The difficulty arises because there are two concepts that carry this discipline, namely the concept of communication and political concepts. Therefore, communications talking about politics are sometimes claimed as study about political aspects of public communication, and are often associated as communication of election campaign because they include persuasion issues of voters, inter-candidate debates and the use of mass media as a campaign tool. With the advancement of technology, human can regulate the faster delivery and broader range, so that at least it can affect the value system or political system that takes place within a country. In the political system, communication serves to bridge between the situation of political life that exists in the political superstructure and political infrastructure that at the same time also creates the stable political condition.

Besides, political communication also discusses issues related to participation and socialization of politics as well as changing in mental attitude and thinking patterns of all citizens in viewing the state as a unity containing mental integrity and national loyalty of all citizens.

Political communication is an interdisciplinary study built by variety of disciplines, especially in the relationship between the communication process and the political process. A study built by two fields of science often creates problems in integrating the two concepts. There will be dominance of one science to the other. If communication discipline is not more dominant than political discipline, political discipline will dominate study of communication. Nevertheless, it does not diminish the interest of scientists to delve deeper into this interdisciplinary field of political communication studies because it has a contact toward many disciplines.

The term of political communication is still relatively new in political science. The term begins to be always mentioned since the publication of Gabriel Almond's writings in his book *The Politics of the Development Areas*, which discusses political communication in more detail. Political communication is one of the functions that always present in every political system, so it is possible for political scientists to compare political systems and different cultural backgrounds. The significance of this definition is in the view that all the political systems that have existed in the world, which now exist, and which will later have fundamental similarities is the similarity of functions undertaken by all political systems.

## **2.2 The Definition of Public Opinion**

Political communication is closely related to public opinion. This is considered as the consequence of an imaging process being performed. Besides political images, political communication also aims to shape and foster public opinion and encourage political participation. By focusing on political messages or political talks as a formal object in the science of political communication, the discussion of politics can be developed within the framework of a mechanistic perspective, ie who speaks politics to whom, through what channels, and how their effects. Public opinion is one of the effects of political communication process based on mechanistic paradigm, especially political communication channeled through mass media. Public opinion in Indonesian is often translated by general opinion. To know the existence of public opinion can be known in 1963, Indonesia confronts to the Dutch about West Irian. On radio, newspapers, public meetings, speeches, lectures and others, people talks about West Irian. Generally, these speakers tend to the opinion that West Irian is the property of the Indonesian government, therefore the Indonesian nation is obliged to recapture it, and this is what makes that opinion is very important because it can take a joint decision. The symptoms are usually called public opinion.

The concept of public opinion is derived from the basic human self, namely the right to freedom of expression, to express the will, ideas, or ideas. Public opinion is an opinion concerning an issue or event that concerns the public. It means that in the mass there are individuals who cluster spontaneously because interested in matters concerning the public interest, especially those raised by the mass media. They discuss the problem to find a solution and to determine attitudes and opinions. These groups are called public. That is why the public is important to be understood as the result of a process of mass communication containing political messages. The public is part of the mass where a group of people faced to a difficult and controversy problem over its solution. Therefore, it requires intensive discussion.

Public opinion is formed when political communicators convey ideas or messages to the public. The process of the formation of public opinion does not only take place through the process of mass communication, but also takes place through the process of interpersonal communication. Thus, public opinion concerning political interests is communication effect of a very important political. The concrete form of the effect of political communication is the changing presence of image, attitudes, public opinion and public behavior due to the message that touches it. The change can further improve the existing image, and further strengthen the support of public opinion or otherwise. Every public layer consists of individuals who have difference of character, motivation and interests each other. The existence of differences encourages the emergence of unequal opinions, so it requires discussion and exchange of opinions to achieve common opinion and consensus. Public opinion concerning political interests is a political communication that takes place through mass media and interpersonal communication. The effect is not merely a feedback and reaction of public as a political communications audience of political messages or talks made by politicians through mass media or political rhetoric. However, the effect is a guide of a number of forces working in society, where politicians as political communicators can only dominate one power, ie messages or content of political speech openly delivered to the public. Public opinion is as a social and political phenomenon, especially in the field of political communication having certain characteristics. This characteristic concerns public opinion about political figures. In addition, another characteristic of public opinion is pluralist appearance. There are three faces of public opinion: 1) the face of opinion mass is derived from individual who achieves this personal choice and this choice through the process of convergent selectivity, a tool for achieving the social order in generating symbolic leaders. 2) The face of group opinion, arises either through an organized social control instrument or through giving and receiving from groups negotiating one another. 3) The face of popular opinion, is the sum of individual opinions measured by polls and political surveys, voting in general elections, and so on.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Types and Research Approach

This research uses mixed methods, which combines between quantitative and qualitative research. Furthermore, this research uses sequential mixed methods where strategy is done by interview first to get qualitative data then followed by quantitative data by using questionnaire. The used sequential method is sequential explanatory, by collecting and analyzing quantitative data and followed by collecting and analyzing qualitative data constructed based on preliminary quantitative results and priority given to quantitative data.

In this research, quantitative data is used to describe qualitative data obtained by interviews to obtain an overview of political communication and public opinion from the views of the figures. Then this research is done by quantitative approach which is correlation, that is research which try to connect or look for relation between one variable with other variable which is done to analyze the influence of political communication to public opinion and political participation of Moslem society in North Aceh Regency in legislative election 2014 -2019.

#### 3.2 The View of Research Location

North Aceh Regency is one of regencies in Aceh province located at the westernmost, tip of Sumatra island in Indonesia, and is located in coastal and highlands. The capital of this regency is moved from Lhokseumawe to Lhoksukon, following Lhokseumawe as an autonomous city. North Aceh Regency lies geographically with coordinate point 96.52.000-97.31.000 East Longitude and 04.46.000-05.00.400 North Latitude. Administratively, North Aceh Regency has an area of 3,296.86 km<sup>2</sup>, with the boundaries of area as followings:

1. North borders on the City of Lhokseumawe and the Malacca Strait;
2. South borders on Bener Meriah regency;
3. East borders on East Aceh Regency; and
4. West borders on Bireuen regency.

North Aceh regency consists of 27 subdistricts, 70 Settlements, and 852 Villages (*Gampong*), with the number of population of 579,180 consisting of 283,301 men and 295,879 women. The details of the number of settlements and villages in subdistricts of North Aceh regency are as follows:

**Table 1.** The Number of Settlements and Villages in Subdistrict of North Aceh Regency

Numb.	Subdistrict	Settlements	Villages
1.	Sawang	2	39
2.	Nisam	3	29
3.	Nisam Antara	1	6
4.	Banda Baro	1	9
5.	Kuta Makmur	3	39
6.	Simpang Keuramat	2	16
7.	Syamtalira Bayu	4	38
8.	Geureudong Pase	-	11
9.	Meurah Mulia	3	50
10.	Matangkuli	4	49
11.	Paya Bakong	4	39
12.	Pirak Timu	2	23
13.	Cot Girek	3	24
14.	Tanah Jambo Aye	4	47
15.	Langkahan	3	23
16.	Seunuddon	3	33
17.	Baktiya	3	57
18.	Baktiya Barat	3	26
19.	Lhoksukon	4	75
20.	Tanah Luas	3	57
21.	Nibong	2	20
22.	Samudera	3	40
23.	Syamtalira Aron	4	34
24.	Tanah Pasir	1	18
25.	Lapang	1	11
26.	Muara Batu	2	24
27.	Dewantara	2	15

The population composition based on ethnic in North Aceh filled by some of the biggest ethnicities is Aceh and Javanese. The majority of religions adopted are Islam almost 100%, very few non-Moslems is in the composition of the community in North Aceh. Therefore, in the North Aceh region there is no means of worship house besides the mosque. North Aceh regency consists of 16 (Sixteen) Watersheds. There are 5 (five) major river in North Aceh Regency region includes: Kr. Jambo Aye, Kr Keureto, Kr Pase, Kr. Nisam and Kr. Mane that stretches from upstream around the highlands in the south up to the Malacca Strait in the northern coastal region. The menagement in watershed region is the most important sector in supporting the development of planned areas. The area around the river is an area that affects economic growth and social stability. The average height of North Aceh is 125 m. The eastern highway of Sumatra crossing the lowlands makes this area being a more economically developed area than the southern region in isolated area. In lowland area is always hit by flooding when high rainfall is in the field. Lowland area is dominated by agricultural land in the form of rice fields and settlements, coastal consisting of saltwater fishing ponds while in the highlands area of plantation land begins to be worked widely by the community. North Aceh regency has relatively adequate public facilities and infrastructures, ranging from kindergarten to university level. There are 952 units for kindergarten, 385 units for elementary schools, 112 units for Junior High School, 63 unit for Senior High School and 2 units for university such as Unimal and poliklinik. While health facilities are 30 units for health clinics, 79 units for community health sub-centre, 34 units for maternity center and 1 unit for Hospital Cut Meutia.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

Simply political communication is a communication process whose messages contained political messages relating to the power of government and policy of government. Related to the effort to win the election directly, the election ofcourse will require the right political communication process to be able to win the voters, the thing is done by doing political imaging through political marketing. In the search process this support shows that voters are identical to political parties or candidates having platforms and feasible imaging for sale with a theme or branding that touches the voters' hearts to make it easier to remember. Therefore, the Democratic National Party elects candidates who will fight the voting power in legislative elections from public figures or legislative candidate received by the community or often communicate with the public, as well as candidates who have proximity figure with party leaders.

Political communication has an important role of a politic party for winning in election. Therefore the right strategy is needed in doing political communication, so a political party obtain support and vote from society. One of communication aim is to form good political imaging to people. Political imaging is formed based on accepted information either directly or through media. Based this case, Party Demokrat introduces their legislative candidate not only through printed media, social media and billboard but also through meeting directly with society in the places that is visited by many visitors. Like Aceh tradition, to lose the tired or bored they gether in coffee shop. This meeting is done to introduce legislative candidate to construct political imaging, so the public opinion is created because in the basic public opinion is built through political imaging, and political imaging is existed as consequence of Political communication.

The Legislative Election is a manifestation of democracy which is the right of the community in selecting and determining the candidate who will fight for their interests. In each election, every candidate contesting at this democracy party must have its own strategy aimed to win the election by gaining public support. Election is the primary key of a democratic country. One of the most important essence in democracy is the existence of political institutions as well as political infrastructure which the scope has political parties as the participant, each individual or political party attempts to compete and launch a strategy to win the competition and succeed in legislative election. Getting the votes is done by candidates with political communication as a strategy. This strategy is needed to provide political information to the public, so it is expected to be drawn a positive image of political parties. This condition is expected to help shape the mindset and habits of the community in terms of political participation. In this case, the candidate figure becomes a big factor in winning the legislative election, because besides viewing political parties, political actors or legislative candidates must be owned in the community because this actor will run the existing policies in his Government, so the public should also see this case well. The affirmation of Golkar Party is choosing candidates to be role models to compete in the legislative elections. The same thing is also affirmed by *Persatuan Pembangunan Party* that in competing in the legislative elections is selected candidates who have a figure that is favored by the community and have social capital to the electoral district. Besides social capital that must be owned by political actors, political communication must also be owned by the actors to gain legitimacy from the public.

Political party is the great intermediaries that connect social forces and social ideologies with official governmental institutions and linked to political action in the wider society. Based on this view, H. Ismed AJ Hasan Deputy Secretary of the Board of Experts of *Persatuan Pembangunan Party* of North Aceh emphasizes the importance of political campaigns by political parties to introduce their candidates. Political campaign is a form of political communication conducted by a person or group or political organizations within a certain time to gain political support from the people. Generally political campaign governed by separate rules is time, procedures, supervision and sanctions in case of violations by campaign organizers.

So here the function of political communication itself is how the political actors having the legitimacy or trust of the community can be more trusted again by using communication with the community, so the emotional connection is strongly embedded. In addition to political parties, figures of political actors or legislative candidates themselves gain legitimacy from the community. Legitimacy must be obtained by the candidates or figures who will advance in the Legislative Election, this is because the voting comes from a lot of society, which demands must have social capital that has been prepared also in the community itself. These candidate figures must have an emotional connection with the community.

Elections are explicitly regulated in Chapter VI Article 22 E of the Constitution of 1945. This election is the main point in a democratic country, because it contains two pillars of democracy, namely participation and competition. The Chairman of the choice independent commission states that participation is demonstrated by the people that use their political right to vote for representatives of the people who will sit in representative institutions. Therefore, elected representatives must have the capacity to establish communicative relationships with their constituents. Community participation is not only limited to participate in elections, but also they want to join in the political party. The participation of the community in political activities, especially in voting in the legislative elections, is a very important political communication consequence. Political campaigns are implemented by political parties to gain positive public opinion and the high electability of political parties. Basically, the attitude of someone will be consistent with his behavior. Attitudes can be seen from the direction of public opinion on political campaigns, whereas behavior can be seen from the level of his electability. The high electability of political parties should be followed by positive public opinion. This is confirmed by *Nasional Demokrat* Party that voter behavior is predicted through public opinion about political candidates or candidates. The opinion can be fun, in the form of comments that contain praise, adulation, or statements supporting candidate campaigns. It can also be unpleasant opinion which means the public does not like the candidate campaign in the form of comments that criticize, belittle, or the statement does not support candidate campaign. Meanwhile, neutral opinion means the public does not show his attitude, the public only gives advice.

Political communicators are people who have the ability to run political communication. Attached to it is a strategic position as a politician, that keeps credibility and branding of individual, or an institution where communicators take shelter. As a politician, they can be inside or outside government positions, but must maintain national integrity. In line with the national political contestation, there emerges professional political communicator who utilizes mainstream media channels and alternative media to influence the masses. The use of mass media such as print media, electronic media and online media, to spread political messages, can reach the heterogeneous and large target audience. Because the mass media do have a responsibility to always provide the right accurate and clear information, broadcast and present. With that function, mass media can supply the information needs of the audience. Therefore, according to the chairman of *Demokrat* Party candidates need to pay attention to the media used to convey political messages. Because in political communication, the most realistic fact to use as a measure of the success of message delivery, is the increasing number of audiences who agree on what the message is about. More assertive is willing to be a follower of political communicator. In political contestation, his hope is willing to vote in the legislative elections. Adding followers and the number of people can be formed through opinions formed by political communicators or candidates. The issue of public opinion can be widely accepted by society or rejected because it does not provide significant benefits to the society. Therefore, political communicators or candidates should build public opinion, by formulating issues related to political competition and other political activities that are considered to increase public belief. According to Chairman of Golkar Party, the success of making public opinion is the key of the formation of society in political communication because the public opinion is very sensitive towards issues of interest and felt by the wider community. If the arrangement of messages in political communications can touch the needs of society basically and be done in program and continually, then the resulting political impact is the increased credibility of political communicators or candidates with political parties. Conveying messages, information and political news continuously in the political socialization program conducted by political communicators is a political learning and political participation of the community. This is not an easy job, so political communicators or legislators must have the ability to communicate politically so that they have the opportunity and capacity as leaders who are able to organize messages to society well. Because political messages are associated with symbols, language and public opinion, these three things are always embedded in the political information propagated by communicators or legislative candidates to the public to achieve political goals. Based on this, H. Ismed, AJ Hasan, S. Sos of *Persatuan Pembangunan* Party asserts that in the delivery of political messages through campaigns, legislative candidates must use persuasion techniques that reach individuals psychologically to rally public opinion. In addition, the dissemination of political messages is done through political advertisements directed to heterogeneous society, so that the program and ideology of the party can be better known to the public.

Looking at it, presumably political socialization needs to be done continuously in order to attract the political participation of the community. Not only increase in the run-up to legislative elections because basically political socialization is the process of introducing a political system to someone, and how that person determines his responses and reactions to political phenomena. According to the Chairman of choice independent commission in the state demands the implementation of democratic elections. There is no pressure from various stakeholders in national political contestation. Democratic election undertaken democratically is free from the pressure of any party having an interest, the role of free media, and independence, because the representation of democracy in government is a free election. It is determined peacefully and encourages the people to use their vote, accessing gives voting rights is open, equality of voices, so that no votes are counted more than others.

## V. CONCLUSION

In relation to the paradigm of political communication as an effort to convey political messages, election has significance with the issue of the right of the people to know the vision, mission and program of candidates in legislative elections. The most obvious manifestation of this testimony is the implementation of campaigns, political socialization and various activities exploring political messages to the people through channels of organization and mass media. Therefore, candidates must be involved early in political communication with the people, not only at the time as candidate in short time, but also the candidate fight from beginning to get the aspiration of people where it is a necessity that must be run consistently. It is better for taking attention on the pattern of organizing a good message based on the definition of communication which is the process of delivering messages from communicators to communicants having the aim to build understanding of the meaning together. To achieve mutual understanding, legislative candidates must know what the characteristics, the will and needs of people are factually. The Moslem community in Aceh is considering having a different assessment of the political situation. Aceh's history has been heavily influenced by violence, and efforts have been made to resolve the conflict. The protracted conflict in Aceh is finally solved by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of Helsinki in 2005 through the mediation of the CMI (Conflict Management Initiative).

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