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Author for correspondence:

Nuning Indah Pratiwi

E-mail: nuningindahpratiwi@undiknas.ac.id

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Hegemony in Political Communication: The Swing Voter Phenomenon in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem Regency, Bali

¹Nuning Indah Pratiwi, ²I Nyoman Darma Putra, ³Anak Agung Ngurah Anom Kumbara, ⁴Ni Wayan Widhiasthini

^{1,4} Universitas Pendidikan Nasional, Indonesia

^{2,3} Universitas Udayana, Indonesia

The 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem, Bali was marked by a significant swing voter phenomenon. The incumbent pair Mas Sumatri and Sukerana, predicted by surveys to win with 53.9% against Dana-Dipa with 37.2% during the campaign, actually suffered a crushing defeat with 43.4%, while Dana-Dipa won with 56.6% according to the official results from the Karangasem KPU. Additionally, there was a need to increase political participation, as the Karangasem KPU data showed that out of 377,873 registered voters, only 269,501 exercised their right to vote. This means there were 108,372 voters who did not vote. This research examines the swing voter phenomenon in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem by addressing hegemony factors as the cause of swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem, Bali, Indonesia. Data were analyzed using the concept of hegemony. The results of this research are: first, the hegemonic factors of the incumbent's policies causing swing voters and the counter-hegemony by the community against the incumbent government's policies. Second, the political communication strategies of the candidates to minimize swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem.

1. Introduction

Elections are a hallmark of democratic countries as a fundamental constitutional mandate in state administration and as a manifestation of popular sovereignty. This occurs in democratic countries where the involvement of all citizens in elections is a source of legitimacy for the government's power and serves as a catalyst to study rational voting behavior. The public determines the direction of the nation's journey, as well as its involvement in politics, which can help a democratic country implement a system that places sovereignty in the hands of the people. According to Munck (2014, p. 1), the statement "democracy is more than just elections" captures an important insight that is now common wisdom, as seen in aspects like governance, the quality of government, or open government. Schumpeter states that democracy is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions where individuals acquire the power to decide through a competition for the people's vote. Thus, regional head elections and deputy regional head elections, often referred to as *Pilkada*, are part of the implementation of democracy (Cherneski, 2018, p. 1).

Regional heads are political positions that lead and drive the wheels of government for the benefit of the public. Therefore, regional heads must be elected by the people and are accountable according to the recruitment mechanism of regional heads conducted politically through a selection process by the public of candidates for regional head positions. This process cannot be separated from power, authority, and hegemony. As understood by Gramsci, domination and socio-political change are the results of class struggles over hegemony (Leijendekkera & Mutsvairob, 2014, p. 1040; Wang, 2020, p. 114).

The concept of hegemony and its dominance can provide an analysis of the differential abilities of sub-groups in society to shape the social world (Rachar, 2016, pp. 227-247; Safieddine; 2021, pp. 41-56; Montalbano, 2021, pp. 83-97). This cannot be separated from politics, which, according to Ardag et al. (2019, p. 2), is a political struggle that is regularly assimilated and directed, but also has a tendency to reject depoliticization at certain times. Political life in Indonesia has moved dynamically since the late 1990s reform era, marked by the emergence of many political parties, the freedom of the public to directly elect regional heads, legislators, and presidents, in contrast to the pre-reform era when the public chose political parties and their voices were utilized by representatives they had never directly elected (Anugerah, 2018, p. 27).

Campaign activities in the 2020 *Pilkada* could also be conducted by the candidate's success teams using social media with various platforms in the digitalization era, but still in accordance with applicable regulations. This regulation aims to ensure an orderly campaign process as one of the indicators of an integrity election, namely free and fair competition among election participants. The process of convincing voters during the campaign must uphold the principle of free and fair by

complying with applicable regulations, so that election fraud can be avoided. Campaigning as part of political communication is done by persuading voters/constituents to deliver political messages in the form of programs, visions, and missions to broaden insights and influence the views and behavior of voters as political targets and participants in the campaign. The ability and credibility of candidates competing in political contests as communicators in conveying communication messages are very important. This can also be categorized as political communication marketing to "brand" the programs offered by the candidates to voters/constituents. The use of social media platforms has become a prominent form of election campaigning in three Southeast Asian countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines.

Social media campaigning has now become a prominent feature in election campaigns in Indonesia and the Philippines, where social media is increasingly used to undermine mainstream media discourse and official communication channels (Tapsell, 2020, p. 1). Setiawan argues that political communication is the process of conveying opinions, attitudes, and behaviors of individuals, institutions, or political forces in order to influence political decision-making (Susanto, 2013, p. 164), while politics is state life. Flexibly, political communication refers to activities related to politics (Nimmo, 2007, p. 8). Galnoor (1980, p. 102) states that political communication is the political infrastructure—a combination of social interactions in which information related to collective efforts and power relations enters circulation.

According to Lilleker, the main function of political communication is to make the public think about an issue in a way that is beneficial to the creators and senders of political messages (Sulaiman, 2013, p. 126). This means that any political organization intending to influence the public politically must strive to control the dominant ideas in the public sphere. This has become a political movement for historical inclusion that has pushed for political representation and increased presence in non-governmental institutions (Djupe and Olson, 2013, p. 329).

The swing voter phenomenon also occurred in Karangasem during the simultaneous Pilkada in Bali in 2020, which was held in six regencies/cities, namely Jembrana, Tabanan, Badung, Bangli, Karangasem, and Denpasar City. Among these six regencies/cities, one area ran unopposed, namely Badung Regency. Some incumbent candidates or those still serving as regional heads received fewer votes compared to new political opponents. This happened in Jembrana Regency where the incumbent candidate I Made Kembang Hartawan and I Ketut Sugiasa received fewer votes compared to the other candidates, I Nengah Tamba and I Gede Ngurah Patriana Krisna. The same thing happened in Karangasem Regency when, before the voting, the temporary results from the Ganesha survey showed that candidate pair number 2, I Gusti Ayu Mas Sumatri and I Made Sukerana, had higher electability compared to candidate pair number 1, I Gede Dana and I Wayan

Artha Dipa. However, during the voting, the opposite occurred: pair number 2 lost to pair number 1. The 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem was marked by a significant swing voter phenomenon. The incumbent pair Mas Sumatri and Sukerana, predicted by surveys to win with 53.9% against I Gede Dana and I Wayan Artha Dipa with 37.2% during the campaign, actually suffered a crushing defeat with 43.4%, while Dana-Dipa won with 56.6% according to the official results from the Karangasem KPU. Additionally, political participation needed improvement, as the Karangasem KPU data showed that out of 377,873 registered voters, only 269,501 exercised their right to vote, meaning 108,372 voters did not vote.

The above description shows that the swing voter phenomenon in the voting process greatly influences the democratic process in Indonesia and the process of winning political candidates contesting in Indonesian elections.

Based on the background and the issues related to the dynamics of swing voters in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem, the research question in this study is whether hegemonic factors cause the occurrence of swing voters in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem.

2. Method

This research is qualitative, which according to Creswell (2018, p. 59) begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that shape or influence the study of research problems related to the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human issue. Based on the above, this research critically examines the factors causing the occurrence of swing voters, the forms of swing voters, and the implications of swing voters on the socio-political landscape in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem. This research uses a qualitative approach, collecting data in natural settings, sensitive to the people and places under study, and analyzing data inductively and deductively to form various themes or patterns. Data collection methods include four techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, document studies, and literature studies. The data sources used in this qualitative research are divided into primary and secondary sources, namely:

Primary data, which are data collected by the researcher through observation and interviews. Thus, primary data will be obtained from interviews with informants including political analysts and academics, the Chair of the Karangasem KPU, and the Commissioners of the Karangasem KPU, the Head of Budakeling Village, Kelian Dinas of Subagan Village, Bendesa Adat of Subagan Village, religious figures of Pertima Village, political elites, voters who participated in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem, and voters who decided to become swing voters in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem. This is done to ensure data consistency with the research results.

Secondary data, which are data collected in this research, such as data related to the results of the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem, and journals discussing swing voters. These data serve as references related to the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem..

3. Result and Discussion

During the campaign process, independent survey organizations showed that the pair Mas Sumatri and Sukerana were leading. However, the people of Karangasem were surprised by the defeat of candidate pair number 2 after the voting process took place. This has become a polemic, indicating the occurrence of swing voters during the 2020 Pilkada.

The 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem was also marked by the phenomenon of swing voters, where initially voters chose one candidate but switched their votes to another candidate on election day. This happened to candidate pair number 2, I Gusti Ayu Mas Sumatri and her running mate, I Made Sukerana. A survey by Ganesha Consulting, shown in Figure 1, illustrated that the electability simulation of candidate pair number 2 was quite high during the campaign process compared to candidate pair number 1.



Figure 1: Simulated Ballots for Each Candidate Pair Number One and Two During the 2020 Regent and Deputy Regent Election Campaign.
Source: Lembaga Survei Ganesha Consulting (2020)

Figure 1 is a simulation of the ballots for each candidate pair number one and two in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem during the 2020 regent and deputy regent election campaign conducted by the Ganesha Consulting survey institute. Additionally, according to suaradewata.com, Ganesha

Consulting stated that two types of surveys were conducted: an electability survey and a mapping survey.

Based on the constituent base of parties holding seats in the Karangasem DPRD, Mas Sumatri managed to garner the most votes across all parties. For example, among PDI Perjuangan voters, Mas Sumatri secured 16.9 percent while Gede Dana had 15.7 percent; among Golkar voters, Mas Sumatri had 6 percent and Gede Dana had 1.8 percent; among Demokrat voters, Mas Sumatri had 2 percent and Gede Dana had 0.4 percent. Out of the eight sub-districts, Mas Sumatri won in all with the highest percentages in Karangasem and Kubu. According to the Ganesha Consulting survey results, from a mapping survey perspective, Mas Sumatri led in 66 out of 78 villages/kelurahan, lost in 6, and tied in 6. This marked a significant increase in Mas Sumatri's electability, as she only led in 35 villages during the 2015 Pilkada.

These survey results made the campaign team for candidate pair number two confident in their victory. However, the final vote count revealed a different outcome. According to the final tally by the Karangasem KPU, candidate pair number one, I Gede Dana and I Wayan Artha Dipa, won with 56.6%, while candidate pair number two, I Gusti Ayu Mas Sumatri and I Made Sukerana, received 43.4%, resulting in their defeat, as shown in Figure 2

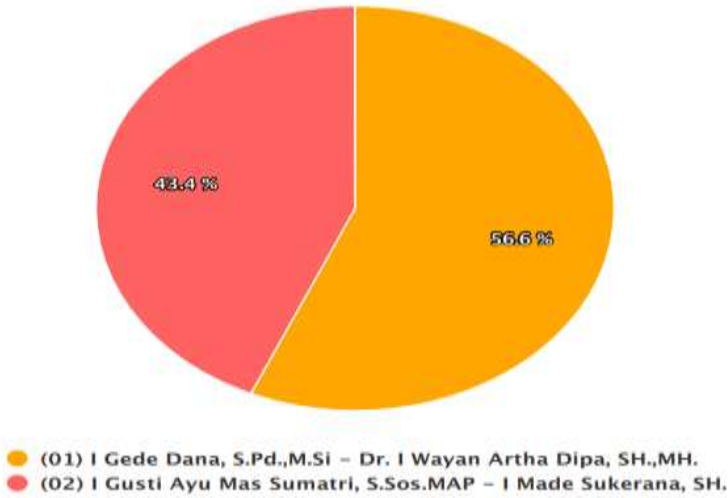


Figure 2: Percentage of Votes for Regent and Deputy Regent Candidate Pairs in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem

Source: KPU Karangasem (2020)

Dr. Subanda's statement regarding the dynamics of swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election (Pilkada) in Karangasem, Bali, related to the incumbent's performance record:

"It must be acknowledged that in the 2020 Pilkada in Karangasem, Bu Mas had strong assets. I observed her social investment, providing clean water assistance to the people of Karangasem. Her financial backing is also strong due to her husband, a successful businessman in Karangasem. However, it should be noted that swing voters occurred due to internal bureaucratic issues during Bu Mas's leadership, which can be linked to her performance record" (interview, March 1, 2023).

The informant above explains that in Bali, generally, the majority of winning political parties are PDI Perjuangan, and in Karangasem, apart from PDI Perjuangan, the strong political party is Golkar.

This research also involved the general public, including informant Kadek Dwi Pujiati, 27 years old, a student, who stated:

"I choose a candidate who is not currently in office because I want new and better changes in Karangasem, but that doesn't mean the current leader is not good. The current leader has been good; many of their programs have been implemented for the people of Karangasem. Health programs, cultural programs, welfare improvement programs, and many others. But in my opinion, they have not reached their maximum potential yet. So, in this Regional Election, I want to try something new with a new leader" (interview, February 19, 2023).

Another member of the general public (X3), who is a student and prefers not to be named, stated:

"At the beginning, in the 2015 Regional Election, I voted for the elected Regent because the majority also voted for him, but during his leadership, I feel there were shortcomings and sometimes decisions were made by listening to only one side, not as a whole. Therefore, in the 2020 Regional Election, I voted for a new Regent with new rules and policies" (interview, June 10, 2023).

The issue of Swing Voters has been highlighted in mass media coverage, not only in Karangasem, Bali, but also in two notable cases extensively covered by the media: the differences between survey predictions and the final results of regional elections (pilkada) in Jakarta in 2012 and West Java in 2013. In Jakarta, the unexpected victory of the Jokowi-Ahok pair in two rounds of the election overturned survey results that favored the incumbent pair, Fauzi Bowo-Nachrowi.

Meanwhile, in the West Java 2013 Regional Election, the Aher-Deddy pair, less favored by opinion research, emerged victorious, defeating the Dede Yusuf-Lex Laksamana pair, which was favored by many polling institutions. With the increasing number of political parties in Indonesia, the choices available to Indonesian voters have become more diverse.

Swing Voters in Karangasem are not a natural phenomenon but occur due to a counter-hegemony factor among residents, responding to the hegemonic power of the ruling government in Karangasem. During the 2020 Regional Election, Regent Mas Sumatri issued controversial policies that sparked debate and controversy among Karangasem's residents. Bureaucratic policies involving arbitrary personnel transfers were particularly unpopular because these transfers were based not on the competence of the officials but on personal factors. Consequently, hegemony was evident in Mas Sumatri's administration and became a contributing factor to the swing voter phenomenon in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem, countering the hegemonic policies of the incumbent government.

Gramsci expanded the concept of hegemony, encompassing the role of capitalist class and its members, both in seizing state power and in maintaining existing power (Emerson, 2013, p. 439). Through Gramsci's perspective on hegemony in the social-political dynamics of Karangasem's community, it becomes apparent that dominance arises from those wielding power.

The assertion of hegemony as dominance is further emphasized by political elite informant, Dr. Sugawa Korry, S.E., M.M., Ak., CA., who states:

"Hegemony and power cannot be separated because hegemony is exerted only by those in power; if they were not in power, they would not be able to hegemonize/dominate others. Similarly in Bali, if we examine the tendency of hegemony from the ruling party (PDI Perjuangan), it certainly influences policies. For example, when there is controversy surrounding political dynasties within a government. So, I interpret it as power that will later, over time in their administration, implement necessary corrections." (interview, February 15, 2023).

The informant's statement above explains hegemony in general, and when related to the occurrence of swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem, Dr. Sugawa Korry, S.E., M.M., Ak., CA. explains as follows:

"Hegemony dominates the governmental structure, so it can easily become commonplace, especially for those who hold power, to make political decisions that can be implemented in public policy. According to this, it is clear that hegemony influences political decisions." (interview, February 15, 2023).

Based on the interview with the informant, it was found that during Mas Sumatri's administration, controversy arose due to bureaucratic policies that disappointed the community, such as placing less competent individuals in government positions and carrying out questionable personnel transfers. This made his hegemony explicit. As expressed by Informant X1, a member of the public who works as a merchant and prefers not to be named:

"When Bu Mas was still serving as Bupati, I was disappointed when she appointed people to government positions whom I felt were not suitable based on their competence. There was also a policy to transfer people to other regions for reasons that seemed inappropriate. These reasons led me to vote for a new candidate in the 2020 Regional Election." (interview, March 20, 2023).

According to the informant's statement above, the tendency for swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election in Karangasem was caused by the hegemony of the ruling authority that was not accepted by the community. As a result, the community countered this hegemony, ultimately deciding not to re-elect the incumbent in the subsequent elections if they were to run for the same position again. This illustrates that hegemony can form from anyone who feels they have the power to dominate others.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that hegemony is a factor causing swing voters in the 2020 Regional Election (Pilkada) in Karangasem, particularly concerning policies related to the placement of government officials within the incumbent administration. This highlights the importance of a meritocratic system that provides opportunities for individuals to lead based on their abilities or achievements, rather than their wealth or social class, as a patrimonial system can adversely affect governance performance.

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