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Sound Horeg as Political Campaign Strategy in the Banyuwangi Local Election

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Abstract

The phenomenon of sound horeg in the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi local election reflects a significant transformation in local political campaign strategies that integrate popular culture, grassroots entertainment, and emotional political communication. Originally functioning as a form of rural entertainment, sound horeg has evolved into a strategic political medium capable of mobilizing mass participation, fostering emotional attachment, and strengthening cultural identification between candidates and voters. This study aims to analyze the role of sound horeg as a political campaign strategy, the political communication processes involved, and its implications for voter perceptions, cultural identity, and democratic quality. This research employs a qualitative case study approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with campaign teams, local political actors, sound horeg community members, religious figures, and voters, complemented by participant observation and document analysis. The analytical framework integrates Harold Lasswell's political communication model, Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Ernesto Laclau's theory of populism, and perspectives from cultural sociology and the sociology of religion. The findings reveal that sound horeg functions not merely as entertainment but as a symbolic cultural practice that produces political legitimacy, emotional mobilization, and populist identification. However, the strategy also raises ethical concerns regarding the commodification of culture, the dominance of emotional appeals over policy discourse, and the potential exclusion of certain social groups. This study contributes to the literature on local political communication by demonstrating how culture, religion, and power intersect in contemporary Indonesian local elections.

Keyword: *Sound Horeg, Political Campaign Strategy, Cultural Hegemony, Populism, Banyuwangi Local Election*

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Introduction

Local democracy in Indonesia has undergone significant transformation alongside the growing diversification of political campaign strategies employed in electoral contests. Regional Head Elections (Pemilihan Kepala Daerah or Pilkada) function not only as a procedural mechanism for leadership succession but also as a social, cultural, and symbolic arena where political actors interact with society (Winters, 2016). Within the framework of Pancasila democracy, political processes are ideally oriented not merely toward the acquisition of power but also toward the construction of legitimacy through engagement with societal values and local cultural contexts (Triwicaksono & Nugroho, 2021).

Recent developments indicate that political campaigns are no longer confined to the formal dissemination of visions, missions, and policy programs. Contemporary political communication increasingly adopts populist, emotional, and experience-based approaches that resonate more closely with voters' everyday lives. Political preferences are shaped not only by rational evaluations but also by affective, symbolic, and cultural dimensions that influence how voters perceive candidates and political messages. Consequently, non-conventional media forms have gained prominence as effective tools for reaching grassroots communities (Shem et al., 2023).

One notable manifestation of this shift is the increasing use of sound-based media and popular entertainment in local political campaigns (Setyawan & Khotimah, 2019). In various regions of Indonesia, high powered audio systems, music performances, and street-based entertainment are frequently employed to attract public attention, mobilize crowds, and generate a festive campaign atmosphere (Sari et al., 2023). This trend reflects a broader transformation in campaign practices from elite driven and formal communication toward more inclusive and culturally embedded political engagement. Sound media function not only as channels for message delivery but also as instruments of mass mobilization and collective emotional formation (Rozy et al., 2020).

Within this context, sound horeg emerges as a particularly compelling phenomenon. Sound horeg refers to high-powered sound systems characterized by extremely loud volume and strong bass vibrations, traditionally used in rural community events such as weddings, local festivals, and dangdut music performances (Rijalussaumi & Irma, 2025). In Banyuwangi, sound horeg has evolved into an integral component of local popular culture and a symbol of collective expression, particularly among youth communities and the working class. Beyond its entertainment function, sound horeg represents social identity, group solidarity, and community pride (Rahmania & Raharjo, 2025).

The transformation of sound horeg from a cultural entertainment practice into a political

campaign instrument highlights the close relationship between culture and power (Ayuningsih et al., 2021). During the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi Pilkada, sound horeg was extensively utilized in various campaign activities, including political convoys, declarations of support, and open rallies. Its presence successfully attracted large audiences, generated political enthusiasm, and fostered a sense

of closeness between candidates and grassroots voters. Campaigns framed within entertainment-oriented settings were perceived as more engaging and accessible compared to conventional, formal political events (Putra & Gautama, 2021).

The Banyuwangi case becomes particularly significant when examined through the lens of strategic political adaptation. Initially, the incumbent candidate, Ipuk Mujiono, prohibited the use of sound horeg during campaign activities, citing concerns over public order and community disturbance (Parsons, 2024). However, this policy decision coincided with a decline in campaign appeal and electoral popularity, especially as rival candidates actively employed sound horeg as an attractive campaign medium. The subsequent strategic shift to permit sound horeg use proved effective in increasing public participation and restoring electoral support, ultimately contributing to electoral victory in the 2024–2029 Pilkada (Pandiangan, 2019).

This phenomenon underscores the importance of adaptive campaign strategies that are responsive to local social and cultural dynamics. Political communication strategies that align with voter preferences and cultural practices play a crucial role in shaping campaign effectiveness and electoral outcomes (Nurunnisa & Djuyandi, 2023). In this regard, sound horeg functions not merely as a technical medium for message amplification but also as a cultural symbol conveying meanings of proximity, inclusivity, and local identity (Nadir & Wardani, 2019).

From a theoretical perspective, the use of sound horeg can be examined through Harold Lasswell's Political Communication Theory, particularly the framework of "who says what, through which channel, to whom, and with what effect" (Mediastika et al., 2024). Sound horeg serves as a powerful communication channel capable of reaching large audiences in public spaces while creating participatory political experiences (Magdalena et al., 2025). Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci's Theory of Hegemony provides a complementary analytical lens to understand how popular culture functions as an ideological tool for building political consent and legitimacy through cultural engagement rather than coercion (Kiptiyah et al., 2025).

Despite the growing body of literature on political campaign strategies and political communication, existing studies predominantly focus on digital media, mass media, or conventional campaign tools (Hiyatma et al., 2025). Scholarly attention to culturally embedded,

non-conventional media such as sound horeg in local electoral contexts remains limited. Yet, this phenomenon reflects a critical transformation in local democratic practices, where entertainment and popular culture become integral components of political power contests (Hadrizall & Hamdan M. Salleh, 2022).

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the use of sound horeg as a political campaign strategy in the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi Pilkada by examining the political communication processes involved, the strategic dynamics employed by candidates, and the implications for voter perceptions and preferences. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research seeks to contribute theoretically to the study of culturally grounded political communication while offering

empirical insights into the evolving nature of local political campaigns in Indonesia (Fernando Holqi & Rahman, 2024).

Root Problem

1. How is sound horeg utilized as a political campaign strategy in the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi local election?
2. How does sound horeg function as a medium of cultural hegemony and populist political communication?
3. What are the ethical, religious, and social implications of entertainment-based political campaigns?

Purpose Of Research

To determine the extent to which the use of sound horeg plays a role as an effective political communication strategy in shaping voter preferences and increasing the electability of regional head candidates in Banyuwangi in the 2024–2029 regional elections.

Benefits of Research

In practical terms, this study offers important insights for politicians, election organizers, and the general public on how campaign strategies should be formulated to align with the social and cultural realities at the local level (Fauzi et al., 2019). The use of sound horeg in Banyuwangi is a concrete example of how a campaign approach that embraces local culture can be a more effective means of communication than a conventional approach alone. For campaign teams and regional head candidates, these findings show that strategies that are adaptive to community preferences and habits have the potential to increase public engagement while strengthening electability (Dwi Susilo et al., 2021). For election organizers, this research can be used as a basis for consideration in drafting regulations that not only govern campaign order but also provide space for innovation in political communication that still pays attention to ethics and public order (Ekman & Widholm, 2024).

Meanwhile, for the public, this research can build critical awareness that political campaigns are not just about entertainment or popularity, but also about how the values, messages, and commitments of prospective leaders are communicated appropriately to the public. In other words, this research encourages smarter, more reflective, and contextual political participation in line with the spirit of Pancasila democracy (Purwanti et al., 2023).

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore the socio-political dynamics of sound horeg in the Banyuwangi local election. Banyuwangi was purposively selected due to the prominence of sound horeg in campaign activities and its strong cultural significance.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with campaign team members, DPRD members, sound horeg community participants, religious leaders, and voters. Participant observation was conducted during campaign events, and document analysis included campaign materials, media reports, and regulatory texts.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, guided by Lasswell's communication framework and supported by Gramsci's hegemony theory and Laclau's populism theory to interpret cultural and emotional political dynamics.

Result and Discussion

Sound Horeg as Cultural and Political Communication

Sound horeg proved highly effective in attracting public attention and mobilizing mass participation. Campaign events transformed into social gatherings, lowering barriers to political engagement and fostering collective enthusiasm. Candidates using sound horeg were perceived as approachable and culturally grounded (Di Leo et al., 2025).

Cultural Hegemony and Political Consent

Drawing on Gramsci's theory, sound horeg operates as a hegemonic cultural tool through which

political legitimacy is constructed via cultural alignment rather than coercion. Candidates embed authority within familiar cultural practices, generating spontaneous public consent (Despita & Gautama, 2022).

Populism and Emotional Politics

Consistent with Laclau's theory, sound horeg functions as a populist signifier that creates emotional bonds between candidates and voters. While fostering inclusion, this strategy risks simplifying political discourse by prioritizing affect over policy substance (Bari et al., 2025).

Religion, Morality, and Cultural Boundaries

Religious values significantly shape public reception of sound horeg. While some religious communities tolerate its use as social entertainment, others express moral concerns regarding noise and public order. Religious leaders thus act as moral gatekeepers in political communication (Anwari et al., 2026).

Ethical and Democratic Implications

Entertainment-based campaigns raise ethical concerns about the commodification of culture and the reduction of democratic participation to spectacle. While participation increases, substantive political dialogue may diminish, posing risks to democratic accountability (Afisa et al., 2024).

Power, Accessibility, and Exclusion

Sound horeg is not universally inclusive. Its auditory dominance may marginalize elderly residents, noise-sensitive groups, and those who perceive such campaigns as intrusive. This highlights unequal political accessibility and the need for complementary communication strategies (Anisa Triana Octavia et al., 2024).

Research Results

After This study finds that sound horeg has transformed from a form of grassroots entertainment into an effective political communication tool in the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi regional election. Its use in campaign activities successfully attracted mass participation, created a festive atmosphere, and strengthened emotional connections between candidates and voters (Amir Mahmud & Dewien Nabelah Agustin, 2025).

Tabel 1.
Respondent Response

No.	Respondent Category	Main Responses
1	Campaign Team	Sound horeg is intentionally used to attract public attention, increase crowd attendance, and create an engaging campaign atmosphere. It helps reduce social distance between candidates and voters.
2	Political Actors / DPRD Members	Sound horeg is viewed as a pragmatic adaptation to local political culture. Campaigns that align with popular culture are more easily accepted and enhance candidate visibility and public recall.
3	Sound Horeg Community Members	Participation is driven by cultural pride and social recognition. Sound horeg is perceived as a symbol of collective identity and active involvement in the political process.
4	Voters (General Public)	Campaigns using sound horeg are considered more engaging, memorable, and enjoyable compared to conventional campaigns. They create emotional closeness with candidates.
5	Voters (Critic	Some respondents express concerns about noise disturbance, indicating differing perceptions and the need for contextual sensitivity in its use.

Sound horeg functioned as a strategic medium for mass mobilization, particularly among rural communities and youth groups. Campaign events incorporating sound horeg were perceived as more inclusive and engaging, turning political activities into collective social gatherings rather than formal rallies (Allya Salsa Bilatul Kh et al., 2024).

A key finding is the strategic shift by candidate Ipuk Mujiono. Initially prohibiting sound horeg led to a decline in public support, while the opposing camp gained increased visibility. After allowing the use of sound horeg, Ipuk Mujiono’s campaign experienced a rapid recovery in electability, which

contributed significantly to electoral victory (Akioye, 1993).

Additionally, sound horeg played a role in image construction and cultural hegemony. By embedding political messages within popular local culture, candidates gained legitimacy and public consent without overt coercion. Although some residents viewed sound horeg as disruptive, overall voter perception remained positive, especially in areas where the practice was culturally familiar (Abdullahi Maigari & Shehu, 2025).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that sound horeg functions as a culturally embedded and politically strategic campaign medium in the 2024–2029 Banyuwangi local election. Beyond entertainment, it serves as a symbolic instrument for constructing legitimacy, emotional proximity, and cultural hegemony.

By integrating political communication theory, cultural sociology, populism theory, and the sociology of religion, this research reveals both the strengths and limitations of entertainment based political campaigns. While such strategies enhance participation and cultural resonance, they also raise ethical concerns regarding democratic substance and inclusivity. Future research should examine regulatory and ethical frameworks to ensure that culturally adaptive campaign strategies strengthen democratic quality rather than undermine it.

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