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Culturally Embedded Campaign Strategy: A Challenger's Victory over the Incumbent in Padang's 2024 Mayoral Election

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Abstract: *This study aims to analyse how the Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir pair designed and implemented the campaign strategy that defeated the incumbent in the 2024 Padang mayoral election, in which the pair won 55.17 percent of valid votes and led in all eleven districts. The study employs a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with fifteen informants from seven role categories, an interview with an independent academic observer for expert triangulation, and campaign documents and local news coverage. The data were analysed using the interactive model, with manual coding framed by Shea and Burton's six elements of campaign strategy. The findings reveal that the campaign rested on planning that began in October 2023, survey-based voter segmentation, a paired image of administrative competence and religious closeness, a non-confrontational message grounded in the Minangkabau maxim mampatarang lampu awak se, tanpa mamadaman lampu urang, and the mobilisation of volunteers and a ten-party coalition, while crisis management remained largely reactive. This study contributes to the literature on local electoral politics by showing that local culture can operate as a rule that shapes campaign strategy rather than merely as campaign content.*

INTRODUCTION

The direct election of regional heads, introduced in Indonesia in 2005, has turned local politics into a largely candidate-centred contest. Campaigns increasingly rely on surveys, consultants and digital tools, although the sophistication of such data-based practices varies widely across contexts (Dommett, 2019; Kefford et al., 2023). At the same time, candidates continue to depend on personal networks, brokers and money as much as on political parties, so that programmatic appeals and patronage often coexist within the same campaign (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020). Vote buying remains widespread even though campaigns convert only a fraction of their payments into votes (Aspinall et al., 2017), and the gap between elite and mass commitments to liberal democratic norms keeps the quality of electoral competition in question (Aspinall et al., 2020).

The simultaneous regional elections of 2024 renewed these concerns. Large coalitions behind leading candidates narrowed voter choice in some cities (Ashari et al., 2025), dynastic and cartel-like arrangements remained visible (Said & Yunas, 2025), and public deliberation had only a weak influence on candidates' agendas (Khairunnas et al., 2026). Party candidate selection often took place among insiders (Prianto, 2025), and in some provinces the winning coalitions later turned bureaucratic posts into rewards for loyalty (Rifai & Haeril, 2025). Personalised and celebrity-driven campaigning also continued to grow, with popularity and media visibility often standing in for programmatic substance (Beta & Neyazi, 2022; Muliani et al., 2026; Subekti et al., 2024).

The 2024 mayoral election in Padang, the capital of West Sumatra, offers a clear case of a challenger victory within this landscape. Three pairs competed. Fadly Amran, who had served as Mayor of Padang Panjang until October 2023 and chaired the West Sumatra branch of the NasDem Party, ran with Maigus Nasir, a religious educator and former member of the West Sumatra Provincial Legislative Council. Although both were relatively new to Padang's executive politics,

they defeated the incumbent Hendri Septa–Hidayat and the Muhammad Iqbal–Amasrul pair with 176,648 votes and led in all eleven districts (Detik Sumut, 2025). The case is interesting for two reasons. First, the winning mayoral candidate brought a governing record from another city, a form of portable executive experience that sits between the incumbent and the newcomer. Second, the campaign framed its strategy through the Minangkabau maxim *mampatarang lampu awak se, tanpa mamadaman lampu urang* (brighten your own lamp without putting out another's), which turns a cultural norm into a rule of campaign conduct (Effendi, 2014).

Previous studies on campaign strategy in Indonesian local elections have mostly examined the official campaign period. For instance, Ardipandanto (2018) highlights how a gubernatorial candidate in West Java combined political image and positioning, while Dewanti and Kartika Sari (2021) examine face-to-face, virtual and door-to-door campaigning in Gresik during the pandemic. Similarly, Zulfauzan and Untung (2025) find that candidate image, party credibility, policy relevance and message consistency shaped the effectiveness of a party campaign in the 2024 election. Studies of incumbency add a further angle. Klašnja and Titiunik (2017) show that the incumbency advantage can turn into a disadvantage where parties are weak, while Nurlinah et al. (2019) and Sari et al. (2025) document Indonesian incumbents who lost because voters judged them distant from local expectations or unsuccessful in office.

A second group of studies concerns local culture and religion. For instance, Effendi (2014) highlights the non-confrontational *badunsanak* (kinship) political culture among candidates in Padang's 2013 mayoral election, while Dalmenda and Syafiola (2025) examine how Minangkabau customary leaders are increasingly drawn into transactional politics. Similarly, Dalmenda et al. (2026) find that local figures use the philosophy *alam takambang jadi guru* (nature as teacher) to build hybrid legitimacy, and Oktavianus et al. (2024) show that candidates use the Minangkabau language on billboards to signal closeness. Religious authorities, such as the *tuanku* of tarekat communities or Malay ulama, also shape voter preferences (Azwar et al., 2023; Wardana et al., 2025).

A third group deals with data, volunteers and digital media. Data-driven campaigning is often assumed rather than demonstrated (Baldwin-Philippi, 2019; Bennett & Lyon, 2019), volunteer groups tend to support candidates for instrumental reasons (Lay, 2017), and influencers and semi-hidden online operations have become ordinary campaign tools (Riedl et al., 2023; Tapsell, 2021). Field experiments further show that the persuasive effect of direct contact is real but modest and decays over time (Kalla & Broockman, 2018; Pons, 2018). To position this study within the wider literature, a keyword co-occurrence map was produced, as shown in Figure 1. The map was built from 3,519 records retrieved from Google Scholar through Publish or Perish 8 on 16 September 2026. Six queries restricted to journal sources were run, namely "political strategy", "voting behavioral", "perilaku pemilih", "strategi politik" and "incumbent", the last both for 1950–2000 and for Indonesian journals, covering English- and Indonesian-language publications up to 2025. The records were analysed in VOSviewer using term co-occurrence with a minimum of 52 occurrences per term, which yielded four clusters.

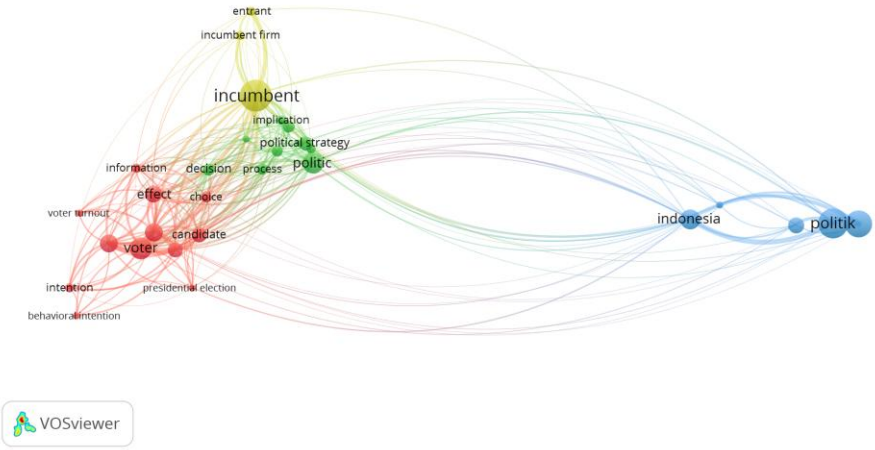


Figure 1. Keyword Co-occurrence Map of Studies on Incumbency, Voters, and Political Strategy
Source: Processed by the authors using VOSviewer (2026).

Based on Figure 1 above, the literature related to this study forms four clusters. The yellow cluster centres on "incumbent" together with "incumbent firm" and "entrant", which shows that the concept of incumbency is also widely discussed in research on market competition, not only in electoral politics. The red cluster contains "voter", "candidate", "effect", "choice", "information", "voter turnout", "intention", "behavioral intention" and "presidential election", representing the literature on voting behaviour. The green cluster contains "politic", "political strategy", "process", "decision" and "implication", representing the literature on political strategy. The blue cluster ("indonesia", "politik") sits at the edge of the map and is connected to the other clusters only by thin links. The map contains no node on local culture, local wisdom, Minangkabau, campaign volunteers or regional head elections. This bibliometric approach has clear limitations. The map reflects only the database, search terms, languages and period selected, and term co-occurrence counts words rather than arguments, so the map is indicative rather than exhaustive. Studies on Minangkabau political culture are in fact relatively abundant, as reviewed above (Azwar et al., 2023; Dalmenda & Syafiola, 2025; Dalmenda et al., 2026; Effendi, 2014; Oktavianus et al., 2024), but many appear in national journals, books or theses that fall outside the top-ranked records returned by Google Scholar, which caps each query at 1,000 results, use Indonesian or Minangkabau terms such as *adat*, *kearifan lokal* or *badunsanak*, or do not refer to incumbency or political strategy in their titles and abstracts. The absence of nodes on local culture, Minangkabau, volunteers or regional head elections therefore indicates weak connections between these bodies of literature in the indexed corpus rather than a lack of studies. For this reason, the map is used only to position the literature review, is complemented by the narrative review above, and is not part of the analysis of the research data.

Despite the growing body of literature on campaign strategy in Indonesian local elections, studies that trace how a campaign strategy is assembled remain limited. First, most studies of regional head elections capture only the official campaign period rather than the assembly of strategy from the pre-candidacy phase to the quiet period. Second, the six elements of Shea and Burton's framework are rarely analysed together within a single case. Third, local culture is usually treated as campaign content, such as slogans, language or symbols, rather than as a principle that shapes strategic choices themselves (Effendi, 2014; Oktavianus et al., 2024).

This study uses the campaign strategy framework of Shea and Burton (2006), which treats a campaign as a managed process grounded in situational analysis, a clear target and a consistent message. In order to avoid a merely declarative use of theory, the framework is applied explicitly as an analytical framework. Each of its six elements is given an analytical focus and guiding interview questions: strategic planning; competitor analysis and voter segmentation; image

building; message consistency and coherence; tactical implementation and dynamic adaptation; and crisis management (Table 1). The six elements serve as deductive coding categories, while the analysis remains open to themes emerging from the field (Shea & Burton, 2006).

TABLE 1. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF SHEA AND BURTON'S CAMPAIGN STRATEGY ELEMENTS

Element	Analytical focus	Guiding questions explored in interviews
Strategic planning	When and why the decision to run was made; how the situation and the candidate's strengths and weaknesses were read; how targets, timelines and programmes were set	How did the team read the situation before candidacy? How were the vision and programmes formulated?
Competitor analysis and voter segmentation	How opponents were read; which voter groups were prioritised and why; how territory and work were divided	How were rivals assessed? Which groups were seen as decisive, and how were they approached?
Image building	How the candidates were positioned against rivals; which personal traits were displayed; how weaknesses in image were handled	What image did the team want voters to see, and how was it made credible?
Message consistency and coherence	What the core message was; how it was kept uniform across actors and channels; how message discipline was maintained under attack	What was the core message, and how was it kept the same down to the grassroots?
Tactical implementation and dynamic adaptation	How the team, coalition and volunteers were organised; how activities were evaluated; what was adjusted during the campaign	How was field work organised? What changed during the campaign, and why?
Crisis management	What attacks emerged; how the campaign responded; who produced counter-narratives; how the candidates were protected	What attacks did the pair face? How were they handled, and by whom?

Source: Adapted from Shea and Burton (2006), processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Table 1 above, each element is linked to observable campaign practices and to the questions explored in the interviews, so that the framework guides the collection and coding of data rather than serving only as a label for the findings. Accordingly, this study asks two questions. First, how did the Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir pair design and implement their campaign strategy to build political image, attract voter sympathy and maintain their support base? Second, how did the campaign strategy relate to the pair's electoral victory over the incumbent?

This study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it reconstructs a local campaign longitudinally, from the end of the candidate's previous term in October 2023 to the quiet period, and applies all six elements of Shea and Burton's framework together, showing that they were neither equally developed nor equally planned. It also shows how a Minangkabau norm worked as a strategic rule that constrained attack politics. Practically, it offers lessons for candidates, parties and election management bodies on early planning, coalition building and the regulation of pre-campaign activities (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020; Shea & Burton, 2006).

Based on these problems, this study aims to analyse how the Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir pair designed and implemented their campaign strategy in the 2024 Padang mayoral election, and to explain how that strategy relates to their electoral victory over the incumbent.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a purely qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design, which is appropriate when the case itself is of primary interest (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and when the boundary between phenomenon and context is not clear-cut (Yin, 2018). The study does not test hypotheses, measure variables or draw statistical inferences. Official election results, the number of volunteers and the distribution of council seats are used only as documentary context for the qualitative analysis.

Research Location and Period

The research was conducted in Padang City, West Sumatra, for three reasons. First, Padang is the provincial capital and the centre of West Sumatra's political competition, with a fragmented city council in which no party holds more than seven of 45 seats. Second, the 2024 result was decisive, as the winning pair finished 87,789 votes ahead of the incumbent and led in every district.

Third, Padang's predominantly Minangkabau society, organised around the principle *adat basandi syarak, syarak basandi Kitabullah* (custom founded on Islamic law, Islamic law founded on the Qur'an), allows the study to examine how cultural norms enter campaign strategy (Effendi, 2014). The case covers the period from October 2023 to the quiet period and the official determination of the result.

Informants

The determination of informants was carried out using purposive sampling, which is the selection of informants based on criteria relevant to the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). The informants include fifteen people: the elected mayor and deputy mayor; the pair's political consultant; the secretary and the vice-chair of the winning team; the secretaries of the Padang City branches of the NasDem Party and the Golkar Party; three volunteers and three voters from Nanggalo, Padang Barat and Pauh districts, which represent the pair's highest, middle and lowest vote shares; the mayoral candidate's personal aide of thirteen years; and the deputy mayoral candidate's son. An academic observer from Universitas Negeri Padang who was not involved in the campaign was interviewed for expert triangulation and is not counted among the fifteen informants. Apart from the two candidates, who are public figures, informants are not named and their views are reported by role. Research permits were issued by the Department of Political Science and the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Andalas, and each informant agreed to be interviewed after being informed of the purpose of the study.

Data Collection Techniques

Primary data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews between 6 January and 16 February 2026, held at informants' homes, offices and cafés, with one interview conducted via Zoom. The interviews were conducted in Indonesian with some Minangkabau expressions, recorded with the informants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Because many expressions cannot be translated literally without losing meaning, interview data are presented as analytical description rather than translated quotations, and key local terms are italicised with English equivalents. Secondary data comprised the official results of the Padang City General Elections Commission (KPU), the winning team's decree, survey reports, campaign materials, volunteer coordination records and local news coverage (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Transcripts were organised in a question-by-informant matrix and coded manually without software, using the six elements of Shea and Burton's framework as deductive coding categories while remaining open to inductive themes, such as the role of family members in filtering negative news. The analysis combined an emic reading, which takes informants' own categories seriously, with an etic reading against the framework. The research and analysis flow is shown in Figure 2.

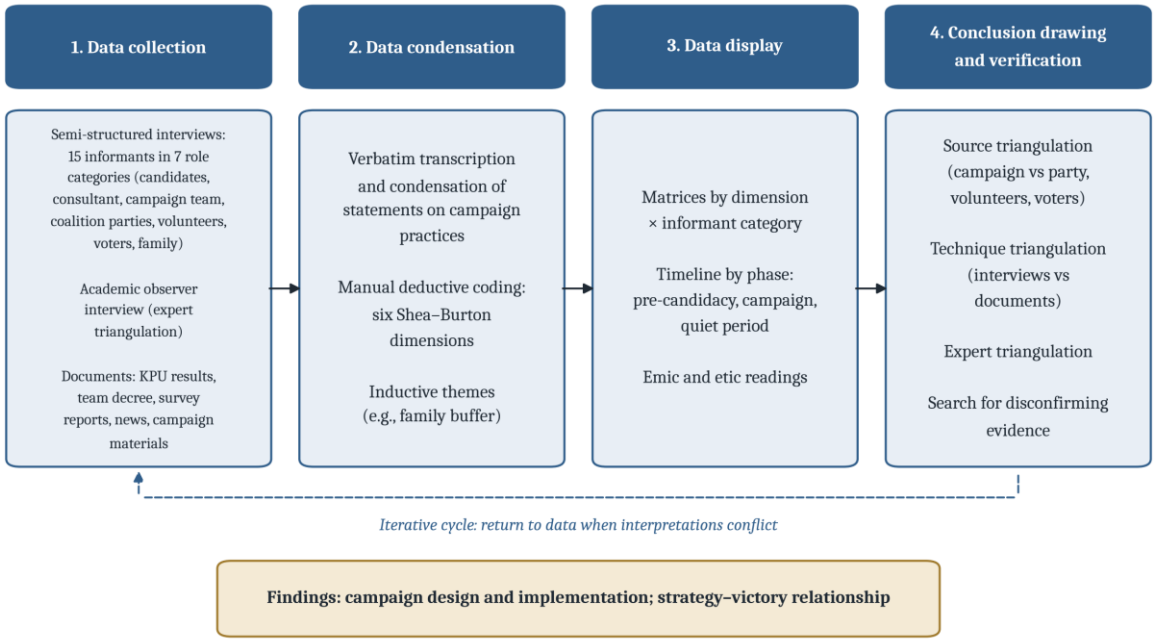


Figure 2. Research and Data Analysis Flow

Source: Processed by the authors (2026), adapted from Miles et al. (2020).

Based on Figure 2 above, the analysis moved iteratively between the data and the framework, returning to the transcripts whenever accounts from different informants conflicted.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation, comparing the accounts of the candidates and the winning team with those of party officials, volunteers and voters; technique triangulation between interviews and documents; and expert triangulation through the interview with the independent academic observer. Claims that could not be confirmed by a second source are reported as informants' views. The first author had personal and working ties with members of the candidate's core team, including the political consultant, before the study. These ties eased access but created a risk of insider bias. To address this risk systematically, the findings were broken down into fourteen key claims covering the six elements of Shea and Burton's framework and the link between strategy and outcome. Each claim made by the candidates or the core team was checked against at least one source in a different position, namely the academic observer, party secretaries, volunteers or voters, and against documents such as the official KPU results, survey reports and local news; two claims made by the academic observer himself were checked in the same way. As summarised in Table 2, seven claims were confirmed by sources outside the core team or by documents, five were partly confirmed or contested, and two could not be confirmed and are therefore reported explicitly as informants' views. For example, the incumbent's weakness was confirmed by the academic observer and the lead in all eleven districts by the official results, whereas the view that the victory rested mainly on strategy was qualified by the observer's emphasis on incumbent weakness and finance. Contested findings, such as the unplanned character of crisis management and the role of finance, are reported in the Results alongside the campaign's own account. Nevertheless, most informants came from the winning side, so some insider bias may remain.

TABLE 2. VERIFICATION OF KEY CLAIMS AGAINST INDEPENDENT SOURCES

Claim	Main source	Checked against	Result
Planning began before formal nomination (from October 2023; Ramadan visits to 22 mosques; 10–15 visits a day)	Mayoral candidate; consultant	Academic observer; local news reports	Confirmed
Bimonthly surveys guided decisions, and name recognition rose between February and April 2024	Mayoral candidate; consultant	Survey reports	Confirmed
Maigus Nasir was chosen as running mate on the basis of survey simulations	Consultant	Survey reports show his standing in early simulations; no record of the decision itself	Partly confirmed or contested
The incumbent was perceived as weak	Consultant; vice-chair of the winning team	Academic observer	Confirmed
Territory was divided by coalition-party strength, with teams down to the polling stations	Vice-chair of the winning team	NasDem and Golkar secretaries; academic observer	Confirmed
The paired professional and religious image reached voters	Consultant; personal aide; deputy mayoral candidate's son	Three voters; academic observer	Confirmed
The record in Padang Panjang demonstrated the mayoral candidate's competence	Consultant; mayoral candidate	Academic observer (record not universally regarded as successful)	Partly confirmed or contested
The lamp maxim kept the message non-confrontational and uniform	Mayoral candidate; vice-chair of the winning team	Volunteers; secretary of the winning team; printed materials (restraint confirmed, but the message changed down the chain)	Partly confirmed or contested
About 7,500 trained volunteers were mobilised	Winning team	Local news report; volunteers	Confirmed
Attacks were handled as part of the campaign's strategy	Deputy mayoral candidate	Personal aide; deputy mayoral candidate's son; secretary of the winning team (response largely unplanned and reliant on outsiders)	Partly confirmed or contested
The pair led in all eleven districts	Candidates; winning team	Official KPU results	Confirmed
The victory rested mainly on the campaign strategy	Candidates; consultant	Academic observer; NasDem secretary (incumbent weakness, coalition and finance also stressed)	Partly confirmed or contested
The 7,500 volunteers were voters whose support had been bought	Academic observer	Other informants; no campaign-finance data	Not confirmed
Influencers were paid to reach young voters	Academic observer	Social media content; no payment records	Not confirmed

Source: Interviews and documents, processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Table 2 above, claims about organisation and outcomes were generally confirmed, whereas claims about the running-mate decision, crisis management and the causes of the victory, which were most open to insider bias, were the ones most often qualified by sources outside the core team.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings are organised into the six elements of Shea and Burton's framework, followed by an analysis of how the strategy relates to the electoral outcome and the study's theoretical contribution. The elements are presented in the order in which they became important during the campaign, from planning in the pre-candidacy phase to crisis management during the official campaign. Before turning to these elements, the political context of the contest is briefly described.

Padang's 2024 mayoral race was held as part of the nationwide simultaneous regional elections, and the fragmented city council forced every pair to build cross-party coalitions. The Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir pair was nominated by a ten-party coalition, six of whose members (NasDem, Golkar, PKB, PDI-P, PPP and Partai Ummat) together held 22 of the 45 council seats. The incumbent Hendri Septa ran with Hidayat on the ticket of PAN and Gerindra (12 seats), while Muhammad Iqbal and Amasrul were nominated by PKS and Demokrat (11 seats). Table 3 presents the official result.

TABLE 3. OFFICIAL RESULT OF THE 2024 PADANG MAYORAL ELECTION

Candidate pair	Nominating parties (council seats)	Votes	Share (%)
Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir	NasDem, Golkar, PKB, PDI-P, PPP, Partai Ummat and four non-parliamentary parties (22)	176,648	55.17
Hendri Septa–Hidayat (incumbent)	PAN, Gerindra (12)	88,859	27.75
Muhammad Iqbal–Amasrul	PKS, Demokrat (11)	54,685	17.08
Total valid votes		320,192	100.00

Source: Detik Sumut (2025); seat distribution from KPU Padang City data; processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Table 3 above, the winning pair received almost twice the incumbent's vote, although its coalition held less than half of the council seats. According to the official results, the pair led in all eleven districts, with its strongest support in Nanggalo, while in Pauh it led without an absolute majority. This condition shows that support was spread across the city rather than concentrated in a few strongholds (Detik Sumut, 2025).

Strategic Planning

The campaign's planning began well before the official campaign period. After his term in Padang Panjang ended in October 2023, Fadly Amran first concentrated on NasDem's legislative campaign and then turned to Padang, his birthplace. During Ramadan in March 2024 he visited 22 mosques across the city (Padang Ekspres, 2024b), and he later visited 10 to 15 locations a day, from morning until late at night (Tribun Sumbar, 2024). The mayoral candidate explained that impressions gathered during field visits to community leaders, traders, teachers, young people and women's Qur'anic study groups (*majelis taklim*) were checked against surveys conducted every two months, because what was felt in the field did not always reflect the wider picture. The pair's political consultant described how the team began as a small circle of people personally trusted by the candidate and grew into an institutional structure. The consultant set a short-term target of raising the candidate's name recognition within the first months, and survey reports obtained during fieldwork record a marked rise in name recognition and head-to-head support between February and April 2024. According to the consultant, survey simulations also informed the choice of Maigus Nasir as running mate. These findings confirm Shea and Burton's (2006) view that strategy begins with situational analysis and a clear target. In contrast to studies that focus on the official campaign (Ardipandanto, 2018; Dewanti & Kartika Sari, 2021), the decisive planning in Padang took place before formal nomination, a phase that the academic observer described as *curi start* (getting ahead of the starting gun).

Furthermore, decisions were taken collectively in a weekly core-team meeting. Fadly Amran described the process as flexible, starting from survey trends and then opening the floor to input, while the deputy mayoral candidate brought complaints heard at the grassroots into discussions with the consultant. The deputy mayoral candidate also explained that the campaign was divided into three phases: listening during the pre-campaign period, promoting programmes during the campaign, and tightening control over volunteers during the quiet period so that they would not overreact. The vision *Menggerakkan Segala Potensi* (Mobilising All Potential) was translated into a few concrete offers: free contributions to the national health insurance scheme (*BPJS Kesehatan*), free school uniforms and student workbooks (*Lembar Kerja Siswa*), and Smart Surau, a character education programme based in neighbourhood prayer houses. The candidates stressed that the narrative should rest on achievements already delivered rather than on promises. This finding expands the debate on data-driven campaigning: the data used here consisted mainly of periodic polls rather than voter files or digital profiling, which places the campaign at the modest end of the range described by Dommett (2019) and supports Baldwin-Philippi's (2019) caution against overstating such practices. At the same time, the use of mosque visits before the formal campaign shows how the line between religious outreach and campaigning can blur. Thus, strategic planning in this case was early, poll-informed and programme-centred, and it set the targets that the other elements later pursued.

Competitor Analysis and Voter Segmentation

Competitor analysis was conducted as a two-track exercise. The pair's political consultant explained that the surveys assessed the candidate's own popularity and likeability while also tracking opponents' standing and the issues they raised. In the consultant's reading, the incumbent had failed to make use of the structural resources available to him and some of his supporters had shifted sides, while the PKS-backed team relied on a narrow internal network. The vice-chair of the winning team added that rivals were monitored through debates, campaign events and the movements of party machines. From outside the campaign, the academic observer confirmed that the field was not considered strong because public opinion did not regard the incumbent pair as successful. These findings confirm the relevance of the incumbency literature: the campaign's advantage depended partly on an incumbent whose record voters judged personally and unfavourably (Klašnja & Titiunik, 2017; Nurlinah et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2025). In this context, competitor analysis served less to discover new weaknesses than to confirm and exploit an existing perception of incumbent underperformance.

Moreover, segmentation followed survey data on age, area, education and the issues voters felt most strongly. Fadly Amran explained that the aim was not to divide the electorate but to translate the same message into language suited to each group, using the bimonthly surveys to decide where the campaign needed to be strengthened, where it needed to be guarded and where a more personal approach was required. The deputy mayoral candidate and the vice-chair of the winning team identified three priority segments: poor households facing difficulties in accessing health care, young people, and middle-class swing voters who were considered more responsive to issues such as education. Territorial responsibilities were allocated according to the historical strength of coalition parties. The secretary of the NasDem Party's Padang City branch explained that Golkar was expected to work among middle- and upper-class voters, while the secretary of the Golkar Party's Padang City branch described how Pondok, assigned to PDI-P, was backed up by the whole coalition. Teams were also formed for each polling station (TPS). These practices match the micro-targeting recommended by Shea and Burton (2006), but the allocation of territory by party strength resembles the network-based logic of Indonesian clientelism (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020). On the other hand, the academic observer noted that all candidates offered broadly similar programmes and that voters responded to benefits they could obtain immediately, while explicitly declining to call this money politics, which is consistent with Aspinall et al. (2017). Therefore, segmentation combined survey-based targeting with party networks, and programme differentiation alone had limited reach.

Image Building

The image of the pair was built by combining two complementary profiles. The pair's political consultant positioned Fadly Amran as a stronger alternative to the incumbent, competent, open to input and able to run a large organisation. The same consultant acknowledged that the candidate appeared stiff in the media, found it hard to adapt to political gimmicks and was constrained by a formal and distant political image, whereas local elections demand an image that feels close to ordinary people. The team chose to keep this authentic, if formal, image rather than invent a new persona. Maigus Nasir, widely known as *Buya* (a title for a respected religious teacher), supplied a religious and grassroots profile built in Muhammadiyah, the Indonesian Ulema Council and the city's *zakat* agency. The mayoral candidate's long-serving personal aide described how the inner circle directed the candidate to lead prayers as imam so that his religious character would be visible, and asked him to greet children so that people who saw him for the first time would not regard him as aloof or as a wealthy figure distant from ordinary people. The deputy mayoral candidate's son described his father's conduct through *politik nabi* (prophetic politics), referring to the qualities of *siddiq* (truthfulness), *amanah* (trustworthiness), *tabligh* (conveying the message) and *fathanah* (wisdom), and saw the family as guardians of this religious reputation.

Voters' accounts suggest that the intended image was received. A voter in Padang Barat described the pair as responsive, a voter in Pauh emphasised quick action during disasters, and a voter in Nanggalo pointed to the focus on education and health. The academic observer added that

ordinary policies were packaged under memorable labels such as Smart Surau, but also noted that Fadly Amran's record in Padang Panjang was not universally regarded as successful. Shea and Burton (2006) treat authenticity as the foundation of a durable image, yet this case shows that authenticity was itself managed. This finding is close to what Beta and Neyazi (2022) call performances of political legitimacy and echoes the distinction between symbolic and substantive legitimacy drawn by Muliani et al. (2026), although here the performance was tied to a governing record rather than to celebrity. The prominence of religious cues is also consistent with evidence that religious authority shapes voter preferences in West Sumatra and Riau (Azwar et al., 2023; Wardana et al., 2025). Thus, image building distributed complementary traits across the ticket and relied on curated, but plausible, displays of religiosity and humility.

Message Consistency and Coherence

The core message rested on a cultural rule rather than on a slogan. Fadly Amran explained that the campaign moved on the basis of sincerity and held to the Minangkabau maxim *mampatarang lampu awak se, tanpa mamadaman lampu urang*, which he understood as focusing on one's own ideas without having to put out the lamps of others. For him, campaign strategy was not about attacking but about offering solutions, and the first phrase of the vision, mobilising all potential, meant collaboration among government, citizens, the private sector, academics and young people. He saw the difference from rivals in building a narrative of collaboration rather than of conflict. The maxim therefore excluded attack messages and kept the narrative on service, collaboration and the candidates' records. This finding supports Shea and Burton's (2006) emphasis on a simple message repeated through every channel, and it expands that emphasis by adding a cultural mechanism. The maxim continues the *badunsanak* culture that Effendi (2014) found in Padang's 2013 mayoral election and parallels the hybrid legitimacy that Minangkabau figures build by grounding political messages in customary philosophy (Dalmenda et al., 2026).

In addition, consistency was maintained through routine meetings led by the mayoral candidate, daily presence in the field, and printed flyers and banners carrying the same wording to the grassroots. The vice-chair of the winning team explained that the team agreed on who would speak and what would be said and then checked delivery through random spot checks (*uji petik*). The same informant acknowledged, however, that the message changed as it moved down the chain because each messenger delivered it differently, which was why printed materials became the main tool for keeping it uniform. Volunteers in Padang Barat and Pauh said they were given room to propose changes but saw no need to add anything to the programme. In contrast to studies that treat local language and symbols as decoration (Oktavianus et al., 2024), the cultural norm in this case set limits on which strategies were acceptable. These findings indicate, however, that culturally framed messages remain vulnerable to distortion when they pass through thousands of volunteers. Thus, message consistency was anchored in a shared cultural rule but depended on printed materials and checks to survive at the grassroots.

Tactical Implementation and Dynamic Adaptation

Implementation was organised through a formal winning team, registered with the election commission and divided into working units with their own programmes. The secretary of the winning team explained that coordination between the core team, district teams and volunteers took place at campaign posts when issues required it rather than on a fixed schedule, and that every activity was documented with time- and location-stamped photographs, videos and a form recording participants, team members, banners, sound systems and even the distribution of snacks. The secretary of the NasDem Party's Padang City branch attributed the low level of friction among coalition partners to their involvement in planning, implementing and reviewing activities from the start. The campaign also mobilised about 7,500 volunteers who received technical training (Padang Ekspres, 2024a). Volunteers were recruited mainly through personal networks and explained the vision and programmes during door-to-door visits. A volunteer in Nanggalo described passing residents' complaints directly to the candidate, including a case of a household without rice whose children had not eaten, after which assistance was sent, and explained that this responsiveness was how she kept residents' trust. These findings fit Shea and

Burton's (2006) view that strategy is translated into field action, but they also show that responsiveness can slide into the personalised provision of goods, which the literature associates with clientelist exchange (Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020) and with the instrumental character of volunteer support (Lay, 2017).

Furthermore, adaptation was frequent but minor. The pair's political consultant reported that the core team held larger review meetings every two or three weeks and that the most visible changes concerned which networks to approach, while the overall direction remained the same. The vice-chair of the winning team explained that monthly targets, such as which programme to promote in a given month, were set from survey results. In the academic observer's view, the pair's funding allowed them to execute whatever strategy the team proposed, including paying influencers to reach young voters on social media. Field experiments find that door-to-door contact has modest persuasive effects that are strongest when it happens early (Kalla & Broockman, 2018; Pons, 2018), which suggests that the volunteer network in Padang mattered as much for gathering information about households as for persuasion. The use of paid influencers places the campaign within broader trends in Indonesian and Southeast Asian electioneering (Riedl et al., 2023; Subekti et al., 2024; Tapsell, 2021), although the data do not allow their influence to be assessed. Therefore, tactical implementation combined formal organisation, a large volunteer network and incremental adjustments, supported by strong finance.

Crisis Management

Crisis management relied on restraint rather than on a planned response. Campaign informants agreed that it faced black campaigns and personal smears, some of them targeting Fadly Amran's record in Padang Panjang. The deputy mayoral candidate explained that the pair never responded with confrontation and remained polite and humane despite frequent attacks. He described how, when he was accused over his earlier leadership of the city council, the clarification came not from the campaign but from respected outside figures, including a legal expert, and that these attacks therefore turned into a plus point for the pair. Other parts of the response were informal. The mayoral candidate's long-serving personal aide filtered negative information so that only matters requiring the candidate's attention reached him and chose the right moment to convey bad news, while the deputy mayoral candidate's son explained that the family decided not to comment on social media. The secretary of the winning team found the candidates' restraint difficult at times, but noted that the team was summoned by election authorities only twice during the campaign.

This element departs most clearly from Shea and Burton's (2006) model, which expects a planned rapid-response capacity, counter-narratives and media management. In Padang, no such unit was described. The counter-narrative was produced by external actors who chose to intervene, and the main internal mechanisms were personal: a family buffer and the candidates' temperament. Crisis management in this case is therefore better described as accidental, since it worked without having been designed. The non-confrontational stance was consistent with the lamp maxim and reinforced the pair's polite image, yet its success depended on attacks that were weak enough to be answered by sympathetic third parties. In a campaign facing coordinated, semi-hidden online operations of the kind described by Tapsell (2021), such a stance could prove costly. Thus, crisis management was the least planned element and the most dependent on favourable circumstances.

Linking Campaign Strategy to Electoral Victory

To answer the second question, Table 4 brings the six elements together and shows, for each, the key findings, their analytical interpretation against Shea and Burton's framework, and the way in which informants understood its contribution to the result.

TABLE 4. THEMATIC MATRIX OF CAMPAIGN STRATEGY AND ITS PERCEIVED CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESULT

Strategy element	Key findings	Analytical interpretation	Contribution as understood by informants
Strategic planning	Early start (October 2023); Ramadan visits to 22 mosques; 10–15 visits a day; bimonthly surveys; weekly core meetings; vision translated into free BPJS contributions, uniforms and workbooks, and Smart Surau	Confirms that strategy begins with situational analysis; expands the framework because the decisive planning took place before formal nomination (curi start)	Seen as building name recognition before rivals and aligning the team around clear targets
Competitor analysis and voter segmentation	Two-track survey reading; perceived incumbent weakness; three priority segments; party-based territorial division; polling-station teams	Confirms micro-targeting, but territory was allocated through party networks, echoing the network logic of clientelism	Seen as directing effort to weak areas and swing groups across the city
Image building	Positioning as a stronger alternative; formal but authentic image; coached religious and humble gestures; paired professional and religious profiles	Expands the framework: authenticity was itself managed, and complementary traits were divided across the ticket	Seen as offsetting the mayoral candidate's formal image and appealing to religious voters
Message consistency and coherence	Lamp maxim; no attack messages; emphasis on achievements; meetings led by the candidate; flyers, banners and spot checks	Expands the framework: a Minangkabau norm worked as a strategic rule that limited acceptable tactics, not merely as campaign content	Seen as keeping a polite, collaborative profile in line with local norms
Tactical implementation and dynamic adaptation	Formal team; ten-party coordination; 7,500 trained volunteers; complaint channelling; paid influencers; minor network adjustments	Confirms the translation of strategy into field action; responsiveness could slide into personalised material assistance	Seen as extending reach to the polling-station level
Crisis management	Non-confrontation; clarification by third parties; family filtering of news; restraint on social media	Departs from the framework: no planned rapid-response unit existed, so crisis management was accidental rather than designed	Seen as protecting the polite image, but dependent on attacks being weak

Source: Interviews and documents, processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Table 4 above, the elements did not contribute equally in the eyes of those involved. Strategic planning, segmentation and tactical implementation were deliberate and poll-informed, image building and message consistency were deliberate and culturally framed, while crisis management was largely unplanned. Read against the framework, the campaign largely confirmed Shea and Burton's (2006) model in planning, segmentation and tactical implementation, expanded it in image building and message consistency, and departed from it in crisis management. Taken together, the informants' accounts show how those involved understood the link between their strategy and the result, rather than measuring the size of any strategy's effect; the official outcome and the survey reports available to the campaign point in the same direction but cannot isolate the contribution of individual elements. Figure 3 synthesises how the six elements were sequenced and anchored in Minangkabau values.

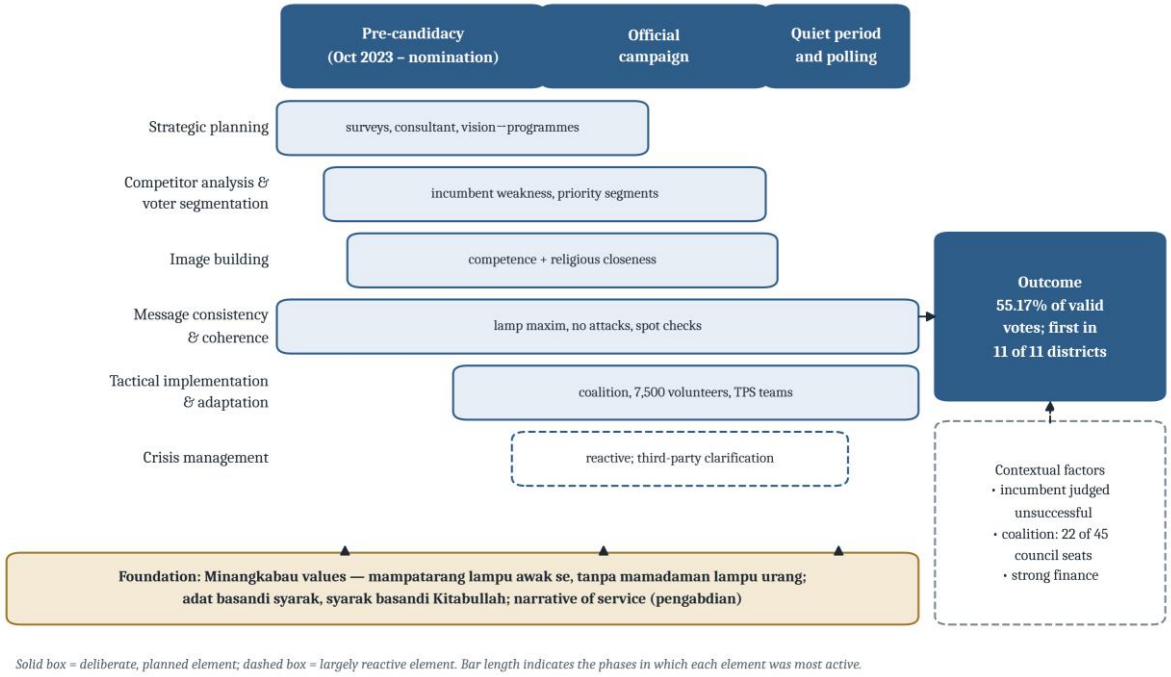


Figure 3. Synthesis Model of the Campaign Strategy: Six Elements Anchored in Minangkabau Values
Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

Based on Figure 3 above, the campaign can be read as a sequence in which early planning set the targets, segmentation and the paired image defined whom to address and how, the lamp maxim kept the message consistent and non-confrontational, and volunteers and coalition partners carried it to the polling-station level. This integration helps explain why the pair led in all eleven districts rather than only in a few strongholds. However, other factors must be weighed alongside strategy. The first is the incumbent's weakness, stressed by both the consultant and the academic observer, which is consistent with the incumbency disadvantage reported elsewhere in Indonesia (Nurlinah et al., 2019; Sari et al., 2025). The second is the coalition, since the pair entered the race with the largest bloc of council seats and with party elites who, according to the NasDem secretary, had long-standing relationships with loyal voters. The third is money. The academic observer described the pair as financially strong. Asked whether the 7,500 volunteers had influenced the result, he agreed but, in his view, the volunteers were themselves voters whose support had been bought: he suggested that the pair could afford to build a team down to the polling-station level and paid the people recruited into it, so that these team members would at least vote for the pair. In this reading, paid recruitment into the volunteer network served to secure the volunteers' own votes rather than to channel money to other voters, and he did not claim that volunteers distributed cash to the wider electorate. No other informant confirmed this claim, and the study had no independent data on campaign finance, so it cannot be verified here; it is nevertheless consistent with evidence that volunteer support in Indonesia tends to be instrumental (Lay, 2017) and that success-team networks are often built through material incentives (Aspinall et al., 2017; Berenschot & Aspinall, 2020). Therefore, the campaign strategy is associated with, and helps explain, the breadth of the result, but it worked together with incumbent weakness, coalition strength and finance.

Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the literature on campaign strategy and local politics in three ways. First, it shows that the six elements of Shea and Burton's (2006) framework are not parallel components but a sequence with uneven development: planning and survey work were front-loaded into the pre-candidacy phase, while crisis management remained residual and informal, a pattern that a snapshot of the official campaign would miss. Second, it shows that a local cultural

norm can function as a strategic rule rather than as campaign content, since the lamp maxim ruled out attack politics, shaped the response to smears and tied the campaign to an established Padang tradition of non-confrontational competition (Effendi, 2014), while also making the campaign dependent on third parties to defend it. Third, it refines the debate on incumbency by identifying a challenger with a portable executive record from another city, paired with a running mate whose religious and grassroots profile supplied local proximity; where incumbents are judged personally (Klašnja & Titiunik, 2017; Nurlinah et al., 2019), such challengers can borrow some of the credibility associated with incumbency without carrying its accountability burden. Thus, these propositions extend campaign strategy theory to culturally dense local settings, although they emerge from a single case and should be tested comparatively.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the Fadly Amran–Maigus Nasir pair designed their campaign over more than a year, beginning after the end of the mayoral candidate's previous term, and implemented it through survey-based planning and segmentation, a paired image of administrative competence and religious closeness, a non-confrontational message anchored in a Minangkabau maxim, and a large volunteer and coalition network, while crisis management remained largely unplanned. The integrated strategy is associated with the breadth of the pair's victory across all eleven districts, but it worked together with a weak incumbent, a strong coalition and substantial finance. The study contributes a longitudinal reading of Shea and Burton's framework, an account of local culture as a strategic rule rather than campaign content, and the notion of a challenger with a portable executive record.

Practically, candidates and campaign teams can build broad support through early planning, regular polling and a consistent, non-confrontational message, but they should plan their crisis response rather than rely on the goodwill of outsiders. Political parties gain cooperation when coalition partners are involved in planning from the start. Election management bodies need clearer rules on campaigning before the formal campaign period, including activities in places of worship, and on the use of volunteer networks to channel material assistance. Voters and civil society should judge candidates by their programme commitments as well as their manners, and monitor whether promises such as free health insurance contributions are delivered.

This study has several limitations. It examines a single case, most informants came from the winning side (although key claims were checked against independent sources, as shown in Table 2), rival campaign teams were not interviewed, and the accounts were collected retrospectively. It includes no quantitative data on voter behaviour, part of the survey evidence came from organisations used by the campaign, and presenting interview data as analytical description inevitably loses some nuance of the original language. Future research should compare winning and losing campaigns, examine other regions with strong local cultures, combine interviews with voter surveys in a mixed-methods design, analyse digital and influencer campaigning, and trace whether campaign programmes are delivered after the election.

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