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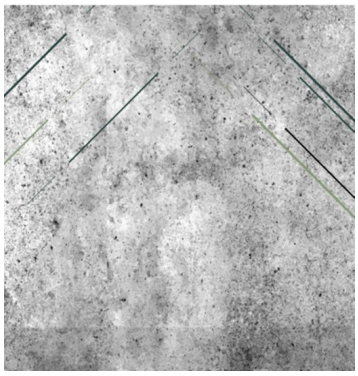
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Beyond Incumbency Advantage: Social Reach, Political Trust, and Leadership Legitimacy in the Karanganyar Village Head Election

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Abstract

The victory of a newcomer in the Karanganyar village head election represents a shift in leadership that challenges the incumbent's position. Strengthening public exposure and social reach serves as the primary strategy, leveraging the potential of changing times, complemented by a track record of social contributions as an indicator of integrity in political legitimacy. The primary objective of this study is to analyze the political strategies employed by newcomers in village-level political contests. Using a descriptive qualitative method, this study will explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the strategies employed. The study adopts Scott's framework as its primary analytical tool, specifically to understand resistance to the incumbent's dominance. The main findings of the study indicate that the strategies fall into two categories. First, strengthening exposure and social reach, which involves the use of automated digital messaging; here, the use of digital information spam serves as a key tactic to target the opposition's constituency while simultaneously increasing and maintaining support among young voters—the next primary target for progressive ideas. Second, the strategies focus on the track record of social contributions by newcomers who are able to embody trustworthy values in leadership, and emphasize that the relationship between newcomers and the community fosters positive activities—not merely as a form of loyalty, but as an integral part of morality. This research contributes to adapting village-level political contests to keep pace with the times without disregarding local wisdom. The findings highlight the growing importance of digital communication strategies in expanding political outreach and engaging voters within village electoral contests.

Keywords: Village Head Election; Political Strategy; Democracy Village; Leadership; Village Politics

Introduction

The political victory in the 2023 Karanganyar village head election marked a significant leadership transition from the incumbent to a new figure. The success in winning the village election against the incumbent was achieved through efforts to combat both covert and overt forms of vote-buying (Adi et al., 2024). The ability of new candidates to secure victory underscores the importance of preserving democratic principles, particularly to ensure a more dynamic and balanced leadership transition. However, reaching that point is no easy task; in other words, the primary challenges are on par with the demands of competitive generational renewal, especially as technological disruption fragments social activities. In short, village head candidates are not only required to cling to conventional methods in attracting and retaining voters but must also embrace modernization as a key tool in shaping political preferences especially among young, digitally savvy voters who are responsive to change. Consequently, the growing influence of

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acculturation on village political culture necessitates sensitivity to current conditions and potential. Therefore, strategic interactions within village politics serve as a starting point to be established and developed in order to renew the electoral recruitment system in a massive and progressive manner and potentially at even higher levels.

In the context of village politics, the parameters of victory tend to be influenced by various relatively sensitive factors. Consequently, bringing in new people is not easily achieved. A fundamental reflection on the findings of previous research, Yaqin (2018) It appears that incumbents still enjoy relatively strong legitimacy in the village due to their local patronage networks, which they have built and maintained over the past five years though it has now been nine years. Consequently, the emotional bond between the village community and its long-standing leaders remains relatively strong. This situation is consistent with the findings presented in the latest report Purba (2025), social capital provides greater accuracy in mobilizing constituents, even though economic capital as represented by the buying and selling of votes is not fully accounted for in terms of political ability and awareness. The emphasis on social ties in these findings helps mitigate the influence of money politics through social closeness. In fact, the justification for the strength of social capital is presented by Ukhwaluddin & Subekti (2022) When the existence of social capital leaves a vacant seat in the opposition, the result is that a husband and wife run for office to represent an electoral system that tends to be competitive yet in reality has no major political rivals or challengers with a significant support base. This approach is adopted because the constituency recognizes that both social and symbolic power are concentrated within the incumbent's family lineage. This experience highlights an early observation: that incumbent status confers significant political advantages, particularly in retaining office during village-level democratic contests.

So far, the victories of newcomers in village head elections have been documented in various studies conducted by local communities. Based on the findings of previous studies, vote-buying is considered a means of defeating incumbent village heads, as shown in the study Prasetyanta, et al. (2024) who found, through comparative research on two villages in different administrative districts, that vote-buying and identity politics are prevalent, and that constituents even prioritize wealth as the primary criterion, with education coming in second. This red flag clearly violates the constitution and suggests that victory can only be achieved through capital. Another study by Priadi et al. (2019) this is relatively interesting in terms of securing victories for newcomers in village democracy, as new candidates realize that since influential local figures are held in higher regard, this strategy is prioritized to win over voters even though newcomers' popularity tends to be low. Therefore, the research presented Priadi et al. (2019) it's relatively unusual especially since he's a newcomer who doesn't come from the local religious majority and tends to lack engagement with the community yet he managed to win; conventional attributes still play a role in winning over constituents.

The research findings, which focus on new contenders in the aforementioned escalation of village politics, indicate a lack of strategies for attracting a more competitive electorate, particularly in terms of playing a role in modernization and exercising productive leadership. Reconsidering whether Prasetyanta et al. (2024) identifies money politics and identity politics as the main strategies for attacking the incumbent while simultaneously attracting and retaining voters, whereas Priadi et al. (2019) tends to center on influential figures in the village. Through several overlapping lines of research, new challengers cannot escape the need for individual skill in reading the situation. The lack of studies that examine the relationship between social exposure and reach through the use of social media is a key distinguishing factor, including the cultivation of trustworthy values. Therefore, this study will focus on analyzing the phenomenon of newcomers' victories in village head elections, which has the potential to be adopted and adapted for future democratic elections. If the path to victory is wide open, it is not only through the application of relatively conventional systems whether offensive or defensive but also through modernization and fragmentation. Because battles in the modern era require effective and efficient mechanisms, as well as leadership capabilities.

This concern is indeed valid, given that villages are still classified as traditional areas, where patron-client relationships serve as the primary framework for all activities within the village (Foster, 1961; Landé, 1965; Scott, 1985, 1990; Wolf, 2013), including the election of the village head itself. In short, the thesis of oligarchy as identified by Winters (2013) emphasizes the importance of the incumbent village head's role in maximizing their identity and legitimacy to strengthen their continued hold on power. This narrative then spread and became part of the effort to reach an agreement regarding the practice of vote-buying in village head elections (Abdillah & Ganefo, 2024; Baehaki, 2021; Rahmi & Putra, 2022), Clientelism and contemporary patronage politics perpetuated by Andhika (2019); Lestari (2022) and Yaqin (2018), related to the division of labor or reciprocal practices (Hermansyah, 2017; Puri, 2019; Renaldi, 2021), which essentially places power in the hands of those in power.

By categorizing the village as a traditional area rich in social practices, this prompts the author to use Scott's theory as the primary analytical tool particularly regarding everyday resistance to analyze how newcomers establish political legitimacy in the village and position themselves to accommodate their constituents during the village head election process, thereby securing their support. Although Scott's work does not specifically address village democratic politics but rather focuses on the domination of farmers or landowners over agricultural laborers, which leads to subordination this context reveals a pattern suggesting that the incumbent's dominance within the village political context is both sharp and powerful, establishing a fundamental understanding that the incumbent possesses the capacity to win democratic contests. Thus, through resistance which, in Scott's view, constitutes a counterforce to the power or effects of such domination resistance becomes an inevitability. This benchmark is not only categorized collectively but is also open to individual expression, as long as it challenges the fundamental structure of property rights and domination to reduce or reject the claims made by higher social classes within a given society (Scott, 1985).

Resistance through strategy focuses on the material basis of interclass relations and the interclass struggle. Ultimately, resistance focuses on intent rather than consequences. Thus, it is acknowledged that many acts of resistance end in failure to achieve their intended results (Scott, 1985). However, the current context of village politics illustrates this very situation. Although incumbents possess superior social and economic capital which places them at the center of the local constituency economic factors also play a role in ensuring that interests are accommodated to maximize power. However, all of this is challenged when newcomers emerge as agents of change by employing a strategy that differs from one focused on economic capital namely, intellectual capital through the utilization of arenas considered vital. In short, they are more aware of the opportunities for change in the current era by taking local conditions into account and maximizing support from the lower-middle class and below (Adi & Maksum, 2025). This capital then manifests itself in the form of strategies to maximize resistance or offensive mechanisms in accommodating constituents. As a result, the contest within village democracy becomes a highly anticipated moment to determine which candidates are capable and qualified.

Method

The method used in this study is descriptive qualitative, which refers to Kvale (1996), qualitative methods place greater emphasis on the meaning behind the collected information. This distinguishes them from other research approaches. Additionally, this research technique employs a systematic approach. Specifically, the researchers examined information regarding village democracy, focusing on Karanganyar Village, Poncokusumo Subdistrict, Malang District, which participated in the 2023 simultaneous village head elections in Malang District. In addition, the researchers collected information on how the village head utilized social media. Through this monitoring process, the researcher identified key informants because the information presented in the form of visualized content was directly produced by one of the new candidates' teams. The selection of key informants was based on their role in distributing the content and their verified

ability to provide responses virtually.

On the other hand, the researchers integrated data from their notebooks and recorded the interviews on their cell phones. This was done to ensure that the data was collected and organized as thoroughly as possible, so that the democratic political events in the village could be conveyed as effectively as possible (Sobari, 2023). Taking other factors into account, given that the data collected is descriptive in nature and the interviews with all informants were conducted in a semi-informal manner, the main finding is that informants sometimes provided answers that were initially intended for the first question; furthermore, the process of delving deeper into the subject matter was not rigid.

This study employs thematic analysis Braun & Clarke (2023), The themes were not "discovered" in the data, but rather constructed by the researcher through reflective interaction with the data. More specifically, the process began with familiarization with the data; after the researcher had collected the data, he re-read the transcripts of the four interviews that had been conducted and the research documents that had been gathered both secondary sources through summaries and relevant journals In addition, the researchers noted initial ideas and interesting patterns emerging from the research process. In the initial stage, the researchers began to deeply immerse themselves in the data before coding. Second, the researchers performed preliminary coding; in this context, they did not code the entire interview transcripts that had been obtained, but rather selected those that were relevant. Third, the researcher begins to identify potential patterns of similarity; these patterns are organized around a central concept, so the results will visualize several contexts that share overlapping relationships. Next, the researcher reviews and develops the themes that have emerged, assigns names to them, and writes a report that articulates the patterns of meaning coherently.

Results

Enhancing Social Exposure and Reach

The key strategy for securing victory in political battles is to strengthen exposure and social reach. This area was the first topic discussed with the experts, where increasing popularity in this context aims to boost exposure and public attention. Both of these efforts are the primary focus of strategic initiatives designed to maximize a single overarching goal: securing victory. The translation in this context is reflected in several relevant sections of the findings.

Digital-Based Automatic Messaging

Spam messages were the first tool used to increase exposure and reach on social media. This strategy leveraged WhatsApp to spread the vision and mission of the new candidate, Mr. ES, candidate number three. The new candidate implemented this strategy to ensure maximum reach among constituents in the village. Personally, the new candidate did not get involved in this strategy because he was unaware that WhatsApp was capable of disseminating messages on a large scale and spreading information to constituents by sending spam messages to them in the village. As far as he understood, WhatsApp existed only to facilitate more effective interaction through groups or one-on-one messages, and had not yet reached the stage of spreading spam. As ES stated:

> "I use WhatsApp (WA) blasts. A friend of mine told me I could use WhatsApp blasts, but to do that, you need phone numbers first. So I entered the numbers myself, one by one—about 1,800 or so. I focused on people who didn't know me very well yet, so I send them out weekly—let's say I get 300 numbers in a week, I send them right away, and do the same the following week." (ES, Interview, November 8, 2024).

That statement does not stand alone; in fact, on other occasions, the campaign team has argued that the uniqueness of that strategy makes it capable of providing objective and effective information:

> "That's the great thing about sending it via WhatsApp Blast—as voters, we don't know who sent it, so the system immediately provides information about the new candidate's track record to date, allowing voters to automatically click on the link and access the information provided." (CM, Interview, November 8, 2024).

As an indicator of success in organizing constituents, this series of events is reflected in the tabulation of vote counts; Table 1 below shows the distribution of votes by hamlet

Table 1. Recapitulation of the 2023 Karanganyar Village Head Election

Sequence Number	Candidate Name	Dusun Lor Kali	Dusun Krajan	Dusun Pancuran	Dusun KR. Anyar Kidul	Dusun Gadungan	Number
1	TI	110	145	171	362	877	1665
2	KE	135	98	330	642	609	1814
3	ES	245	935	178	197	435	1990
Number of Valid Votes		490	1178	679	1201	1921	5469

Source: Research Findings

The term for maximizing the dissemination of these vision and mission messages is "broadcasting," and it is carried out manually. This team targets the population in each village electoral district, which has been divided into several groups with different roles. On the other hand, outreach to the opposition base does not occur directly but rather through existing WhatsApp groups that have provided the phone numbers of local residents. Regardless, the volunteer team still has several members who are part of the opposition base, so the use of social outreach not only creates opportunities to maximize the new voter base but also expands the opposition's reach. Additionally, some of the teams recruited as volunteers had prior experience working within the village government system. In short, records of village activities particularly those related to constituents' personal contact information were meticulously maintained. This subsequently served as a key step in ensuring that spam messages sent to constituents in Karanganyar Village could be effectively collected.

Furthermore, activities focused on digital utilization have successfully accommodated electoral needs. This aligns with the accumulation of vote counts shown in Table 1. The strategic use of social media has emerged as a distinguishing factor in mobilizing the constituency compared to conventional methods. Based on interview results, the use of social media not only expands exposure and reach but also fosters mutual understanding by conveying narratives from vision and mission to values that build credibility in the eyes of newcomers. Ultimately, digital-based automated messages serve not merely as news disseminators but as instruments for building public trust within the context of village democracy. A victory that was not significantly different from that of the opposition reinforces the idea that newcomers' positions are relatively more highly regarded, particularly in terms of leveraging modern developments. Moreover, in the current era, conventional approaches are relatively inefficient, so there is no reason not to leverage a digital presence to foster a macro-level electoral understanding in a persuasive and informative manner.

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Optimizing Electoral Support from Young People

The next priority in maximizing the vote count for candidate number three is to ensure that young voters are the primary target. In our efforts to maximize the role of young voters as a pillar of victory, we must not overlook the strategies that are available and can be implemented. In formal terms, political campaigns are forums provided by the village head election committee; however, their organization varies considerably, meaning that the composition of candidate number three's meetings with the village community does not distinguish between young and old. Therefore, maximizing the engagement of young voters in this context involves ensuring that they are drawn to campaign platforms that emphasize change. Attracting young voters is a golden opportunity that has been capitalized on by relatively younger candidates. Research findings indicate that newcomers are relatively younger than their competitors, including the incumbent. This condition provides a distinct advantage in implementing more adaptive campaign strategies, as informants noted that this facilitates relationship-building with the younger community. Furthermore, informants revealed that this advantage becomes a key asset when engaging in dialogue in an unrestricted space, allowing for greater flexibility; informants find it easier to build mutual understanding and feel more comfortable in voicing their aspirations.

The emphasis on support from young voters is not limited to those who have reached the standard voting age; rather, in this context, it includes young voters who are still categorized as youth. In other words, the team's subjective assessment considers those deemed young in terms of appearance and demeanor to still be comfortably viewed as youth. This approach is believed to build exposure and social reach, as young voters not only yearn for radical change from the vision and mission offered by newcomers but also for the opportunity to contribute to the future of the village's democratic system. Furthermore, young voters who are not the primary focus of enthusiasm for driving change in this election continue to highlight unacceptable practices, particularly vote-buying. In short, young voters have already developed political awareness, as evidenced by their ability to compare the visions and missions of several candidates competing in the election. This depends not only on how the campaign process is conducted but also on the intensity of the messages received whether through the dissemination of information via social media or through banners at key locations in the village urging voters to reject fraud. Ultimately, the outcome of this political awareness is crucial for ensuring that the integrity of democratic values is well preserved.

Therefore, when this offer is presented in a way that maximizes the participation of young voters, newcomers feel that their political progress is more readily accepted, thereby enhancing their performance in the village political arena. Furthermore, by ensuring their organic interests are addressed, young voters gain a better understanding of the political process, which will have positive consequences in the future.

Track Record of Social Contributions as an Indicatior of Integrity in Political Legitimacy

The context of internalizing trust and village leadership is a key strategic factor in winning a village head election. In short, this interpretation views newcomers not as outsiders to the local area, but solely as local constituents who have the opportunity to participate in village political contests. This track record is built through the newcomers' involvement in local community organizations. The capacity built through local organizations particularly within the internal governance of Karanganyar Village provides the foundation for adapting leadership skills to social activities. Newcomers' involvement in village governance organizations equips them with the ability to assess local needs. Other informants confirmed that this serves as a key electoral benchmark for evaluating newcomers. The practical experience gained within the local community naturally fosters an identity for newcomers as potential leaders who demonstrate high commitment, accountability, and consistency in social work. This context is understood as a set of reliable values that help build electoral trust in newcomers.

In another finding, valuable contributions, which highlight the critical importance of social

aspects are particularly evident when making positive contributions to vulnerable groups (orphans). This sense of responsibility is not intended to seek recognition from local residents but stems from a human duty to foster a sense of community and humanity. The reason given by the informant was a desire to ensure that the community has equal opportunities. The depth of this sense of responsibility toward vulnerable groups has fostered a positive perception of the newcomer. This finding is fundamentally not about seeking recognition; rather, other informants agreed that the newcomer's role as a figure capable of shouldering the responsibility of organizing vulnerable groups is a social reality.

This capital is built through a continuous process that facilitates the fundamental logic of electoral politics; a trustworthy leader is not built instantly, but rather through a lengthy process while working in overlapping fields. This practice is justified whenever religious programs or religious studies are conducted, where donations are integrated to maximize benefits for vulnerable groups. This finding suggests that newcomers have earned public trust in caring for vulnerable groups. This recognition is part of their social capital, stemming from their ability to ensure that donor funds are channeled to those who truly need them and are properly utilized.

Discussion

The distribution strategy implemented by newcomer Mr. ES was identified as playing a fundamental role. If efforts to modernize were able to contribute to optimally suppressing his competitors' support base, the research findings regarding the use of WhatsApp blasts emerged as one aspect frequently cited by informants as a factor contributing to his victory. Interpreting this context aligns with Scott's perspective on the concept of resistance, particularly the everyday resistance practiced by relatively powerless groups. Being "powerless" here means that an individual's economic and social power is insufficient to surpass the limits of the local elite's authority. Consequently, attacks are based on simple techniques with satisfying results, ranging from sabotage to feigning ignorance (Scott, 1985). The framework that Scott has established regarding farmworkers' everyday resistance against landowners forms a sequence that corresponds to various mechanisms within the village democratic process. This everyday resistance is adopted based on the capabilities of groups that lack sufficient capital both economic and social yet yields productive outcomes for the political preferences of the village community.

This goal-oriented approach aims to "co-opt" negotiations aimed at voters who lack a perspective and knowledge base regarding newcomers. Resistance through digitalization strategies depends on the circumstances and the ease of access, which is not limited by cost. If circumstances permit the execution of covert offensive activities without disrupting physical interactions, then these consequences may gradually shift voters' preferences. The consideration to shift voting preferences stems from significant penetration in disseminating information through modern and effective tools. This situation supports the overarching goal that, in uncertain circumstances, by sowing the seeds of newcomers' capabilities to influence voters' reasoning, a better post-election order can be achieved. The most critical and decisive form of influence occurs when this capability penetrates and reshapes people's ideas. The long-standing customs of Asian societies still draw on the knowledge and ideas held by the community, suggesting that the village elite in this context, the incumbent still possesses the appropriate capacity. This is not entirely the case, as the positive consequences of Mr. ES's organic ability to influence the constituency's ideas and challenge the incumbent's patterns of thought are shifting voter preferences.

Productive proposals aimed at engaging diverse constituencies are not merely intended to demonstrate a commitment to upholding the ideas presented. Scoot cites the views of other scholars, particularly Eric Hobsbawm, who argues that while the goal of the peasantry is to operate within the system to minimize losses specifically, traditional farmers do not necessarily express physical or open resistance, they do exploit the system in such a way as to take advantage

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of various loopholes in the application of social and political systems, without violating the law or economic principles (Hobsbawm, 1973). Therefore, this concept is closely aligned with how new candidates navigate the increasingly varied and complex situations within the existing sociopolitical system. This system is implemented after the process of subsistence has been exploitatively suppressed. This has been justified when the resistance mounted by newcomers is able to reduce operational costs while channeling their core capabilities into targeted expressive spaces based on gaps in the digital realm. Minimizing losses and assuming that political practice has indeed been recognized as a space for maximizing investment, capital consequently often becomes the primary instrument through traditional methods. This productive approach does not necessarily obscure other forms of diversity that hold potential benefits; rather, it advances the idea of transforming and overthrowing the incumbent's system of domination through the existing electoral framework.

Consequently, the latest findings supporting this context were proposed by Utomo et al. (2021), The development of WhatsApp-based political campaigns has become one of several rational tools, even though other media platforms also exist that facilitate two-way communication. However, WhatsApp blasts are more effective at sending information anonymously; thus, the use of WhatsApp's digital platform with mass broadcasting technology makes a positive contribution to encouraging constituents to understand Mr. ES's vision and mission. On the other hand, this campaign marks the first operational implementation of this approach, as previous findings did not mention it (Prasetyanta et al., 2024; Priadi et al., 2019), even within the local ecosystem particularly among the opposition manual methods are still being used.

This practice subsequently became a key step in supporting efforts to disseminate the vision and mission to constituents, whether they were political opponents or supporters of Mr. ES himself. Therefore, the journey to drive this campaign for victory involved a multifaceted approach to navigating digital fragmentation not only to foster two-way interaction in building relationships but also to ensure that one-way communication could be effectively conveyed. The optimal use of a WhatsApp number filtering system based on the constituent base is the first application that has not been mentioned in several sources of literature. Enrichment as a form of resistance (Scott, 1985) remains relevant in this situation, where efforts to maximize collective action are carried out with due caution; attacks on the opposition's base in this era are no longer conducted through open campaigns, as this could potentially trigger social unrest or temporary conflict, even if carried out through formal channels. Moreover, the use of WhatsApp Blasts is one-way, not two-way, to open a channel of communication with the target audience.

Therefore, launching attacks via WhatsApp-based social media is the most rational way to issue warnings to constituents who support the opposition. This is because the newcomer's track record is not new in the context of leadership, but rather new in the context of challenging the incumbent. Consequently, the campaign that will unfold does not erase this track record before the candidate declares their intention to enter the village's democratic process. Not wanting to stand alone, if this consideration is relevant to the findings Lees-Marshment (2011), which places political marketing as the primary focus, given that one aspect of political marketing requires communication with clear proportions. This means that, over time, the village community should naturally become politically literate and not close themselves off to developments regarding the designated candidates. Closing oneself off from information will only limit the knowledge that should naturally be acquired in determining the future direction of village development. Therefore, the concept of proportion stems from the personal leadership experience of newcomers before they declare themselves as challengers to incumbents in the village democratic process. This alignment will highlight the distinctive characteristics of newcomers versus the opposition regarding the concrete implications of information dissemination.

Therefore, this study confirms that the potential to win over voters was carefully considered following the identification of opportunities to utilize social media platforms beyond conventional methods. The opposition's failure to implement a similar strategy is categorized as a one in a

Lifetime opportunity to maximize open attacks. In line with what Scoot said, if the resistance is collective in nature, it requires minimal coordination, and the strategy applied by newcomers who share a common understanding relies solely on specific individuals to drive the attack system. Thus, capitalizing on constructive opportunities minimizes the likelihood of failure, and the interpretation of digital utilization is not the fault of service providers, since the primary responsibility for operating these tools lies with the users themselves namely, the newcomer team. It would be a mistake to overlook the digital structure of formal competitive opportunities.

This mobilization does not focus solely on the political contest that is, targeting the opponent's constituent base to shift the political landscape of the constituency. Rather, this mobilization has the potential to form a closed coalition, one that does not materialize in the political sphere but is formed in the intellectual or epistemic sphere, which in fact contributes to the accumulation of votes. In the context of the implementation of democracy, Haynes & Rhine (1998) this also touches on the issue of attacks against political opponents, with a focus on the presidential election, through the optimization of negative messages directed at the nation's constituents and certain media outlets. This strategy is also widely understood as an effort to damage the reputation of the elite, so that a shift in collective attitudes can contribute to the conditions desired by the attackers through the optimization of spam messages. Activities based on their frequency and nature do not detract from the primary objective. Although the nature of the activities carried out by Mr. ES's team has maximized the internalization of the vision and mission, it does not impose unfounded beliefs on voters, thereby preventing the spread of false information.

The coalition's role in following up on this process is a definite advantage, as the opposition's attacks have not yet touched on positive information regarding the candidates' vision and mission. Indeed, there is a gap when attacks are coordinated to ensure the constituent base is secured, at a time when a crucial aspect of implementing systematic and measurable management practices through the composition of the constituent base in the virtual environment has become the primary target. Therefore, this benchmark has also been influenced by Haynes & Rhine (1998) during the distribution of spam messages targeting political opponents, it became clear that there was a real need for this, even though those responsible did not know who the political opponents were due to the random nature of the phone numbers they had. This restriction is a new development during the virtual campaign conducted by Fadila (2025) is seen as a platform for spreading misinformation aimed at damaging the image of political figures via WhatsApp. In other words, WhatsApp has the potential not only to serve as a platform for rallying voter support, but also to become a hub for spreading messages that explain the vision and mission of newcomers' candidacies to online communities.

Consequently, this move seems quite ordinary amid the political maneuvering carried out by political actors (Jamilah & Wahyuni, 2020) the clear goal is to influence voter sentiment, making it increasingly difficult to determine who is worthy and qualified to lead Karanganyar Village for the next eight years. Both older and younger voters are forced to carefully consider their choices within the village's political landscape, which is often the target of attacks from various media outlets (Astrika & Yuwanto, 2019). This situation then became a common ground for maximizing and securing voter support. The fact that Karanganyar Village has a constituent base of around 5,000 people is no reason to disregard candidate number three's desire to seriously lead the village government.

The steps taken by candidate number three, Ms. ES, have provided new insights into how roles within the village democratic system have undergone a radical transition. When vote-gathering efforts were still focused on outreach and formal campaigning, even expanding networks into the digital realm was often considered insufficient due to a limited understanding of the restrictions imposed by digital platform providers, which must be interpreted with caution. Since the use of live broadcasts is considered a relatively innovative two-way communication strategy, as has been stated by Sutikno et al. (2016). Unlike its competitors, Telegram and Facebook, this broadcast feature even provides automatic replies to messages sent by

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the sender (Ramaditiya et al., 2021), and the use of broadcasts in Indonesia is quite widespread, especially among government officials (Puteri, 2026; Ritan et al., 2025), compared to other developing countries in terms of mobilizing the masses, especially during political campaigns, despite the potential for misunderstandings (Chagas et al., 2023; Latina et al., 2021; Resende et al., 2019). Therefore, provocative translations are an integral part of its operations. This means that political lobbying to rally support for various ideas for change can topple pragmatic political alliances and the status quo which are rife with irregularities and disregard the long-term potential for rural development.

These considerations focus on a previous meeting regarding the alleged opposition expressed by the people of Karanganyar to the election of the Karanganyar village head. Scott (1985) has mapped the implementation of everyday resistance through relatively open patterns of resistance, particularly through media networks, which serve as a strong justification for why the principle of caution need not be applied; that is, this phenomenon must be countered if attacks are not always carried out with caution, even though resistance to buying and selling was not mentioned in previous studies. Furthermore, the principle of prudence, if collectively driven by the relatively significant dominance of the dominant party namely, those who previously held legitimacy based on identity and networks, or what Winters refers to as an oligarchy (Winters, 2013). Therefore, resistance in the contemporary era has undergone a transformation that emphasizes the principle of courage based on selective operational practices. Volunteer teams not only prioritize media as a key component, but also ensure that this engagement influences behavior. Furthermore, in his book titled "Peasant Resistance," he raises another important point (Scott, 1993) while open resistance is rarely carried out because the repercussions for the perpetrators are relatively minor in the context of social stratification, this trauma prevents the peasant resistance movement from reaching its most radical peak, allowing it only to shake the structure. Therefore, placing the media in its proper context marks the beginning of a shift from relatively conventional forms of resistance such as face-to-face campaigns and the display of banners toward the use of more effective tools without compromising the substance of the victory.

This opportunity aligns with what the team has already established; maximizing the potential of young voters is not off-limits, as this is an opportunity that must be capitalized on as soon as possible. Viewing young voters as individuals with greater transformational capacity serves as the common ground for the convergence of Mr. ES's vision and mission. This perspective is supported by the findings that have been obtained Haris Zulkarnain & Saufi (2021) young voters are individuals with fresh perspectives, they will not compromise if their ideas are tainted by narratives of election fraud perpetrated by political actors, meaning this opportunity will not come again if it is not seized. Even if such an opportunity were to arise a second time, the next opportunity does not guarantee a process that aligns with the expectation of a nine-year wait following a leadership transition. Prioritizing the political capacity of revolutionary youth in villages as the top priority in village development and concrete work programs is the most effective foundation if mass-based practices can be realized.

Offensive Perspectives, as published by Lees-Marshment (2011) has been agreed upon in this context. The narrative put forward to champion the idea of change aims to reach those who share a similar mindset. Given its formal nature, this narrative is presented not only to promote village political actors who see themselves as future leaders, but also to provide insight into when opportunities to seize and win power can be capitalized on. Haboddin (2017) setting these issues aside, legal practice in understanding power must be understood as a consequence of the existence of a single center of power, as well as the long-standing tradition of generational renewal within the village electoral system. When competition does not guarantee that the votes of young voters are formally accounted for, it is highly likely that the third candidate will be forced to shift their strategy toward one that is more innovative and impactful, although there is an undesirable risk that the timing of its implementation will suffer as a result.

Campaigns focused on young voters have evolved into an arena where third-party candidates can seriously explore all kinds of future opportunities. In this context, simply claiming to be more representative because one's age aligns with that of young voters is not the same as understanding their actual needs. More importantly, it is necessary to examine the track records of the candidates representing young voters, along with their leadership experience. (Fitriyah et al., 2021). In the findings of the study, Adi & Maksum (2025) It also shows that today's young voters are not apathetic; therefore, when confronted with ideas for change, they do not hesitate to voice their important views. This means that young voters are more courageous, and this courage must be addressed appropriately and effectively. If this is not handled properly by progressive leaders who understand the people's needs, it has the potential to spark resistance against the system of government itself (Gatmaytan, 2006; Tilly, 1983). Therefore, it is crucial to place electoral capacity at the core of the leadership strategy to be implemented. This means not only having a basic understanding of the issue but also being politically literate.

Furthermore, if this axis is juxtaposed with other artificial axes, young voters with a progressive understanding of the local political landscape which essentially consists of fragmented digital products will become enthusiastic. The massive growth of social media, along with the accompanying political education, has fostered a subjective view among young voters that traditional politics is relatively vague and unclear in its development, even though this is not entirely true. This reality has led young voters to distrust relatively conventional strategies (Choeriyah & Assyahri, 2024). Upon closer examination, this correlation stems from a network of senior political figures who abuse their power to engage in corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN) (Adi, 2025b; Aji et al., 2023; Jisman, 2022). To the point where the abuse of power by senior political figures has further tarnished their already deteriorating track record and their failure to represent the aspirations of voters (Azizah, 2022).

This enthusiasm for analyzing the political landscape has enabled young voters to make rational, long-term decisions, as they generally understand the issues that need to be addressed and improved which are essentially the challenges facing government and the surrounding community. This means it is not a mistake for Mr. ES, as a newcomer, to leverage this potential to expand his social reach and legitimacy regarding his various program proposals, as well as his vision and mission. On the other hand, once this need is met, young voters become bolder in voicing their aspirations. They are considered highly critical voters when it comes to monitoring a leader's performance. This prospect does not prevent Mr. ES from delving deeper into the characteristics of young voters, as the categorization of young voters can include those who have just gained the right to vote at age 17, or even those under the age of 35.

There is a wide range of options for ensuring that young voters can cut through all the competing agendas, even though only the third candidate represents the preferences of young voters. However, this does not mean that older voters or relatively senior voters are not prioritized in achieving voter turnout. It would be too simplistic to say so, but this priority is an issue that needs to be addressed early on not merely dismissed as premature thinking without evaluating key performance indicators as various visions and missions are refined. Therefore, the strategy for the third candidate in addition to launching attacks through social media also involves ensuring that young voters are accommodated so that their mindset can be nurtured and maintained. Relevance, after securing a voter base, is the aggregate of electoral positioning to ensure loyalty and secure votes. The most difficult and challenging stage of the process of gaining power is maintaining relationships. Scott does not place too much emphasis on the fact that farmworkers' resistance against dominant actors must be based on solidarity particularly among farmers as this issue relates to definition and analysis. At the very least, the effort to secure the electoral base is a short-term struggle aimed at achieving long-term gains. The loss stems from a shift in votes from the incumbent to a newcomer.

Furthermore, given the fundamental points that have been raised namely, that candidate number three is more representative in terms of presenting certain policy proposals it is somewhat contradictory if the findings indicate that Sumaiga & Harahap (2025) which states

that young voters do not always support positive political agendas, because the nature of political corruption tends to be tempting and requires consensus in current meetings. Referring to Aspinall & Sukmajati (2015) if vote-buying remains a difficult issue to address in Indonesia's political democracy, both at the local level (regional and village elections) and the national level (legislative and executive elections). Although various government programs have been launched to curb its growth, the potential for vote-buying still exists in various forms and manifestations (Adi, 2025a).

Furthermore, as has been noted previously, the process of building a competitive democracy continues to be confronted with conflicting findings. Mendrofa (2024), they emphatically stated that this is the hope of the youth group to prevent fraud in the village head election. This means that the identity of young voters appears ambiguous, so their active support for positive practices in the form of candidates' visions and missions that address village programs is not always guaranteed. This is because the desired expectation is to participate in proper voting behavior, both in the process of analyzing the electoral contest and in the realm of electoral behavior itself. The commitment to creating ethical election practices remains the foundation; when this expectation is combined with Mr. ES's serious, ethics-based approach, it becomes an absolute necessity.

When considering other practices aimed at ensuring their existence, this is nothing new for those with experience outside that context. In exploring fundamental experiences, Ms. ES is someone who strives to ensure that vulnerable groups receive fair treatment. In other words, this is a long-term process one that involves putting oneself in a position to treat fellow human beings with dignity as a right that must be realized. This commitment has, in fact, been demonstrated by various political actors wherever they may be. Focusing on engagement in social activities has become commonplace, but the emphasis on a more meaningful process one that goes beyond mere sensationalism and stems from the heart remains an enduring challenge. Therefore, establishing this kind of approach is not easy. It is not just because the incumbent already enjoys popularity, or because other competitors have an equal opportunity to engage in similar social activities.

The sense of commitment fostered through social initiatives has become a key component of social capital. Legitimacy built through grassroots organizing is perceived as embodying a caring, trustworthy, and leadership-worthy figure, which ultimately shapes cultural legitimacy rather than administrative legitimacy. This recognition is crucial for positioning political actors who have contributed to community activities, especially since such patterns are not merely temporary in the context of upcoming elections. Rather, they emerge organically from the grassroots level before these actors even intend to compete for seats in village politics. This means that this track record does not serve as a stage for political actors to build an image, but rather as a critical assessment by a politically literate community. To a certain extent, in the context of competing for seats of power in elections, the public will feel more comfortable with leadership candidates who demonstrate a close connection to the people; this sense of comfort increases when the candidates vying for seats of power come from ordinary backgrounds. Constituents will feel comfortable, not because of personal closeness, but because of a shared position from the grassroots. This rational consideration is evident in Jokowi's career, which began as an ordinary person and led him to victories at the mayoral, gubernatorial, and national levels without ever being defeated, by combining grassroots campaigning with social media (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Mietzner, 2014, 2026; Mujani & Liddle, 2021).

In addition, the consistency fostered through social activities supports recognition of the participants' abilities. Translation (Scott, 1985) village politics is not viewed merely as something rational and formal. A greater emphasis on traditional and personal relationships among political actors ranging from track records to social protection has subtle consequences for patron-client relationships. This means that residents who are already part of the local social system are likely to voluntarily assist in various activities based on their perception of these actors as protectors of the community. Furthermore, the community will subtly reciprocate their political loyalty after a long period period of service that has been established within the village setting. The emphasis on all

these aspects remains consistent with the moral standards of the village community or what is known as the "Peasant Moral Economy" which pertains to justice, decency, and the elite's concern for the people. Before positioning themselves as candidates, they have already been deemed worthy as elite candidates; therefore, this support is not merely a matter of loyalty but is also morally appropriate for the village.

Conclusion

This study attributes Mr. ES's victory as a newcomer in the village political process to his use of varied strategies in building a constituent base. These strategies for winning over constituents were implemented by increasing his visibility and social reach particularly through digital automated messages and by boosting support among young voters. Furthermore, another context highlights a track record of social contributions as an indicator of integrity in political legitimacy. Moreover, the findings of this study enrich Scott's theory by identifying the mechanisms of transition from the accumulation of everyday resistance to the accommodation of electoral voices in village democracy. The difference lies in the sphere of resistance applied and the purpose of the resistance: while Scott highlights resistance within informal spheres based on farm laborers opposing farmers or landowners this study shows that resistance by new candidates in village politics is applied within formal spheres to challenge competitors' electoral bases, thereby enabling voters to evaluate their vision and mission. The use of WhatsApp blasts is one strategy identified as contributing to the expansion of new candidates' political communication reach, though this does not imply the same effectiveness in other village electoral contexts. Additionally, the identification of ideas regarding sustainable and progressive development, as well as the cultivation of a positive image, is another requirement for winning over constituents in village elections a finding not generally addressed in other studies.

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