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## Political Capital, Social Networks, and Electoral Leadership: Explaining Non-Party Candidate Success in Jakarta's Local Elections

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### Abstract

Since the introduction of direct regional head elections in Jakarta in 2007, no incumbent governor has successfully secured a second term. This pattern indicates a unique electoral dynamic where candidates who are not strongly rooted in political party structures can compete effectively. This study examines the factors behind the victory of a non-party candidate in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election and discusses its implications for political party recruitment.

Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis involving 20 informants, including political elites, campaign team members, academics, and community leaders. The analysis applies Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital to understand how political, social, and economic capital interact in electoral competition.

The findings show that electoral success is no longer determined solely by party machinery but by the strategic combination of different forms of capital. Among these, social capital such as public trust, community networks, and shared identity play a particularly important role in mobilizing voter support.

The study concludes that success in local elections depends on the dynamic interaction between political, social, and economic capital. Based on these findings, the study proposes a preliminary framework for political party recruitment that emphasizes candidate performance and the development of social capital as key elements for strengthening democratic leadership.

#### KEYWORDS

regional head contests, non-political party cadres, local leadership introduction.

### Introduction

In recent decades, the development of democratic governance has been accompanied by increasing public scrutiny of political institutions and electoral processes. Electoral competition is not only a mechanism for transferring political power but also a critical arena in which political actors mobilize resources to gain legitimacy and voter support. In many democratic systems, political parties play a central role through candidate nomination, political recruitment, and institutional mobilization. However, contemporary political developments increasingly show the emergence of candidates whose political strength derives not from formal party structures but from broader social networks, public trust, and personal reputation.

In Indonesia, direct regional head elections (Pilkada) represent an important institutional reform aimed at strengthening local democracy following the post-1998 Reformation era. These elections are designed to enhance participation, accountability, and citizen involvement in local leadership selection (Latief et al., 2019). Political parties have traditionally served as gatekeepers in candidate recruitment and campaign organizations. As Aspinall and Berenschot (2019) note, political competition in Indonesia remains shaped by party networks, patronage, and clientelistic practices.

Nevertheless, recent developments reveal a growing phenomenon: candidates who

are not products of internal party cadre systems gaining strong electoral support. In several regions, parties have pragmatically supported popular public figures over their own cadres. This is especially visible in metropolitan arenas where media exposure, social networks, and public perception heavily influence electoral competition. Jakarta, as Indonesia's political and economic center, offers a particularly significant case for observing these dynamics.

The 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election illustrates this phenomenon vividly. The election featured three prominent candidates Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, Anies Baswedan, and Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. For the purposes of this study, "non-party cadre candidates" are defined as individuals who did not rise through formal party regeneration mechanisms, did not hold long-term party leadership positions, and whose primary political legitimacy derived from sources outside party structures such as professional reputation, social activism, or family political dynasties rather than party career progression. None of the three candidates met the criteria for traditional party cadres. Instead, their legitimacy is derived largely from personal popularity, professional reputation, and social networks. Parties appear to prioritize electoral viability over ideological loyalty or internal cadre development (Habersack, 2025).

Previous studies have extensively examined patronage, clientelism, and oligarchic networks in Indonesian elections (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Kurniawan, 2025; Warburton & Aspinall, 2019). While these studies offer valuable insights, they largely focus on institutional structures and mobilization strategies. However, a specific gap remains: limited research has examined how different forms of political, social, and economic capital interact and are converted into electoral advantage by non-party candidates in highly competitive urban electoral arenas like Jakarta. The specific mechanisms of capital conversion in metropolitan electoral contexts remain underexplored.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital provides a useful framework for examining how political actors mobilize and convert various capital forms within specific social fields. However, its application to Indonesian local electoral politics remains relatively limited (Jarness et al., 2019). This study addresses this gap by analyzing the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election through Bourdieu's lens. It asks: (1) How do non-party candidates achieve electoral success in Jakarta? and (2) How do different forms of political, social, and economic capital interact and contribute to shaping voter support? By answering these questions, the study offers a sociological perspective highlighting the importance of social legitimacy, public trust, and symbolic power in contemporary electoral competition.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore political contestation involving non-party candidates in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. A case study design was chosen because it enables focused investigation of a specific electoral contest within its real-world context, allowing for in-depth examination of complex social and political phenomena (Creswell, 2019). This approach enables researchers to understand meanings, interpretations, and interactions among actors involved in the political process. The case study method is particularly appropriate for examining "how" and "why" questions about contemporary events over which researchers have little control (Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022).

### Research Location

The research was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia's

political center, characterized by intense electoral competition, strong media influence, and high political participation. The 2017 gubernatorial election provides a relevant context for examining political contestation involving non-party candidates. Jakarta's status as the national capital with diverse population and significant media attention makes it a strategic site for observing contemporary electoral dynamics.

### Informant Selection

Informants were individuals with direct knowledge of or involvement in the 2017 Jakarta election. Purposive sampling was used to select participants with relevant experience who could provide information-rich cases (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025). Selection criteria included: (1) direct involvement in the 2017 election campaign or administration; (2) positional roles in political parties, campaign teams, or community organizations during the election period; and (3) willingness to provide detailed information about campaign strategies and dynamics. Snowball sampling helped identify additional key actors within political networks who were not initially accessible (see Table 1).

This composition ensured representation from party elites (understanding institutional political capital), campaign operatives (understanding mobilization strategies), community leaders (understanding social capital dynamics), and academic observers (providing analytical distance).

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources between March and August 2023. Multiple methods were employed to enable triangulation.

**In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview guide developed based on Bourdieu's capital theory. The guide included questions about: campaign resource mobilization (economic capital), network utilization (social capital), party involvement (political capital), and narrative construction (symbolic capital). Questions were open-ended to allow informants to elaborate on their experiences and perspectives (Mashuri, 2022). Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with written informed consent. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian and later translated for analysis.

**Observation:** Non-participant observation was conducted at political events, community meetings, and campaign activities during the retrospective reconstruction of campaign dynamics. Observational notes document interactions among political actors and community responses.

**Documentation:** Secondary data included official election reports from the Jakarta General Election Commission (KPU DKI Jakarta), campaign materials, news articles from major

**Table 1. Informant Profile**

Code	Informant Category	Role
I1	Political Party Elite	Party strategist
I2	Campaign Team	Campaign coordinator
I3	Campaign Team	Volunteer network organizer
I4	Political Observer	Political analyst
I5	Academic	Political science scholar
I6	Community Leader	Religious community representative
I7	Campaign Team	Grassroots mobilization coordinator
I8	Political Party Elite	Party official
I9	Volunteer	Community volunteer network
I10	Community Leader	Neighborhood association leader

Indonesian media outlets (Kompas, Tempo, Republika), and academic studies on the 2017 election.

**Focus Group Discussions:** Two FGDs were conducted, each with 5-7 participants representing different informant categories. FGDs allowed observation of group interactions and capture of shared interpretations of political phenomena (Van Bezouw et al., 2019). The first FGD focused on campaign strategy, the second on post-election analysis.

#### Ethical Procedures

All informants provided written informed consent after receiving information about research purposes, data usage, and their rights to withdraw. Confidentiality was assured through anonymization. Informants are identified only by category and code. Data were stored securely with access limited to the research team.

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2018) interactive model, consisting of three concurrent stages:

**Data Reduction:** Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded using thematic analysis. The coding process begins with open coding, identifying segments related to political, social, economic, and symbolic capital. Initial codes were descriptive (e.g., "volunteer networks," "campaign funding," "party coordination"). These were then grouped into categories (e.g., "grassroots network," "resource mobilization," "institutional structure") through axial coding. Finally, selective coding organized categories into broader themes corresponding to Bourdieu's capital forms.

To ensure coding reliability, two researchers independently coded three transcripts, achieving 85% inter-coder agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion, refining the coding scheme before applying it to all transcripts. This systematic approach ensured themes emerged consistently from data rather than being imposed a priori.

**Data Display:** Organized data were presented in narrative descriptions and matrices (see Table 2) to identify patterns and relationships among capital forms. **Conclusion Drawing and Verification:** Conclusions were drawn based on identified patterns and continuously verified through comparison with additional data sources and informant feedback during FGDs.

#### Data Validity

Triangulation enhanced credibility through three strategies (Noble & Heale, 2019): **Source triangulation:** Comparing information across different informant categories (party elites, campaign teams, community leaders, academics) to identify convergent and divergent perspectives. **Triangulation method:** Comparing results from interviews, observations, FGDs, and documentation to validate findings across data types. **Theoretical triangulation:** Interpreting findings using multiple theoretical perspectives (Bourdieu's capital theory, literature on clientelism and patronage, studies of social movements) to ensure robust interpretation.

## Result and Discussion

This section presents the empirical findings derived from interviews, observations, documentation analysis, and focus group discussions. The results are organized according to the analytical categories derived from Bourdieu's theory of capital, namely economic capital, social capital, political capital, and symbolic capital. Presenting the findings through these thematic categories allows a clearer connection between empirical evidence and the theoretical framework used in this study.

The analysis demonstrates how each form of capital contributed to electoral mobilization and how these resources were strategically converted during the campaign process.

#### Thematic Coding of Interview Data

To identify key patterns from the interview data, thematic coding was conducted to categorize statements from informants into analytical themes (see Table 2).

The coding results indicate that electoral competition in Jakarta was shaped by the interaction between various forms of capital mobilized by competing candidates.

#### Economic Capital and Campaign Resource Mobilization.

The first finding highlights the role of economic capital in supporting campaign activities. Economic capital refers to financial resources that enable candidates to organize political campaigns, conduct public outreach, and mobilize supporters. In the case of Sandiaga Uno, economic resources were strategically utilized to strengthen campaign infrastructure, including volunteer mobilization and community outreach programs. Financial resources supported campaign logistics, political communication strategies, and grassroots activities that expanded voter engagement.

However, the study also shows that financial resources alone do not guarantee electoral success. Instead, economic capital became effective when it was transformed into social networks and political influence. Recent studies also indicate that financial resources in electoral campaigns often function as enabling factors that facilitate broader political mobilization rather than acting as direct determinants of electoral outcomes (Enli, 2025; Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; Kreiss et al., 2020). This transformation reflects the concept of capital conversion proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, where economic resources can be transformed into social relationships and political legitimacy.

**Table 2.** Thematic Coding of Interview Findings

No	Interview Evidence	Initial Code	Category	Theme
1	Volunteers expanded campaign outreach to communities outside party networks	Volunteer mobilization	Grassroots network	Social Capital
2	Financial resources supported campaign logistics and media communication	Campaign funding	Resource mobilization	Economic Capital
3	Religious gatherings became spaces for political discussion	Religious influence	Community engagement	Social Capital
4	Political parties coordinated campaign strategy across districts	Party coordination	Institutional structure	Political Capital
5	Campaign narratives increased public trust toward the candidates	Narrative framing	Political legitimacy	Symbolic Capital

### Social Capital and Grassroots Network Mobilization

The second pivotal finding of this study underscores the preeminence of social capital as a determinant factor in shaping political mobilization within the Jakarta electoral field. In the Bourdieusian perspective, social capital is not merely a collection of acquaintances but a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 2020). In the 2017 Jakarta election, this capital functioned as the primary engine for collective political action, compensating for the candidates' lack of organic roots within formal party structures.

A significant revelation from the field data is the strategic utilization of volunteer networks to transcend the limitations of traditional party machineries. These grassroots networks acted as "social brokers" that bridged the gap between elite political figures and the atomized urban electorate. Informants from the campaign inner circle highlighted that these non-formal structures provided a level of agility that formal parties could not achieve. One campaign strategist noted:

*"Volunteer networks became the backbone of the campaign because they allowed us to reach communities that were not directly connected to political parties. They possessed the localized trust necessary to penetrate socio-political barriers that were otherwise inaccessible to party bureaucrats."* (Interview, Campaign Team Member, 2023).

This mobilization indicates a shift from institutionalized mobilization to networked mobilization. Community-based activities, such as informal gatherings and local religious forums, served as "deliberative spaces" where political trust was cultivated. As one community leader observed:

*"Community gatherings and local meetings were important spaces where political discussions occurred informally. Here, the candidate's image was translated into a shared communal identity."* (Interview, Community Leader, 2023).

The victory of Anies Baswedan, in particular, demonstrates the successful conversion of social capital into symbolic power. By mobilizing a heterogeneous array of social networks ranging from neighborhood associations (RT/RW) to faith-based communities the campaign created a resonance between the candidate's narrative and the voters' *habitus*. Community leaders and religious figures functioned as "opinion leaders" who validated the candidate's legitimacy, transforming informal social gatherings into potent channels of political communication.

These findings align with and extend contemporary democratic discourse, which suggests that grassroots networks and community organizations are increasingly complementing and in some cases displacing formal institutions in shaping political participation (Moffitt, 2020; Norris, 2023). However, this study adds an important nuance. In highly polarized metropolitan contexts such as Jakarta, social capital is often mobilized through identity-based networks that generate strong trust and solidarity, yet simultaneously carry the risk of reinforcing social fragmentation. This observation reinforces the argument that while grassroots networks can significantly enhance voter engagement (Bennett & Livingston, 2020), their reliance on symbolic and religious capital also reflects a pragmatic shift in Indonesian local politics. In this context, "outsider" candidates must strategically convert social capital in order to overcome the limitations of party regeneration and institutional stagnation.

Furthermore, these findings contribute to the literature on networked political mobilization by demonstrating that social capital functions not only as a resource embedded in community relations but also as a mechanism for transforming social legitimacy into electoral support. In the Jakarta case, grassroots networks operate as intermediary

structures that connect elite political actors with fragmented urban constituencies.

This study therefore extends existing discussions on networked political mobilization by illustrating how informal community networks can partially compensate for weak institutional party linkages in metropolitan electoral contexts. In addition, the findings enrich the Bourdieusian analytical framework by empirically showing how different forms of capital particularly economic and political capital are strategically converted into social and symbolic capital during electoral campaigns.

### Political Capital and Institutional Party Support

Although the study focuses on non-party candidates, political party support remains an important factor in electoral competition. Political capital refers to institutional resources derived from party endorsement, political legitimacy, and organizational structures. The coalition between Gerindra Party and Prosperous Justice Party provided the campaign with organizational support that facilitated voter mobilization across electoral districts.

Political parties coordinated campaign activities, organized volunteers, and ensured the distribution of campaign information at the grassroots level. However, unlike traditional party-centered campaigns, political parties in this election functioned more as facilitators supporting broader community-based mobilization.

Recent studies in electoral politics highlight that party organizations increasingly rely on hybrid mobilization strategies that combine institutional structures with informal social networks (Bale et al., 2024; Peña, 2021; Scarrow, 2021).

### Symbolic Capital and Political Legitimacy

Another important finding concerns the role of symbolic capital in shaping electoral outcomes. Symbolic capital refers to legitimacy, recognition, and public trust obtained by political actors.

The study found that campaign narratives emphasized leadership change, social justice, and moral values significantly influenced voter perceptions. These narratives gained stronger resonance during political tensions involving the incumbent candidate Basuki Tjahaja Purnama. The ability of the campaign to construct narratives aligned with public sentiment strengthened the symbolic legitimacy of the candidates. Political narratives therefore function as an important tool for shaping voter preferences.

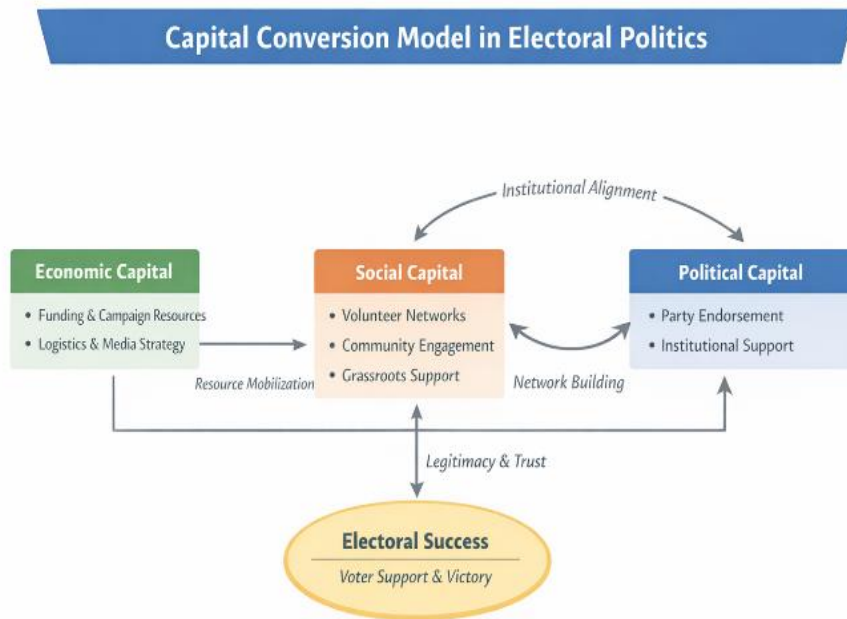
Recent research on political communication shows that narrative framing and symbolic representation significantly influence political legitimacy and voter attitudes in democratic elections (Chadwick, 2024; Margetts et al., 2021; Waisbord, 2022).

### Capital Conversion in Electoral Competition

The findings of this study demonstrate that electoral success in urban political environments is shaped by the interaction and conversion of multiple forms of capital. According to the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, political competition occurs within a social field where actors struggle to accumulate and convert various forms of capital in order to achieve symbolic dominance.

The results indicate that economic capital, social capital, and political capital do not operate independently. Instead, these resources are strategically integrated to produce symbolic legitimacy and voter trust.

Recent studies also suggest that successful electoral campaigns often rely on the ability to integrate financial resources, social networks, and institutional support to create broader political legitimacy (Dassonneville & Çakır, 2021; Huber & Schimpf, 2021; Thompson, 2023). These findings are consistent with previous research emphasizing the importance of social networks and grassroots



**Figure 1.** The Ideal Political Party Recruitment Model in Winning Regional Head Elections to Improve the Quality of National Leadership

source: researcher 2026

mobilization in electoral politics. Studies on contemporary democracies show that informal networks often play a crucial role in connecting political elites with voters and shaping electoral behavior (Bennett & Livingston, 2020; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). However, this study extends previous research by demonstrating how different forms of capital interact dynamically within the political field. Rather than functioning independently, economic, social, and political capital are strategically converted to produce symbolic legitimacy.

#### Implications for Urban Electoral Politics

The findings provide important insights into contemporary electoral politics in urban democratic contexts. Political actors must develop strategies that integrate financial resources, community engagement, and institutional support in order to build sustainable political legitimacy.

Recent studies also emphasize that modern electoral campaigns increasingly rely on hybrid mobilization strategies combining digital communication, grassroots networks, and political institutions (Enli, 2025; Jungherr & Schroeder, 2021; Kreiss et al., 2020)

#### The Ideal Political Party Recruitment Model in Winning Regional Head Elections to Improve the Quality of National Leadership

Based on the empirical findings, this study proposes a preliminary recruitment framework that reflects the dynamics of the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election. The results show that successful candidates were able to combine institutional political support with strong social networks and community-based legitimacy. This indicates that political party recruitment processes may benefit from incorporating broader social evaluation mechanisms beyond internal party structures. In this context, the study proposes an Integrative-Participatory Recruitment Model, which emphasizes the involvement of multiple stakeholders in the candidate selection process, including party elites, civil society actors, academics, and community representatives.

The model highlights the importance of a holistic assessment of prospective candidates. Candidate evaluation should not rely solely on party loyalty but also consider leadership capacity, integrity and performance record, understanding of local social contexts, and the ability to build

broad social coalitions. These elements reflect the empirical findings that social trust and community legitimacy play a significant role in shaping electoral outcomes.

In addition, the model underscores the importance of developing political entrepreneurship among prospective leaders. This includes the ability to construct strategic political narratives, mobilize social networks, and utilize digital political communication to engage diverse constituencies. Political party support should therefore be conditional upon clear commitments to reform agendas and public accountability. Continuous mentoring and evaluation after the election are also essential to ensure that elected leaders remain responsive to public expectations.

Overall, this framework should be understood as a conceptual proposition derived from the findings of this study rather than a definitive institutional model. Nevertheless, it offers an alternative perspective for strengthening political party recruitment and enhancing democratic leadership in local electoral contexts in Indonesia (see Figure 1).

The findings of this study reveal that the victory of non-party cadre candidates in the Jakarta gubernatorial election cannot be explained solely by the strength of political party machinery. Instead, electoral success is shaped by the dynamic interaction of various forms of capital, namely political capital, social capital, and economic capital. Among these forms, social capital plays the most dominant role in influencing voter preferences, particularly through the formation of public trust, community networks, and the mobilization of collective identity within urban society. Political capital remains important in providing institutional legitimacy and access to political resources, while economic capital supports campaign activities and the dissemination of political messages. However, the effectiveness of these capitals largely depends on their ability to be converted into social legitimacy and public acceptance. This finding indicates a shift in the dynamics of local electoral competition in Indonesia, where the strength of social relations and public trust can outweigh the traditional dominance of formal political party structures in determining electoral outcomes.

## Conclusion

This study suggests that electoral success in the 2017 Jakarta gubernatorial election cannot be understood solely through the strength of political party organizations. Instead, the findings indicate that electoral outcomes were shaped by the interaction and conversion of political, social, and economic capital.

Among these forms of capital, community networks, volunteer mobilization, and informal political communication channels played a particularly important role in facilitating voter engagement. These findings highlight the growing significance of hybrid mobilization strategies that combine institutional political support with broader social networks.

Although the analysis is based on a single case study, it provides insights into how non-party candidates may navigate contemporary urban electoral competition. Future research using comparative or mixed-method approaches could further explore the interaction between political institutions and community-based mobilization in other electoral contexts.

## Author contributions

All authors contributed significantly to the development of this research and the preparation of the manuscript. The first author was responsible for conceptualizing the study, designing the research framework, conducting data

collection, and drafting the initial manuscript. The second author contributed to the development of the research methodology, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The third author was involved in reviewing the literature, validating the research results, and revising the manuscript critically for important intellectual content. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to its submission for publication.

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper. The authors confirm that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. This statement ensures the objectivity and integrity of the research findings presented in this study.

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