

Political Constellation in Shaping Voter Preferences: Case Study of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election

Hardianto Hawing^{1*)}, Irwan Alim², Nursaleh Hartaman³

¹Department of Government Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Indonesia

²Department of Government Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Indonesia

³Department of Government Studies, Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Indonesia

Corresponding author: hardiantohawing@unismuh.ac.id

Received: 30 May 2025; Revised: 29 June 2025; Accepted: 30 June 2025

ABSTRACT - The 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election is part of Indonesia's nationwide simultaneous local elections (Pilkada), which garners significant attention due to the city's unique and dynamic political context. This study aims to analyze the political preferences of Makassar residents during the 2024 election using a qualitative case study approach. The research data were obtained from official government institutions, such as the General Elections Commission and the Makassar City Government, along with various online media platforms. The findings reveal that voter preferences are shaped by multiple interrelated factors, political party coalitions, the public image of candidates, key campaign issues, and the persistence of transactional politics. A particularly notable finding is the relatively low voter turnout, recorded at only 57.7%, which is below both the national target and the participation rate of previous elections. This study confirms that political preferences in Makassar are driven by the interplay of candidate personality traits and the local socio-political environment. It highlights the continuing influence of patron-client relationships and money politics, alongside emerging patterns of issue-based and image-based voting. These insights underscore the importance of strengthening political education and enhancing electoral integrity to improve democratic quality at the local level in future elections

Keywords: political preferences; local election; voters; political parties

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How to Cite: Hawing, H., Alim, I., Hartaman, N. (2025). Political Constellation in Shaping Voter Preferences: Case Study of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election. *Journal of Contemporary Local Politics*, 4(1), 92-106. <https://doi.org/10.46507/jclp.v4i1.716>

Permalink/DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46507/jclp.v4i1.716>

Introduction

The implementation of direct regional head elections in Indonesia represents a tangible and significant embodiment of local democratic practices, providing space for active public participation in determining their regional leadership (Buehler et al., 2021; Siboy, 2024). Through this mechanism, the people are granted the constitutional right to directly elect figures who will hold strategic positions such as governor, regent, or mayor, without intermediaries or representation through legislative institutions. This process not only reinforces the principles of democratic accountability and transparency but also serves as a medium to enhance political awareness, civic engagement, and community involvement in governance at the local level. By giving citizens the authority to vote for their preferred candidates, direct elections are expected to produce leaders who are more responsive, legitimate, and closely connected to the aspirations and needs of the local population (Nwagwu et al., 2022; Yayan Sahi et al., 2024).

The 2024 simultaneous regional elections will be held in all provinces, regencies, and cities, including Makassar City. As the capital of South Sulawesi Province and a major growth center in eastern Indonesia, Makassar City has unique and complex political dynamics. The 2024 Makassar mayoral election is attracting attention because it will be held after two terms of leadership by Mayor "Danny" Pomanto, who was unable to run again due to term limits. This situation opens up space for a truly open political contest without the presence of an incumbent. This is different from the 2020 regional elections, where Danny Pomanto managed to win the election with a vote advantage of around 41.3%. Even in the 2018 mayoral election, there was a unique phenomenon in the form of an empty column victory that defeated the sole candidate Munafri Arifuddin. This background illustrates the high dynamics and uncertainty in the political preferences of voters in Makassar, so it is important to examine the factors that influence people's political choices in the 2024 mayoral election.

Conceptually, people's political preferences refer to the inclination or choice of citizens in determining which candidate or political party they support, a process that does not occur in isolation but rather through the interaction of various interconnected factors (Fauzan et al., 2024; Prianto & Yusraini, 2023; Yayan Sahi et al., 2024). These include social identity, the track record and performance of previous governments, emotional attachment or affiliation with certain candidates, the influence of elites or community leaders, and pragmatic considerations related to tangible or perceived benefits that individuals or groups expect to gain. Recent academic studies have highlighted that voter preferences in mayoral elections are shaped by a complex and dynamic interplay between ideological alignment, party affiliation, candidate attributes, and the pervasive influence of media and social networks. For example, research by Sances (2018), Warshaw et al. (2024), and Kamada & Kojima (2014) illustrates that although local elections are often dominated by pragmatic motivations, ideological orientation continues to significantly influence voter preferences, reflecting the underlying political identity of the electorate. This notion is further supported by the work of Lee et al. (2016), Gendźwiłł & Żółtak (2021), Budiman & Irwandi (2020), who emphasize the role of emotional bonds, group identity, and geographic proximity as critical factors that foster stronger candidate-voter connections, especially at the local level. In the Indonesian context, several studies, including those by Prasetya (2019), Chaer (2024), and Kusen et al. (2022), reveal that cultural, religious, and community proximity have a significant impact on increasing a candidate's electability, particularly in diverse and multicultural urban settings such

as Makassar, where social and cultural heterogeneity play an essential role in shaping political dynamics.

In addition, the role of social media and digital campaign strategies also play an important role in shaping voter opinion, especially among young people (Stier et al., 2018; Halu et al., 2012; Javarone, 2013). Voter preferences are also often influenced by material factors such as money politics and family networks that are still strong in local contests (Fernandes et al., 2024; Artes, 2023). Within this framework, Abramson et al. (2019) and Jones et al. (2021) highlight the influence of polarization situations on voters' abstention tendencies or selective involvement, while Abbas (2024) and Parihar (2024) emphasize that emotion-based political advertising plays an important role in shaping voter perceptions.

Previous research shows that in local democratic practices, political elite intervention and patronage practices are still very strong. For example, a study by Nur Firman Chaer (2022) found that in Makassar, local elites and political parties tend to mobilize and polarize support, even using certain rewards to influence voters' choices. As a result, people's political preferences are not entirely based on rational considerations or conscience, but are often influenced by transactional relationships. This finding is in line with social behavior theory and exchange theory, which explain that the act of voting can also be viewed as the result of social interaction and a form of transaction between voters and candidates.

With this theoretical understanding, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature that has not yet studied in depth voter preferences in the context of multicultural urban Indonesia with the complexity of social, digital, and ideological variables that influence each other. This study will explore how the combination of party coalition factors, candidate personal images, campaign issues, and transactional political practices interact to shape voters' political choices.

The urgency of this study lies in its contribution to enriching the literature on voter behavior at the local level, as well as providing practical implications for strengthening electoral democracy in the regions. Makassar City, with its dynamic political history and the tendency of voters who are not always loyal to certain figures or parties, can be an important reflection for understanding the trend of urban voter preferences in eastern Indonesia. In addition, the results of this study can be a strategic reference for election organizers, political parties, and other stakeholders in designing strategies to increase political participation and election integrity in the future. Therefore, this study not only records the dynamics of the results of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election, but also explores the socio-political context and determinant factors that influence voter behavior in the local democratic process

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design on the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election. A qualitative approach was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of people's political preferences through analysis of the context and meaning behind empirical data. Secondary data is the main source, obtained from: (1) official government and election organizer websites, especially data from the General Election Commission (KPU) regarding voter lists, participation, and the results of the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election recapitulation; and (2) mass media for information related to candidate profiles, campaign issues, public opinion surveys, and dynamics during the election period. An example of official data is the determination of the Makassar City Permanent Voter List (DPT) of around Data collection

techniques were carried out by searching documents and digital archives. The author accessed reports, news articles, KPU press releases, and opinion survey publications (such as the Indonesian Political Indicator release). Each data was evaluated for credibility. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis techniques. This analysis includes the data reduction stage (selecting information relevant to the focus of voter preferences), presenting data in the form of descriptive narratives, and drawing conclusions inductively. Data validity is maintained through source triangulation, namely comparing one piece of information with another

Result and Discussion

Candidate Profiles and Party Coalitions

The 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election featured four candidate pairs competing for the positions of Mayor and Deputy Mayor, each backed by different political parties. One of the prominent pairs was Munafri Arifuddin and Aliyah Mustika Ilham, known by their campaign moniker MULIA, who were supported by a broad coalition of six political parties, namely Golkar, Demokrat, Perindo, Hanura, Ummat, and PBB. Munafri Arifuddin, popularly known as Appi, is recognized for his background as a businessman and sports figure, having previously served as the CEO of PSM Makassar. The 2024 election marked his third attempt at contesting the mayoral race. His running mate, Aliyah Mustika Ilham, is a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives representing the Democratic Party and is also the spouse of Ilham A. Sirajuddin, who held the position of Mayor of Makassar from 2004 to 2014. Their candidacy reflects a strategic combination of a young entrepreneurial figure and an experienced politician, supported by major political parties with significant influence across Makassar.

Another candidate pair is Andi Seto Gadhista Asapa and Rezki Mulfiati Lutfi, who campaign under the name SEHATI. This pair is supported by a coalition of four political parties: Gerindra, NasDem, PAN, and PSI. Andi Seto, representing the Gerindra Party, previously served as the Regent of Sinjai from 2018 to 2023 and is now seeking to establish his political influence in Makassar. He is recognized as a young leader with administrative experience gained from his tenure as regent. His running mate, Rezki Mulfiati Lutfi, is a female professional whose background contributes to strengthening the electability and image of this pair. Supported by political parties with established networks in Makassar, the SEHATI pair emerges as one of the significant challengers in the 2024 mayoral election, with considerable potential to compete in the contest.

The pair Indira Jusuf Ismail and Ilham Ari Fauzi Amir Uskara appeared using the name INIMI as their campaign identity. They received support from three parties, namely PDIP, PKB, and PPP. Indira Jusuf Ismail is the wife of the incumbent Mayor of Makassar Danny Pomanto and is known to be active in social activities and women's organizations such as PKK. Her candidacy is seen as a form of continuation of the programs that her husband has implemented, including the Makassar Sombere' & Smart City initiative. Her candidate for deputy mayor, Ilham Ari Fauzi Amir Uskara, is a young figure who is the son of senior PPP politician Amir Uskara. Through a combination of social experience and ties to the previous government, the INIMI pair offers policy continuity and continuity of city development.

The last pair is Muhammad Amri Arsyid and Abdul Rahman Bando who carry the name AMAN. They are only supported by one party, namely the PKS (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*). Muhammad Amri Arsyid, also known as Doctor Amri, is a PKS cadre and former member of the DPRD. Abdul Rahman Bando as a candidate for deputy mayor is a bureaucrat who once served as Head of Service in the Makassar City Government. This pair displays a religious image and emphasizes experience in government bureaucracy. However, with only the support of one party, their campaign reach tends to be limited to the ideological PKS voter base spread across the Makassar City area.

Voter Preferences and Voting Results

Political preferences are seen from the existing vote distribution pattern. The big win of the Munafri-Aliyah pair shows that the majority of voters prefer a change of leadership rather than maintaining the previous leadership.

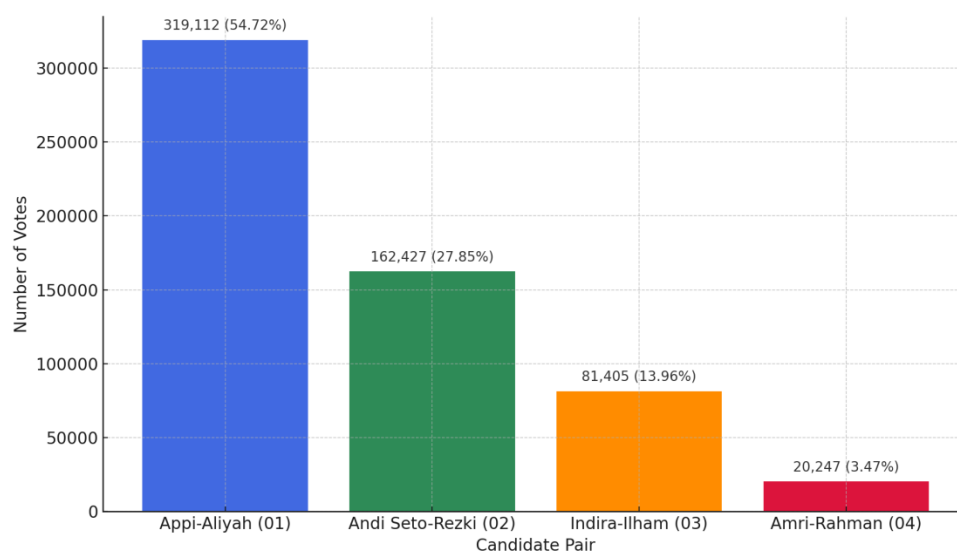


Figure 1. Vote Count and Percentage per Candidate Pair – Makassar Mayoral Election 2024

Source : *Processed by the researcher from Makassar City KPU data.*

The graph above illustrates the number of votes and the percentage of votes obtained by each pair of candidates for Mayor and Deputy Mayor of Makassar in the 2024 Pilkada. From this visualization, it is clear that the pair Munafri Arifuddin and Aliyah Mustika Ilham (Appi-Aliyah) dominated the vote acquisition with a total of 319,112 votes or equivalent to 54.72 percent of the total valid votes.

The pair was far ahead compared to the other three candidates, where the second position was occupied by Andi Seto Gadhistha Asapa and Rezki Mulfiati Lutfi who won 162,427 votes or around 27.85 percent. In third place, the pair Indira Jusuf Ismail and Ilham Ari Fauzi AU won 81,405 votes with a percentage of 13.96 percent, while the pair Amri Arsyid and Abdul Rahman Bando were in last place with 20,247 votes, which is 3.47 percent of the total valid votes.

The labels on each bar display a combination of vote acquisition figures in thousands format along with a percentage of the total valid votes, which provides a more complete understanding of the proportion of support obtained by each candidate pair. The General Election Commission determined Munafri-Aliyah as the winners of the most votes with a significant

margin over the other candidates. This landslide victory made Munafri Arifuddin, in his third attempt, finally elected as Mayor of Makassar for the 2025–2030 period.

The political preferences of the people of Makassar are reflected in the distribution of votes. The dominant support for Munafri-Aliyah indicates that most voters tend to want a change in leadership rather than continuing the previous leadership. Although Indira represents the continuation of the incumbent Mayor's program, in fact she only ranked third in terms of votes. The Andi Seto-Rezki pair actually ranked second, showing the competitiveness of the "newcomer" candidates who did not come from the previous Makassar government circle. This indicates that Makassar voters are quite considering alternative figures outside the local political dynasty. Meanwhile, the PKS-supported pair (Amri-Rahman) received very few votes, reflecting the voters' limited preferences on a certain ideological basis.

The low achievement of INIMI (Indira-Ilham) is also interesting to note. Indira Jusuf Ismail was initially expected to be able to gain support from loyal supporters of Danny Pomanto, especially since PDIP and Islamic parties (PKB, PPP) were behind her. However, this support was eroded by the strength of the large Munafri-Aliyah coalition and the split of votes among Danny's supporters, some of whom may have switched to Munafri or even Andi Seto. In addition, the results of a survey ahead of the Pilkada indicated that Munafri's popularity was higher than Indira's: the Indikator Politik survey in early October 2024 showed that voters' top of mind was 29.1% vs Indira's 20.5%. Even after being given a simulation of the candidate list, Munafri's electability was recorded at 33.4%, ahead of Indira (21.7%) and Andi Seto (18.3%) (Indikator Politik). This trend was consistent until the voting day. Thus, the majority of voters' preference fell on Munafri-Aliyah, while Indira, who supported the government's status quo, lost the competition to win the voters' hearts.

Campaign Issues and Reasons for Choice

Several key issues also influenced the political preferences of the people in the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election. During the campaign period and public debate, the candidates raised various strategic topics related to city development. One of the major themes carried by the KPU in the debate was the environment and climate change – something that is relevant considering that Makassar is vulnerable to extreme weather and rising temperatures. Each candidate pair presented their ideas for making Makassar a climate-resilient city. For example, Indira-Ilham emphasized the waste management program and green alley development, continuing the efforts that had been pioneered in the Danny Pomanto era. Munafri-Aliyah highlighted the importance of urban innovation and equitable economic development, with a vision of change towards a more advanced and inclusive Makassar (although the details of Munafri's environmental program were not as many as Indira's). Andi Seto-Rezki also spoke about his experience leading a region (Sinjai Regency) to build good environmental governance. In terms of social issues, bureaucratic and public service arrangements, congestion and flood control, and the development of the local creative economy were campaign promises offered by the candidates according to the needs of city residents.

The reasons behind people's choice of a particular candidate can be traced from survey findings and media reports. The Indikator survey results show that the main reason voters choose a particular mayoral candidate is the perception that the candidate is "concerned with the people" or cares about the needs of the community. Interestingly, this applies to almost all of the leading

candidates. Many voters of Munafri, Indira, and Andi Seto mentioned the candidate's concern for the community as the main consideration, in addition to factors such as vision/mission and experience. An exception was seen in candidate Amri Arsyid (PKS), where voters tended to choose him because they considered him experienced in government (Political Indicator) . This finding indicates that the candidate's personal image – especially the impression of being close to the people or caring – greatly influences the political preferences of the Makassar community. This is in line with the local political situation in Makassar which prioritizes a leader figure who is close to the community (“ sipakatau ” in local culture means mutual respect for fellow human beings).

In addition, primordial identity factors such as ethnicity and gender turned out not to be significant determinants in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election. Although one of the mayoral candidates is a woman (Indira) and there are diverse ethnic backgrounds, most voters admitted that they did not mind the tribe or gender of the candidates in determining their choice . The Indikator survey showed that the majority of respondents were open: they did not have to choose a candidate from the same tribe as them, and it did not matter whether the candidate was a male or female leader. This shows the level of political maturity of Makassar urban voters who look more at programs and figures than demographic identity. As a result, Indira's failure to win a large number of votes was not due to voter gender bias, but rather due to other political factors.

Participation and Election Dynamics

To understand the dynamics of the 2024 mayoral election in Makassar, it is essential to first examine the level of voter participation. This includes the number of registered voters, the actual voter turnout, gender distribution, and the overall polling infrastructure. The following table presents detailed data on voter participation as compiled and processed from the official records of the Makassar City General Elections Commission.

Table 1. Voter Participation in the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election

Description	Total
Final Voter List (DPT)	1,037,164
Voters who cast their ballots	591,326
Transferred voters	3,915
Total voters who voted	597,794
Voter turnout percentage	57.76%
Male voters	264,856
Female voters	326,470
Regular polling stations	1,870
Special polling stations	7
Total polling stations (TPS)	1,877
Districts	15
Sub-districts (Kelurahan)	153

Source : *Processed by the researcher from Makassar City KPU data.*

The table above illustrates that out of a total of 1,037,164 registered voters in Makassar, only 57.76% exercised their right to vote in the 2024 mayoral election. This means that more than 40% of eligible voters abstained from participating in a key democratic process, raising important questions about the factors influencing voter turnout. From the total of 597,794 votes cast, the figure includes both regular voters who voted at their registered polling locations and 3,915 transferred voters who exercised their rights in different locations due to logistical or

administrative reasons. This suggests a moderate level of electoral mobility, often associated with urban population dynamics such as student relocations, employment-based migration, or temporary displacement.

Gender participation data shows that female voters (326,470) slightly outnumbered male voters (264,856). This relatively balanced yet female-leaning voter turnout highlights a potentially increasing role of women in local political engagement, which could have implications for both campaign strategies and policy orientations of the candidates. Gender dynamics in voter behavior remains an important area for further sociopolitical analysis, especially in an urban setting like Makassar where educational and economic participation by women continues to grow.

To support voting access, a total of 1,877 polling stations were established across the city, consisting of 1,870 regular stations and 7 special stations—likely located in areas such as hospitals, detention facilities, or campuses. These polling units were strategically distributed across 15 districts and 153 sub-districts (kelurahan), reflecting an effort by the election commission to ensure widespread and equitable access to the voting process. However, despite the broad availability of polling sites, the turnout did not meet the expected national or regional targets, suggesting that other factors—such as political apathy, lack of trust in candidates, dissatisfaction with campaign messaging, or limited voter education—may have contributed to the low participation rate.

Overall, the data provides a crucial foundation for further examination of political engagement patterns in Makassar. It serves as a valuable resource for electoral stakeholders, policymakers, researchers, and civic organizations seeking to understand the behavior of the electorate, evaluate the effectiveness of voter outreach strategies, and design more inclusive and responsive electoral processes in future elections.

The dynamics of competition throughout the 2024 Mayor Election in Makassar were quite fierce, although in the end it was relatively conducive. Indications of tight competition were seen from the strengthening of negative campaigns and money politics ahead of the D-day. The South Sulawesi Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) received reports of at least 21 cases of alleged money politics in various regions during the 2024 Pilkada, some of which occurred in Makassar. The LSI Denny JA survey even revealed that 48.3% of respondents in Makassar admitted that money politics practices influenced their decisions in choosing the mayor.

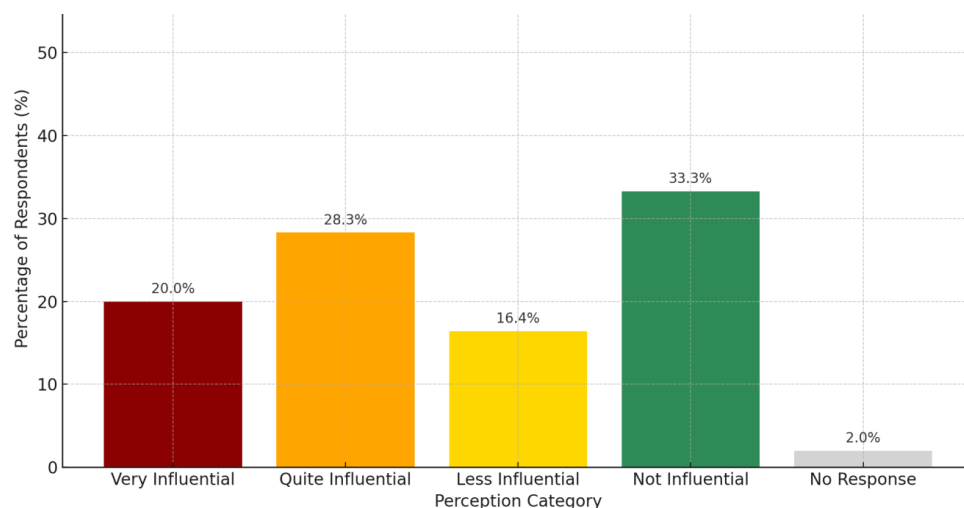


Figure 2. Perceived Influence of Money Politics in Makassar Mayoral Election 2024
Source : Survey data published by Indonesian Survey Circle (LSI)

The chart provides a compelling visualization of how money politics has shaped voter preferences in Makassar's 2024 mayoral race. With nearly half of respondents (48.3%) recognizing the influence of money politics—either as very influential (20%) or quite influential (28.3%)—the findings reflect a critical challenge to democratic integrity in the region. This indicates that vote-buying practices remain a significant factor in determining electoral outcomes, especially in local elections where voter-candidate proximity is closer and direct incentives may be more impactful.

On the other end of the spectrum, 33.3% of respondents claimed that money politics had no influence at all, suggesting a substantial portion of the electorate upholds ideal democratic values or is possibly more resistant to material inducements. Another 16.4% admitted to being slightly influenced, showing a gray area where ethical and practical considerations may be in conflict. The 2% who did not provide a response could either be undecided or hesitant to speak openly about such a sensitive issue, which is common in surveys addressing political behavior involving unethical practices.

This data also implies the presence of a deeply divided voter base—between those who are influenced by transactional politics and those who prioritize programmatic platforms. While 54% of respondents in the broader survey claimed they preferred to vote based on the candidate's vision, mission, and program, the high percentage swayed by money politics revealed a discrepancy between stated ideals and actual behavior—a common occurrence in electoral studies, especially in areas where economic vulnerability is high.

In addition to money politics, there is also discourse and psychological competition between supporters. For example, in the first round of the Public Debate (October 26, 2024), there was a commotion between groups of supporters in the debate arena. This incident was triggered by supporters of one of the candidate pairs (number 2, Andi Seto) who brought a loudspeaker and cheered, thus provoking reactions from supporters of other candidates. Although the situation was immediately controlled, this reflects the high tension of the competition.

During the campaign period, the candidate's campaign teams also competed with each other's social media strategies. Bawaslu had reminded the candidates not to upload content that smelled of SARA or hoaxes on social media. Ahead of the voting day, several negative issues (black campaigns) emerged, for example accusations of nepotism against Indira because of her status as the mayor's wife, or other personal issues against the leading candidate. The Munafri-Aliyah pair admitted that they had been slandered several times with false information, but this was countered with legal action by their team. Overall, the dynamics of the 2024 Makassar Mayor Election show a combination of programmatic competition (competition of ideas in debates, vision campaigns) and pragmatic competition (mobilization of resources, money politics maneuvers, to issue wars). The community as voters are in the middle of this dynamic vortex, and preferences are ultimately formed from the interaction of these various factors.

Analysis of Political Constellation in Forming Voter Preferences

The research results reflect several important points regarding the political preferences of the Makassar community in the regional head election, which can be analyzed more deeply within the framework of the socio-political context and comparison with previous elections.

Coalition Domination and Strong Figures

Munafri-Aliyah's landslide victory shows that a coalition of large political parties combined with a popular candidate figure can effectively consolidate voters' votes. Munafri is supported by Golkar and Demokrat (two large parties in South Sulawesi), plus other middle parties, providing a strong political machine down to the grassroots. The support of elite figures such as Ilham A. Sirajuddin (through the presence of his wife Aliyah as a deputy mayoral candidate) also adds legitimacy among traditional voters in Makassar who remember Ilham's previous leadership. This is in line with the theory of sociological models in voter behavior, where group affiliation (including party patronage networks and local figures) influences choices. Munafri's success in rekindling support after two previous defeats also indicates a political adaptation strategy: he learned from experience, changed his running mate (from Cicu in 2018, then Abdul R. Bando in 2020, now Aliyah in 2024), and maintained his existence in society during the break between elections. In the end, the majority of voters chose the Munafri-Aliyah package because they saw this combination as being able to bring change while understanding local conditions. Munafri's image as a people's figure who intensively goes down to the community (for example through the Kawan Mulia community which targets young voters) also strengthens his appeal.

Preference for Change vs Continuity

Makassar Mayoral Election Results 2024 indicate that voters are more inclined towards the option of change rather than continuing the status quo. Although Danny Pomanto's performance as a two-term mayor was widely appreciated (the government was considered good by 62.3% of Indikator survey respondents), this did not automatically translate into electoral support for Indira. Indira's defeat implied an anti-dynasty sentiment or public reluctance to be led by the incumbent's family in succession. The Makassar public may appreciate Danny's achievements, but want a new leader with a different style or fresher programs. This is consistent with the experience of the 2018 mayoral election when the empty box won against Munafri who was supported by the incumbent mayor at that time (Moh. Ramdhan Pomanto was unable to run at that time, but seemed to approve of the empty box). Makassar voters' preferences appear dynamic and independent, not always subject to elite direction or classic patronage patterns. They can support the incumbent at one time (2020), but can also reject his successor at another time (2024), depending on their assessment of the candidate's personal capabilities. In this case, Andi Seto, who is an "outsider" in Makassar, was even able to win second place, indicating that a certain segment of voters is looking for alternatives beyond the same local names. This phenomenon shows the increasing rationality of urban voters, where track records, competence, and debate performance influence decisions, not just emotional ties to the incumbent.

The Influence of Issues and Programs on Preferences

The 2024 Regional Head Election shows that despite pragmatic practices, issues and programs still play a role in people's political preferences. Topics such as the environment, public services, and the city economy raised in the debate provide information for rational voters. Educated and urban voters in Makassar tend to consider the program platform. However, the effectiveness of issues in changing preferences varies for each candidate. Indira, for example, focused on the issue of the sustainability of Danny Pomanto's program (smart city, alley management, waste management), which is actually relevant, but her campaign may not have

reached outside Danny's support base. Munafri-Aliyah emphasized the narrative of change and accelerated development, a simple message but apparently resonant with the public's hopes for a new leader. Andi Seto tried to highlight his bureaucratic experience in Sinjai as capital to lead Makassar, touching on the issue of bureaucratic reform and equitable development between regions. Voter responses to these issues varied; most still looked at who made the promise. In other words, the credibility and personal image of the candidate strengthened the appeal of the program. This is consistent with the survey findings that the reason for choosing is dominated by the “candidate concern” factor – a personal trait – above the more substantial “vision-mission program” factor. So it can be concluded that political preferences are formed from the interaction between issue voting and personality voting, with a strong tendency towards personal factors in Mayor election in Makassar City.

Transactional Political Practices

One of the challenges in understanding voter preferences is the distortion caused by money politics. As described in the results, almost half of voters are indicated to be influenced by the provision of money or materials. This means that apparent preferences (for example, high support for Munafri) may be partly formed not purely from objective assessments, but from transactional considerations. The culture of patronage in Makassar and South Sulawesi in general is still strong, where political figures often use family networks, relatives (*sipakatau* and *sipakainge'* Bugis-Makassar culture) and materials to ensure voter loyalty. In Mayor Election of Makassar City, all candidate pairs have the potential to do this, but teams with the largest resources can certainly be more massive. The lawsuit by the Indira team (INIMI) to the Constitutional Court after the election accused the Munafri-Aliyah pair of committing TSM (Structured, Systematic, Massive) fraud with money politics. Although the lawsuit ultimately did not change the results, it underlined the perception that a big win could be supported by patronage practices. The influence of money politics creates a democratic dilemma: on the one hand, voters get momentary incentives; on the other hand, it has the potential to ignore leadership capacity that may be more important for long-term city progress. Preferences formed by money are susceptible to change and do not reflect ideological choices. In the long term, this phenomenon can hinder the birth of quality leaders if not addressed. Public discourse in Makassar has begun to highlight this, for example the South Sulawesi Police Chief appealed to residents to reject money politics for the sake of an election with integrity. Thus, the analysis of political preferences in 2024 must recognize the existence of money politics as an intervening variable that complicates the relationship between performance/issues and voter choices.

Political Participation and Legitimacy

The 57% turnout rate means that almost half of the voters did not exercise their right to vote. In the analysis of voter behavior, this group of non-voters (abstainers) also reflects a preference – namely a preference not to participate, which can be caused by political apathy or alienation. In Makassar 2024, the apathy factor could arise due to a lack of trust that whoever is elected will bring significant change (especially after the two previous mayoral terms). Meanwhile, alienation could occur among fanatical supporters of Danny Pomanto who were disappointed because their idol did not compete and may not be accommodated by any candidate. The low turnout was also more or less influenced by the burden of simultaneous elections – the mayoral

election was held after a tiring national election, so that participation decreased. For local political legitimacy, low participation is a concern because the elected mayor is supported by about half of the residents (only ~30% of the total registered voters actually voted for the winner). This means that its effective legitimacy is moderate. However, this phenomenon is common in big cities and does not hinder the running of government, although the level of participation is correlated with the maturity of democracy. Strategies to increase participation – for example through voter education and campaigns that reach more grassroots levels – need to be continuously promoted by the KPU and stakeholders in future elections.

Comparison with Previous Regional Elections

Compared to the 2020 Makassar Mayoral Election, the 2024 voter preferences show a new map without the presence of an incumbent. In 2020, the competition centered between incumbent Danny Pomanto and main challenger Munafri, and preferences were quite strongly polarized (Danny 41% vs Munafri 34%). In 2024, without an incumbent, voters were faced with new figures so that preferences were more spread out before finally consolidating to Munafri towards the end of the campaign. The face of the 2024 contestation is also more competitive (4 candidate pairs), similar to 2020 (4 candidate pairs), but with a different constellation: in 2020 the incumbent vs former rival empty box, in 2024 business figures vs regional bureaucrats vs incumbent families vs party cadres. In the 2018 Pilkada, extreme preferences were shown by the victory of the empty box - a sign of voter protest against the choice of candidates who were felt to not meet expectations. The unique conditions of 2018 taught parties a lesson not to nominate a single candidate without real public support. So in 2024, the big parties chose to join forces to carry a figure who was considered popular (Munafri) rather than risk going against the flow of people's aspirations. This has proven effective in capturing the majority's preferences.

Comparatively, the political preferences of the Makassar community are increasingly mature. In the span of a decade, Makassar voters have tried the option of “not voting for any candidate” (2018), re-electing an incumbent with achievements (2020), and now choosing a new figure who is considered the most capable (2024). This dynamic indicates that voters are not fanatically tied to one figure or party, but are rational swing voters according to the situation. However, traditional factors such as patronage are still present, only voters may use them without completely sacrificing rational judgment (for example: accepting money but still voting according to their conscience, although the LSI survey shows that many are also influenced by money).

In a broader socio-political perspective, the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election is also influenced by the national context. 2024 coincides with the Presidential Election, where national political polarization is quite high. However, in Makassar, the polarization of the Presidential Election (for example, supporters of a particular presidential candidate) is not too fragmented into the Mayoral Election, because the Mayoral Election coalition does not exactly reflect the Presidential Election coalition. Parties such as Gerindra and NasDem are united in Makassar even though they have different positions in the center. This makes voter preferences more focused on local issues rather than being carried away by national political currents. This can also be seen from the fact that the Islamic party machines (PKS, PPP, PKB) failed to win their candidates even though in the presidential election the Islamic base may be solid, indicating that local issues and candidate profiles are more dominant than just general ideological preferences.

This discussion confirms that the political preferences of the community in the 2024 Makassar mayoral election are formed by the interplay between the power of political structures (coalitions, money) and individual voter assessments of candidates. The people of Makassar show themselves as critical voters to a certain extent: daring to change their choices from election to election, considering the track record of candidates, but still vulnerable to transactional politics. Heterogeneous urban social conditions with relatively high levels of education contribute to the variability of these preferences. This Makassar case study is in line with the literature on urban voter behavior in Indonesia, where partisan loyalty is weak, replaced by assessments of figures and short-term incentives approaching election day

Conclusion

This study examines the political preferences of the community in the 2024 Makassar Mayoral Election using a qualitative approach based on secondary data. Voter preferences are influenced by the strength of the party coalition and the candidate's figure, Munafri-Aliyah received broad support from large parties and carried an image of caring for the people, so they were able to attract the sympathy of voters across groups. In contrast, the Indira-Ilham pair who carried the continuation of the incumbent's leadership were less popular, indicating a desire for a change in leadership. The Andi Seto-Rezki pair gained significant support as newcomers, indicating voters' openness to alternatives outside the local political dynasty. Meanwhile, the Amri-Rahman pair from PKS were only supported by a limited niche of ideological voters.

Key factors that shape the political preferences of the Makassar community in 2024 include: (1) the image and closeness of candidates to the people, where surveys show that voters tend to choose candidates who are considered to care most about their needs; (2) strategic campaign issues such as the environment, local economy, and the continuation of government programs, which influence rational voters; (3) the influence of patronage and money politics, as evidenced by the finding that almost half of voters are influenced by campaign materials, although it is difficult to measure their impact directly on the final results; (4) structural support for parties and figures, where large party machines and support from local/national elites help mobilize votes; and (5) the dynamics of competition and voter sentiment towards the status quo, for example rejection of dynasty politics or boredom with previous leadership styles.

The voter turnout of only 57.7% indicates a serious challenge in increasing political participation at the local level. This is an important concern for the upcoming election, especially in terms of socialization strategies and increasing motivation to vote. Nevertheless, the 2024 Makassar Pilkada took place relatively safely and orderly, reflecting the increasing maturity of local democracy.

In closing, the political preferences of the Makassar community in the 2024 Pilkada reflect complex dynamics but are moving towards strengthening local democracy. Voters are increasingly showing an independent attitude in determining political choices, although integrity challenges such as money politics still loom. Therefore, synergy between the KPU, Bawaslu, local governments, political parties, and civil society is needed to realize a cleaner, more transparent, and participatory democratic process. Thus, the elected leader is expected to truly reflect the aspirations of the people and be able to lead the city of Makassar towards a better development direction.

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