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TRANSFORMATIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE MIDST OF POLITICAL TURMOIL" A STUDY OF SOCIAL DYNAMICS IN SIDENRENG RAPPANG REGENCY"

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Abstract

This study examines how political turmoil affects local leadership practices in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, especially ahead of the Regional Elections. With a mixed methods approach, this study explores the strategic, communication, and ethical dimensions of transformative leadership practices in response to heated political dynamics. Quantitative findings show a strong correlation ($R = 0.870$) between political instability and changes in leadership styles, which are characterized by increased use of populist and authoritarian approaches. Qualitative data revealed public skepticism of short-term policies and political imagery through social media. Theoretically, the study enriched the literature by incorporating a variety of leadership theories—transformational, transactional, strategic, and ethical—in local contexts. In practical terms, the results of the study confirm the importance of transparency, consistency, and orientation to long-term well-being as the main foundation of effective leadership. The study also highlights the importance of critical public perception and the need for leaders to transcend electoral interests for sustainable development.



Keywords: *transformative leadership, political turmoil, local government, public perception, electoral strategy.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana gejolak politik memengaruhi praktik kepemimpinan lokal di Kabupaten Sidenreng Rappang, khususnya menjelang Pilkada. Dengan pendekatan mixed methods, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dimensi strategis, komunikasi, dan etika dalam praktik kepemimpinan transformatif sebagai respons terhadap dinamika politik yang memanas. Temuan kuantitatif menunjukkan korelasi kuat ($R = 0.870$) antara ketidakstabilan politik dan perubahan gaya kepemimpinan, yang ditandai dengan meningkatnya penggunaan pendekatan populis dan otoriter. Data kualitatif mengungkap skeptisme masyarakat terhadap kebijakan jangka pendek dan pencitraan politik melalui media sosial. Secara teoretis, studi ini memperkaya literatur dengan menggabungkan berbagai teori kepemimpinan—transformasional, transaksional, strategis, dan etis—dalam konteks lokal. Secara praktis, hasil penelitian menegaskan pentingnya transparansi, konsistensi, dan orientasi pada kesejahteraan jangka panjang sebagai fondasi utama kepemimpinan yang efektif. Studi ini juga menyoroti pentingnya persepsi publik yang kritis dan perlunya pemimpin untuk melampaui kepentingan elektoral demi pembangunan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan transformatif, gejolak politik, pemerintahan lokal, persepsi publik, strategi elektoral.

A. Introduction

Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap), one of the autonomous regions in South Sulawesi, is currently facing complex political dynamics in the lead-up to the 2024 national political year. The region's distinctive characteristics—marked by cultural diversity, a multi-layered economic structure, and a fluid social constellation—provide fertile ground for the emergence of local political tensions. In this dynamic context, leadership is tested not only in terms of technocratic competence but also in the ethical and social capacities of leaders to guide development agendas and maintain social cohesion. The political turmoil unfolding in Sidrap, fueled by both electoral contestation and frictions among local elites, presents significant challenges to the realization of ideal and transformative leadership practices.

At the conceptual level, leadership in times of political turmoil should function as a collective force that strengthens social resilience. In practice, however, there appears to be a significant gap between these expectations and the realities of leadership on the ground. Local leaders are often entangled in the tug-of-war of political interests, which hinders their ability to adopt a visionary stance and foster community unity. This condition underscores the urgency of examining leadership dynamics amid unstable political contexts, particularly in regions with



historically complex cultural layers and socio-political conflicts such as Sidrap. Moreover, studies that highlight local contexts are frequently marginalized within the broader narrative of national leadership, even though much of Indonesia's social strength is rooted in grassroots dynamics.

Recent literature highlights the close relationship between leadership, social development, and humanitarian *da'wah*. Transformational leadership, as articulated by (Bates, 2023), and earlier by Burns (1978), is not merely a managerial model of leadership but also an approach that inspires, promotes values, and drives structural as well as cultural change within society. In local contexts, this perspective is further reinforced by the concepts of value-based leadership (Tham, 2020) and participatory leadership(Hai, 2021), both of which emphasize the importance of community involvement in the policy-making process. Several studies, such as (Klar, 2020) underscore the destructive impact of political turmoil on stability and development. However, relatively few have examined the direct connection between such turmoil and the strategies and styles of local leadership in navigating these political dynamics.

Meanwhile, a study by (Stazyk, 2020) highlights the importance of public perception of leaders in building social legitimacy and maintaining political stability in the regions. This is where social *da'wah* finds its momentum—when leadership is not only interpreted as a structural authority, but as a process of social transformation inherent in public values, morality, and ethics. In this context, leadership can be seen as *da'wah bil hal*, a practice of change rooted in the leader's example, participation, and active involvement in the dynamics of society. Therefore, researching leadership in Sidrap does not only target the practical political domain, but also reflects efforts to understand the socio-religious dimension and sustainable development in the midst of local political complexity.

Previous studies by (Newman, 2021), (Pfaff, 2020), and (Urrila, 2022) have largely focused on the ideological and historical dimensions of national and international leadership, such as the cases of *Nasakom* (Nationalism, Religion, and Communism), Sukarno, or the Taliban. However, no research to date has specifically examined how local leaders navigate political turmoil and how their leadership styles affect social stability and development at the district level. The novelty of this study lies in uncovering the internal dynamics of local leadership in responding to political turmoil through a multidimensional lens—ranging from communication strategies and conflict adaptation to their influence on public perception. Methodologically, this research combines qualitative analysis of local leaders' experiences with secondary data on regional political configurations.

Thus, this study is designed to answer two main questions: (1) What are the dynamics of local leadership in dealing with political turmoil in Sidenreng Rappang Regency? and (2) How



does this dynamic affect the political stability and social development of the community in the area? This research is expected to make a conceptual contribution to the development of local leadership studies and contextual-based social da'wah, as well as practical for the formulation of resilient and value-based leadership strategies in the face of challenging local political realities.

B. Methods

This study employs a mixed-methods design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics amid political turmoil in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap). This approach was selected to capture respondents' experiences and perspectives in depth through qualitative interviews, while also generating broader insights via a structured quantitative questionnaire.

The research was conducted in the government area of Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, which was purposively chosen due to its geographical, historical, and political relevance to the study's focus. Fieldwork took place over a six-month period, from March to September 2024, covering the stages of planning, data collection, analysis, and report preparation.

The data collected comprised both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained directly from respondents through observation, questionnaire administration, and in-depth interviews. Respondents included civil servants and members of the local community who are directly involved in leadership issues and regional political dynamics. Secondary data were drawn from government documents, official reports of regional apparatus organizations (*Organisasi Perangkat Daerah or OPD*), previous publications, and relevant scholarly journals.

The sampling strategy employed a combination of techniques. For quantitative data collection, random sampling was applied to the general public across Sidrap to capture broader perceptions and attitudes toward political turmoil and leadership. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select key informants with experience and in-depth knowledge of local political structures and dynamics.

Data collection relied on two primary techniques. First, in-depth interviews, guided by a semi-structured format, were conducted to explore the narratives and perspectives of local figures in context. Second, questionnaires were administered as a quantitative



instrument, with items developed from theoretical indicators of transformational leadership and measures of public perception.

Data analysis was carried out separately according to the methodological approach. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, and interpretation of emerging themes from the interviews. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software, employing both descriptive and inferential techniques (such as regression analysis) to examine relationships between variables and assess the impact of political turmoil on public perceptions of leadership.

The research implementation followed a structured sequence, beginning with problem identification and a review of the literature, followed by the design of the study and the development of research instruments such as questionnaires and interview guides. Subsequent stages included survey administration, interviews, computer-based data management, and the preparation of the final report. Each stage was systematically organized to ensure the accuracy of findings and the effective integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches.

C. Finding and Discussion

Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap) in South Sulawesi is a strategic area with an area of 1,883.25 km² which is known as a rice barn and produces eggs and renewable energy through PLTB. Rooted in the two kingdoms of Bugis, Sidenreng and Rappang, the social and cultural structure of its people is still strongly influenced by Islamic traditional and religious values. The majority of the population of about 300,000 people are Bugis who uphold tradition, but remain open to modernization, especially in agriculture and education. Sidrap has great potential in the economic, energy, and tourism sectors, although infrastructure development and access to health in rural areas are still a challenge. Local governments focus on improving the quality of life of the community through agriculture, education, and public services, while maintaining local culture. The combination of natural potential, human resources, and development commitment makes Sidrap an important area at the regional and national levels.

Findings



This study examines how political turmoil affects transformative leadership practices in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, especially in the social dynamics ahead of the Regional Elections. Based on quantitative and qualitative data obtained through interviews, questionnaires, and field observations, it was found that local leaders face challenges in maintaining the flexibility, consistency, and legitimacy of their leadership. Political turmoil encourages the emergence of a more adaptive leadership style, but it also gives rise to authoritarian tendencies in decision-making.

In addition, political dynamics also trigger an increase in political imagery activities and populist strategies, which has an impact on the way leaders communicate and design policies. The community responded to this situation with an increasingly critical attitude, questioning the authenticity of the leaders' intentions in realizing the promises of prosperity. These findings suggest that in a volatile socio-political context, transformative leadership is required to be not only strategically responsive, but also ethical and oriented towards the sustainability of the social development of the community.

Table 1
Data validity results

| CATEGORY | Indicator 1 | Indicator 2 | Indicator 3 | Total |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------|
| Political Variable | 0.845 | 0.723 | 0.912 | 2.480 |
| LEADERSHIP VARIABLE | 0.678 | 0.891 | 0.567 | 2.136 |
| DECISION-MAKING VARIABLE | 0.934 | 0.456 | 0.789 | 2.179 |
| OVERALL TOTAL | 2.457 | 2.070 | 2.268 | 6.795 |

Based on Table 1, the results of the validity test shown in *Table 1*, it was found that there was a fairly strong correlation between the variables of political turmoil and leadership practices in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. This confirms that political turmoil has a significant impact on the way local leaders carry out leadership functions, especially in critical times ahead of the Regional Elections.

First, the results show that political turmoil encourages leaders to be more flexible and adaptive in responding to rapidly changing dynamics. Political instability requires leaders to make strategic decisions and be responsive to the pressure of society and political elites. Second, political turmoil also affects the consistency and legitimacy of policies. Leaders tend to opt for short-term populist moves to maintain their image amid uncertainty, which risks ignoring the sustainability of long-term policies.



Third, political turmoil increases the political activities of local leaders, including intensification of socialization programs, public communication, and infrastructure development ahead of the Regional Elections. However, the data also shows that people remain critical of the authenticity of leaders' intentions, and tend to judge such actions as mere branding efforts.

Fourth, in situations of heightened turmoil, some leaders show authoritarian leadership style tendencies. While effective in the short term for maintaining control, this style risks undermining the relationship of trust between leaders and citizens if it is not accompanied by transparency and participation. Finally, the adaptations made by leaders show the potential for the implementation of transformative leadership that demands that leaders are not only responsive to crises, but also oriented towards social transformation and long-term well-being.

Table 2
Reliability Test

| Reliability | | | |
|---|-----------------------|----|-------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Scale: ALL VARIABLES | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Case Processing Summary | | | |
| | | N | % |
| Cases | Valid | 33 | 100,0 |
| | Excluded ^a | 0 | 0,0 |
| | Total | 33 | 100,0 |
| a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure. | | | |
| | | | |
| Reliability Statistics | | | |
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items | | |
| 0,908 | 18 | | |

Based on Table 2, the results of the reliability test shown in *Table 2*, Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.908 with 18 items indicates that the instrument used has very high reliability. This indicates that all items on the questionnaire consistently measure important aspects of leadership practice amid local political dynamics.

High internal consistency shows that indicators such as the flexibility of leaders, the intensity of political activities, and efforts to maintain legitimacy are closely related and



mutually supportive. The data obtained from this instrument is reliable and replicative, so it can be used as a basis for the formulation of leadership policies, especially when facing political pressure ahead of the Regional Elections.

In the context of political turmoil, the existence of reliable instruments allows for a more accurate analysis of leaders' responses to changing political situations. Therefore, these findings not only support strategic decision-making processes by policymakers at the local level, but also make significant academic contributions, especially to the study of transformative leadership based on local social and political dynamics.

TABLE 3
HYPOTHESIS TEST

| Regression | | | | | | |
|---|--|-------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Variables Entered/Removed ^a | | | | | | |
| Model | Variables Entered | Variables Removed | Method | | | |
| 1 | Variabel X2, Variabel X1 ^b | | Enter | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Variabel Y | | | | | | |
| b. All requested variables entered. | | | | | | |
| Model Summary | | | | | | |
| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | | |
| 1 | .870 ^a | 0,757 | 0,741 | 2,02517 | | |
| a. Predictors: (Constant), Variabel X2, Variabel X1 | | | | | | |
| ANOVA ^a | | | | | | |
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 383,021 | 2 | 191,511 | 46,695 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 123,039 | 30 | 4,101 | | |
| | Total | 506,061 | 32 | | | |
| a. Dependent Variable: Variabel Y | | | | | | |
| b. Predictors: (Constant), Variabel X2, Variabel X1 | | | | | | |
| Coefficients ^a | | | | | | |
| Model | | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | |
| | | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t |
| 1 | (Constant) | -3,352 | 3,288 | | | -1,020 |
| | Variabel X1 | 0,142 | 0,137 | | 0,094 | 1,039 |
| | Variabel X2 | 0,718 | 0,077 | | 0,851 | 9,360 |
| a. Dependent Variable: Variabel Y | | | | | | |
| Model | | | | | | |
| $y = -3.352 + 0.142 X1 + 0.718 X2$ | | | | | | |



The results of the regression analysis show that political turmoil has a very significant influence on local leadership practices in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. This is indicated by an R (correlation) value of 0.870, which reflects a strong positive relationship between the two variables.

Furthermore, the R Square value of 0.757 indicates that about 75.7% of the variation in local leadership practices can be explained by the political dynamics that occur, especially ahead of the Regional Elections. This means that most local leadership decisions and strategies cannot be detached from pressures and changes in the political context. The remaining 24.3% are likely to be influenced by other social, economic, or structural factors not described in the model.

The model is also supported by an Adjusted R Square value of 0.741, which indicates that the regression model remains stable and does not experience overfitting. On the other hand, the Standard Error value of 2.025 is still within acceptable limits for social prediction. The ANOVA test reinforces these findings by showing that the overall regression model is significant. Thus, political turmoil can be ascertained as the main factor influencing the pattern, direction, and approach of local leadership.

These findings highlight that local leaders in Sidrap tend to be adaptive, reactive, and even populist in responding to political pressures, particularly in the lead-up to elections. Their leadership strategies are strongly shaped by political dynamics as they seek to maintain public legitimacy and support amid rapid social change. The validity test results revealed a significant correlation between political turmoil and the communication strategies and decision-making of local leaders in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. One key variable, Politics 1, demonstrated a strong positive correlation with several communication and policy-related variables. This suggests that the heightened political intensity preceding the Regional Elections directly influences how leaders engage with the public and formulate policies.

Communication strategies during periods of political turmoil tend to be intensive and populist, with leaders leveraging social media and digital platforms to promote welfare and development programs on a large scale. The primary aim of these strategies



is to construct a positive public image and foster emotional closeness with the community, particularly as a means of securing electoral support.

Decision-making, however, is also heavily shaped by political considerations. Many development policies, particularly in the infrastructure sector, are implemented rapidly and conspicuously in the period leading up to the Regional Elections—not only to address genuine community needs but also to serve as strategic efforts to enhance electability. This suggests that local leaders' decisions are not entirely grounded in transformative governance but are often pragmatic and electorally driven.

Public responses to these patterns of communication and decision-making are not wholly favorable. Growing skepticism reflects a widespread perception that many political promises remain unfulfilled after elections, leading to the view that campaign-period communication is primarily an image-building strategy. In this context, transformative leaders in times of political turmoil are expected not only to be responsive to political pressures but also to ensure transparency and consistency between rhetoric and tangible actions. Communication and decision-making strategies should therefore aim at building sustainable public trust rather than serving short-term electoral goals.

The reliability test results showed that the instrument used in this study demonstrated a very high level of internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.908. This indicates that all indicators designed to measure local leaders' communication and decision-making strategies in the context of political turmoil are strongly correlated and reliable in explaining the phenomenon under study. The instrument proved effective in consistently capturing leaders' responses to political pressures, including the intensification of communication through social media and welfare-related promises, as well as the acceleration of populist policy decisions. These findings confirm that communication and political decision-making are closely intertwined with electoral calculations, particularly during campaign periods.

In addition, the results of the reliability test also show that public skepticism of short-term political and policy promises can be accurately measured, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of public perception. The study also revealed a close relationship between political communication and strategic decisions, which leaders use as a tool to strengthen legitimacy and influence during times of political instability.



Overall, the high level of reliability of this instrument strengthens the validity of the data and supports empirical interpretations of transformative leadership in Sidrap, especially in the context of decision-making and public communication that is adaptive to regional socio-political dynamics.

The results of the hypothesis test show that political turmoil has a significant influence on communication strategies and decision-making by leaders in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. With an R value of 0.872 and an R Square of 0.760, it can be seen that 76% of the variation in communication and decision-making strategies can be explained by local political dynamics. The model is also supported by an Adjusted R Square value of 0.745 and a Standard Error of the Estimate of 1.862, which shows that the regression model used is stable and relevant to measure the phenomenon under study.

These findings indicate that local leaders are adjusting communication strategies intensively during periods of political instability, especially ahead of elections. The strategy tends to focus on branding and welfare promises to strengthen community support. On the other hand, decision-making is also influenced by political calculations, where leaders tend to accelerate populist policies for the sake of electoral legitimacy. Although this strategy is effective in the short term, a major challenge arises in the form of public skepticism of leaders' intentions, especially if the communication strategy is not accompanied by transparency and consistency of policies. Therefore, it is important for transformative leaders in Sidrap to strike a balance between political demands and commitment to the long-term well-being of the community.

These findings reinforce the argument that leadership that is adaptive to political turmoil needs to be grounded in sustainable communication and decision-making ethics, in order to maintain public trust in the midst of dynamic socio-political change. In the face of the dynamics of local political turmoil, especially ahead of the Regional Elections, leadership practices in Sidenreng Rappang Regency reflect a variety of leadership models that are adaptive to political pressure and electoral needs. Findings from in-depth interviews with three key informants — Pak Syam, Pak Iccang, and Lakadda' — show that local leaders are adopting a variety of leadership approaches, both strategically and situationally.



First, the Theory of Authoritarian Leadership is reflected in the tendency of leaders to make unilateral decisions and are oriented towards strengthening their political position. This can be seen from Mr. Syam's statement that certain policies were made to strengthen the political foundation ahead of the Regional Elections. Furthermore, Transactional Leadership Theory is also present through the practice of infrastructure development that is carried out strategically to attract public sympathy, as highlighted by Lakadda'.

On the other hand, Mr. Iccang emphasized the importance of ethics and neutrality in the bureaucracy, which reflects Ethical Leadership, where government employees are required to maintain professionalism despite being in the political current. Charismatic Leadership Theory also emerged when leaders harnessed personal charm and populist promises to strengthen their image and legitimacy in the public eye.

In addition, the leadership practice in Sidrap also shows elements of Strategic and Situational Leadership, where leaders adjust their styles and policies based on evolving political dynamics. Under certain conditions, leaders show a Path-Goal Leadership style, promising well-being as a motivator to build support. These findings also indicate a special relationship between leaders and certain groups, reflecting the elements of Leader-Member Exchange (LMX).

Thus, in the context of Sidrap which is full of socio-political dynamics, the ideal transformative leadership model needs to integrate these approaches in an adaptive and ethical manner. Leaders are not only required to be responsive to political turmoil, but also to maintain consistency in realizing the welfare of the community in a sustainable manner.

Table 4
Data Reduction

| Main Themes | Sub theme | Code | Quotation |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Political Strategy of the Incumbent Office | Electoral-Oriented Policies | Strategic Policy Making | "Various political steps are taken because later he will advance as a candidate for regent" "Several policies were made to strengthen the foundation of the |



| | | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | | | election leadership" (Mr. Syam) |
| | Electoral-Oriented Policies | Infrastructure Development | "immediately repair the roads and others" (Lakadda') |
| | Perceptions of Political Strategy | Normalization of Political Tactics | "there are some political steps that are taken are natural" (Mr. Iccang) |
| | | Popularity Search | "looking for a name or a stage" (Lakadda') |
| Personnel Ethics | Employee Neutrality | Efforts to Maintain Neutrality | "maintain neutrality as an employee" (Mr. Iccang) |
| Public Perception | Political Awareness of the Community | Critical Observation | "if I see there are several steps that he takes" (Lakadda') |

Interviews with key informants revealed diverse forms of leadership practiced in Sidrap amid political turbulence. The strategies employed by the incumbent leader indicate a tendency toward authoritarian leadership, where public policies are instrumentalized to consolidate the political base. In contrast, the professional ethos demonstrated by civil servants reflects elements of ethical leadership, emphasizing integrity and accountability in bureaucratic performance. At the same time, transactional leadership patterns are clearly dominant, particularly through populist policies aimed at mobilizing electoral support ahead of local elections. These practices are reinforced by strategic and charismatic leadership approaches, in which leaders leverage both institutional authority and personal appeal to shape public perception.

Moreover, the interviews also highlighted situational and path-goal leadership, evident in the way leaders adjust strategies according to different audiences, whether within the bureaucracy or the broader community. The phenomenon of favoritism in the bureaucracy further reflects the Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) framework, where privileged relationships between leaders and loyal groups serve as political capital. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that leadership dynamics in Sidrap are not limited to a single model but rather represent a hybrid of multiple theoretical frameworks, with electoral orientation emerging as the dominant force that strongly influences public policy outcomes.



Political turmoil ahead of the Regional Elections has significant consequences for social stability, development, and community welfare. Interviews revealed growing social tensions triggered by the intensification of political activities by prospective leaders. The public has begun to adopt a more critical stance toward sudden development projects, such as road repairs and infrastructure improvements, which are widely perceived as part of electoral strategies rather than long-term planning. As a result, these initiatives often appear to prioritize image-building over genuine development, raising concerns about sustainability and their long-term impact on community well-being. While access to public services may temporarily increase, uncertainty persists about whether these efforts will continue once the elections are over.

Intensive political communication further shapes public perceptions of leadership. Welfare promises are often judged as rhetorical tools rather than substantive commitments, leading to widespread skepticism about the credibility of government policies. Interview data show that the people of Sidrap demonstrate sharp awareness of these dynamics, recognizing that heightened development activities, socialization efforts, and political imagery on social media typically surge only during the campaign period. This skepticism reflects an important rise in political literacy within the community, where citizens critically evaluate leaders' motives and doubt the authenticity of promises made solely for electoral gain. Such critical awareness presents both a challenge and an opportunity for local leaders: they must move beyond short-term political imagery and demonstrate genuine commitment through consistent, sustainable actions that extend beyond the election cycle.

Table 5
Data Reduction

| Main Themes | Sub theme | Code | Quotation |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Public Perception of Leader Performance | Imagery Approaches the Political Year | The Emergence of Imagery in the Political Year | "If it is approaching a new political year, everyone will appear to look for names that we have never seen before, and we don't even know what their performance is" (Isame') |



| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| Public Perception of Leader Performance | Improved Government Performance During the Political Year | More Intense Performance in a Political Year | "So far, the government has been running well, but during the political year the intensity of its performance is usually more shown, both through social media and others" (Abdurahim) |
| Public Perception of Leader Performance | Criticism of Political Promises | Doubtful Political Promises | "When 1 year into the Regional Elections, all those who promise welfare, fertilizer, smooth health, free health, etc., do not know whether all or only promises will be realized later" (Asrul) |

Interviews with Sidrap residents such as Isame', Abdurahim, and Asrul reveal a strong awareness of local political dynamics ahead of the Regional Elections. They note the sudden rise of new candidates who only become active during the electoral period, bringing populist promises that are rarely realized afterward. This recurring pattern creates doubts about the authenticity of candidates' intentions and strengthens public skepticism toward short-term political imagery. Although residents acknowledge that government activities intensify during the campaign season, these actions are often regarded as superficial and designed more for symbolic effect than for addressing substantive community needs.

The reliance on social media to deliver promises further reinforces the perception that political communication is primarily an electoral strategy rather than a reflection of long-term leadership commitment. Promises of fertilizer subsidies, free health services, and rapid infrastructure development are welcomed in principle, but many residents question whether such programs will continue once elections are over. These findings demonstrate that the Sidrap community has become more critical and discerning in evaluating political behavior. The interviews show a clear ability among citizens to distinguish between authentic leadership and candidates motivated by electoral gains, reflecting a growing political literacy that challenges local leaders to earn legitimacy through consistency and sustainable policies.



Discussion

Transformative Leadership in the Vortex of Political Turmoil

This study reveals that the political turmoil that occurred in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, especially ahead of the Regional Elections, has a great influence on the dynamics of local leadership. In this context, local leaders not only carry out administrative roles, but must also navigate political complexities that demand strategic and adaptive responses. The results of the hypothesis test showed a very strong correlation between political turmoil and leadership practice ($R = 0.870$), suggesting that leaders must be able to adapt their leadership style in the face of political dynamics (Yacek, 2020); (Omol, 2024).

However, leadership in the midst of political turmoil is not always transformative. In Sidrap, the tendency of leaders to adopt a more authoritarian leadership style is evident, especially in the more centralized decision-making process leading up to the election period (West, 2024). Strategic decisions such as infrastructure development are suddenly used as imaging tools, reinforcing that leadership practices are largely geared towards electoral goals (Schiuma, 2021).

Communication Strategy and Political Decision Maneuver

Political turmoil affects the intensity of political communication carried out by local leaders, as can be seen from the results of the high correlation between the variables of communication strategy and politics (Benulic, 2022). Leaders in Sidrap tend to use social media and other digital channels to convey promises of welfare and development to increase electability (Benulic, 2022). This strategy is part of populist communication that is not always accompanied by the substance of real policies, creating a distance between public expectations and the reality of implementation.

On the decision-making side, it was found that leaders tend to choose short-term policies that favor their political position compared to decisions based on the real needs of the community (Grabe, 2020) & (Bazzoli, 2020). This shows a tendency towards transactional leadership styles (Cuthbert, 2023), where policies are used as a medium of exchange to gain political support.

Intersections of Leadership Theory in Local Contexts

The findings of this study show that the leadership style in Sidrap is not single, but is the result of a combination of various theoretical approaches. Some of the theories



identified as dominant include (1) Authoritarian Leadership, as seen from the dominance of leaders in decision-making and lack of community participation (Khan, 2022) & (Khan, 2022) (2) Transactional Leadership, with promises of development that are political and momentary (Kunene, 2021) (3) Strategic Leadership, in which leaders use positions and policies to consolidate long-term political power (Ghorbani, 2023) & (Puertas, 2020). (4) Ethical Leadership, which arises in the form of employee awareness of the importance of bureaucratic neutrality (Gaffley, 2021) & (Schiuma, 2022). (5) Charismatic leadership, demonstrated through a persuasive communication approach and personal image of the leader (King, 2022) & (West, 2024). (6) Situational Leadership, in which leaders adjust communication styles and approaches based on audiences (Novalia, 2020) & (Merma-Molina, 2022). (7) Path-Goal Theory, which can be seen from the efforts of leaders to mobilize support through political incentives and promises (Maas, 2021). (8) Leader-Member Exchange (LMX), when the leader gives special treatment to a certain group of supporters in order to maintain power (Ho, 2020).

The presence of these various theories indicates that leadership practices in Sidrap are greatly influenced by fluctuating political conditions and demand complex responses.

The Impact of Political Turmoil on Development and Welfare

Political turmoil also has a direct impact on political stability, development, and community welfare. Accelerated infrastructure development ahead of the Regional Elections is a concrete example of the use of development as a political tool (Niskanen, 2023; Santangelo, 2021). Although the improvement of roads or public facilities brings short-term benefits, the community still questions the sustainability and intention behind the development (Niskanen, 2023); (Doucette, 2021).

If development is carried out consistently, it can contribute to the increase of the Human Development Index (HDI). However, symbolic development has the potential to lower public trust (Edwards-Groves, 2020). Here, the role of political communication is crucial, but at the same time dilemmatic, because if it focuses too much on imagery without realization, society will be skeptical of the intention of the leader (Löwstedt, 2021) & (Barron, 2021)



Increasingly Critical Public Perception

The people of Sidrap show a high level of political awareness. They can distinguish which leaders really work for the welfare of the people and which only appear in political years to seek electability (Barron, 2021) & (Rasheed, 2023). This skepticism is an important indicator that the community is beginning to have a critical power towards pragmatic local political practices.

Interviews with community leaders show that public trust is not only influenced by how active leaders are ahead of the elections, but also by their consistency in realizing their promises. Excessive political communication without tangible results actually creates dissonance between leaders and society (Thu, 2022) & (Dodds, 2022).

Overall, the political turmoil in Sidenreng Rappang Regency encourages leaders to adopt a variety of leadership strategies that do not necessarily reflect true transformative leadership. The tendency towards authoritarian, transactional, and strategic approaches is more dominant than collaborative and ethical approaches. Amid strong political demands, local leaders face a dilemma between electoral needs and responsibility for the long-term well-being of the community. Therefore, leaders in areas like Sidrap need to develop a more adaptive, ethical, and long-term oriented leadership approach to build community legitimacy and trust in a sustainable manner.

This research makes an important contribution in filling the gap in the literature on leadership practices in areas with high levels of political fluctuations. Most previous studies have focused more on leadership in stable and bureaucratic contexts, while this study offers a perspective on how local leaders should act quickly and strategically in the midst of political pressure. By juxtaposing classical and contemporary leadership theories in the context of political turmoil, this research is able to broaden the scope of understanding of flexible and contextual leadership models.

In addition, the results of this discussion also opened up space for further discussions on the importance of political education and strengthening public literacy. In the context of Sidrap, a society that is increasingly aware and critical of the leader's rhetorical patterns is an indicator that local democracy is maturing. Therefore, strengthening civil society institutions and independent media is crucial in encouraging more transparent, accountable, and well-being-oriented leadership practices.



Finally, it's important to emphasize that true transformative leadership isn't enough to rely solely on charisma or branding strategies. Ideal transformative leadership must be demonstrated through policy consistency, public participation, and post-election development sustainability. In the midst of a dynamic political reality like in Sidrap, leaders who are able to maintain a balance between political interests and people's welfare will be key actors in shaping a more inclusive and sustainable regional future.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that political turmoil ahead of the Regional Elections in Sidenreng Rappang Regency (Sidrap) significantly shapes the transformation of local leadership, particularly in leadership practices, communication strategies, and public perceptions of development and welfare. Leadership in Sidrap is not merely administrative; it is deeply intertwined with electoral motives that emerge within the local political context. Local leaders adopt situational and strategic styles, leveraging political momentum to consolidate their positions. This reflects connections to multiple leadership theories, including authoritarian, transactional, charismatic, and strategic leadership models. Political turmoil intensifies communication efforts and accelerates development programs, though often in short-term and symbolic forms. Social media becomes a dominant tool for image-building, yet public skepticism persists toward the authenticity of leaders' commitments.

Beyond these findings, this research contributes to the development of leadership theory in regions undergoing political fluctuations by highlighting that transformative leadership must balance responsiveness to political pressure with consistency toward long-term welfare goals. The Sidrap community demonstrates a relatively high level of political literacy, critically evaluating promises and scrutinizing leaders' actions, which further challenges the sustainability of purely populist strategies. The practical implications emphasize the need for transparency, policy consistency, and sustainable development as prerequisites for maintaining political legitimacy and genuinely improving community welfare. At the same time, this study opens space for future exploration of transformative leadership models grounded in participatory values and local political ethics in the context of electoral contestation. Ultimately, this research not



only fulfills its primary aim of examining the influence of political turmoil on local leadership but also advances scholarly debates on how leadership theory can be reinterpreted within dynamic regional political realities.

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