Political communication of the capital placement in NTT Gubernatorial election

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ABSTRACT

Background: This study is driven by concerns over the political practices seen during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. It examines political communication strategies, particularly how political capital was used by both candidates and voter groups. The study assumes that political capitalization does not always have positive dimensions; in this election, some forms of political capital were aggressively traded. Goals: To map the political modalities present during the election, analyze how candidates' political modalities were distributed through political communication activities, and describe the symbolic rivalry among voter groups shaped by these modalities. **Methods:** This study employs a critical paradigm and uses a case study approach. Field data were gathered through in-depth interviews with 27 relevant informants, along with document observation related to the research focus. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of "Modalities" is applied to critically analyze the realities of the research subject. **Results:** In the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election, each candidate pair relied on distinct political modalities: Melki–Johni emphasized economic capital, Ansy–Jane mobilized symbolic capital through millennial and female representation, and Simon–Andrianus drew upon ethnic identity. Voter groups also reflected this stratification—upper-class voters leveraged financial and business capital, the middle class relied on educational and political capital, and lower-class groups contributed numerical strength. Political rivalries, rooted in religion and ethnicity, further shaped communication practices, expressed both directly and symbolically. **Conclusion:** The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election was marked by political communication strategies that relied on capitalizing various political modalities in transactions between candidates and voter groups. This use of political modalities also generated political rivalries within society. **Implications:** The research findings may provide a basis for recommendations on transforming political culture—particularly during electoral contests—to support the development of local political life and democracy.

Keywords: Placement; modalities; bourdieu; communication; political

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INTRODUCTION

The political configuration in the 2024 East Nusa Tenggara gubernatorial election revealed voter segmentation based on specific political modalities. Political modalities are defined as the various resources utilized by political actors to pursue particular political interests or power (Carozzi et al., 2024). The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election confirmed that upper-class voters relied on economic modalities and business affiliations to engage with political power. This class accessed public services at a premium level, and their political participation was consistently prioritized due to their substantial economic capital, including their involvement in development activities. (Cattaneo et al., 2022). They possess extensive and complex business affiliations. This group freely accesses economic resources and participates in strong business networks primarily to accumulate economic gains (Cuypers et al., 2020). The involvement of the upper class in political contests carries economic–political implications that involve an exchange of interests between economic elites and those in power. This class converts its political support into a form of "reciprocal politics," gaining economic benefits through development allocations. (Pradhanawati et al., 2019). This class possesses substantial financial capital for political succession and consists of businesspeople and large property owners. In NTT, this class constitutes only about 1–2% of the population yet controls the region's local economy (BPS NTT, 2024). They consist of major business actors and local contractors. Financial support for particular candidates is exchanged for promises of access to strategic government projects. This group can even influence government policies to serve their business interests. The high cost of political campaigns makes the political support of this class highly valuable to candidates during elections. (Bataona et al., 2025).

The middle class capitalizes on cultural and social modalities, such as political competence and social influence, during political contests. This class includes local politicians, contractors and entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, civil servants, and private employees. They rely on state resources for their livelihoods, obtaining advantages through rent-seeking activities connected to their positions within the governmental structure (Li, 2023). In NTT, middle-class involvement is driven by the intention to control state resources through bureaucratic positions or socio-cultural networks (Bataona et al., 2025). The middle class represents the most prominent and active participants in politics, as their position lies between the upper and lower classes (Traber et al., 2022). They hold the status of opinion leaders capable of mobilizing public opinion, particularly among the lower class, due to their substantial political knowledge capital. The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election revealed middle-class support—including entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, academics, employees, advocacy groups, and

others—for the competing candidates. During the contest, this group expressed its support through active involvement in campaign teams, mobilizing voter backing primarily from the lower class. In contrast, the quality of lower-class political participation remained relatively limited, aside from their numerical strength, which held significant electoral potential. This limitation stemmed from inadequate political education and communication infrastructure, which hindered their full engagement in political activities. (Brady et al., 2020). In NTT, the political attitudes of the lower class are often subordinate to the authority of opinion leaders within highly hierarchical social relationships. This form of obedience is exploited by elites to advance their electoral interests. The political modality of the lower class—reflected in their capacity to mobilize a potential majority vote—plays a decisive role in determining the success of political succession. (Kulachai et al., 2023). The lower-class population in NTT holds limited political influence, except during the five-year electoral cycle, when their numerical dominance within the electorate grants them temporary political significance.

During the contest, candidates adjusted their political branding to align with voter group profiles in order to accumulate electoral support. Conversely, voters capitalized on their political modalities to gain access to existing political power. Although the use of political modalities is often viewed as "pathological" within normative political practices, these modalities proved to be the most effective variable in determining the foundational structure underlying the complexity of political contests. The political choices of NTT's electorate can be categorized into three orientations: ethnicity, religion, and money. While money politics and identity politics are common phenomena across much of Indonesia, their configuration, penetration, and the actors involved distinguish how these practices manifest within the NTT political landscape. (Agasi et al., 2023). These three resources are often capitalized as political modalities that determine electoral victory in NTT. Ethnicity-based voter groups tend to support candidates who share their ethnic and regional backgrounds. All three candidates in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election demonstrated some degree of capitalization on identity issues. The distribution and rivalry of political capital in NTT reflect the region's broader political culture.

Ironically, such political practices are widely perceived as normal—especially among most voter groups—and have become normalized in every electoral cycle. This study seeks to critically examine these practices in order to provide political education for NTT society. From a lay perspective, political culture is rarely subjected to rigorous academic analysis, leading to the normalization of political irregularities through habitual acceptance over time (Yates & de Oliveira, 2016). This study seeks to uncover the existence and distribution of political capital from a critical political

Table 1 Candidates for the 2024 NTT Gubernatorial Election

Serial Number	Name of Candidate Pair	Geopolitical Map
1	Yohanis Fransiskus Lema (Ansy)	Flores – Catholic
	Jane Natalia Suryanto (Jane)	Jakarta - Protestant
2	Emanuel Melkiades Laka Lena (Melki)	Flores – Catholic
	dan Johanis Asadoma (Johni)	Alor – Protestant
3	Simon Petrus Kamlasi (Simon)	Timor – Protestant
	Adrianus Garu (Adrianus)	Flores – Catholic

Source: NTT General Election Commission, 2024

communication perspective, serving as a basis for political advocacy for the public.

Table 1 illustrates the geopolitical distribution of the three 2024 NTT gubernatorial candidates based on ethnicity and religion. Voter geopolitics shaped the direction of electoral support for each candidate. Identity-based support was often exchanged for strategic positions in government or for social prestige granted to particular ethnic or religious groups. (Majid & Amirulkamar, 2023). Yohanis Fransiskus Lema (Ansy) and Emanuel Melkiades Laka Lena (Melky) both come from Flores Island, which accounts for 42.01% of the electorate. Meanwhile, Simon Petrus Kamlasi (Simon) represents voters from Timor Island, comprising 35% of the electorate. Simon's running mate, Adrianus Garu (Andrianus), also hails from Flores. Religious identity also functioned as symbolic capital that the candidates actively capitalized on. Simon represented the Protestant voter base, while Jane Natalia Suryanto (Jane), Ansy's running mate, and Johanis Asadoma (Johni), Melky's running mate, likewise represented Protestant voters. In contrast, Ansy, Melky, and Andrianus drew their primary support from Catholic voters. In NTT, there are approximately 3.08 million Catholics and 3.05 million Protestants. All three candidate pairs in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election possessed substantial financial resources, supported by strong economic capital largely derived from national political and economic elites. The Ansy–Jane pair received financial backing from Herman Herry, a politician–entrepreneur from NTT who built his career in Jakarta. Reportedly, Ansy's nomination as a candidate enabled Stevano Adranacus (Herman Herry's son) to secure a seat in the Indonesian House of Representatives as Ansy's replacement. Additionally, Jane herself is a major business figure capable of financing their

campaign. Melki–Johni were supported by the *Koalisi Indonesia Maju* (Advanced Indonesia Coalition), comprising political parties that won the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, and they received financial support from national elites. Meanwhile, Simon–Andrianus, backed by the Nasdem Party, were financed by Viktor Bungtilu Laiskodat, a Nasdem elite with substantial economic resources and broad business networks. Indonesia's direct election system contributes to the high campaign costs borne by candidates. Data from the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) indicate that financial circulation during national elections reaches approximately 80 trillion rupiahs. (Media Indonesia, 2024). Berenschot's (2019) study concludes that financial support is a relatively decisive variable in determining political victory in Indonesia. These three variables have functioned as political modalities that drive elite political strategies in every NTT electoral contest over the past two decades. (Roen, 2023). The three candidates competing in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election also capitalized on other political modalities to secure victory.

The complexity of political contests can be effectively analyzed when their components and underlying logic are properly identified and understood. Political modalities serve both to drive political behavior and to shape the configuration of political culture. (Maes & Van Hootegem, 2022). Political modalities reflect the power and bargaining position of political actors within the context of political competition. This capital serves as an exchange instrument in political transactions and can determine political victory when effectively and contextually utilized (Clarke & Flannery, 2020). This study seeks to examine in depth the configuration and rivalry of political modalities during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. Previous studies have clearly shown how political modalities are capitalized on by both candidates and voter groups. (Bataona et al., 2025). Mapping political modalities in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. It identifies the various political modalities present among both voter groups and competing candidates. Voter groups are classified based on their political modalities and voting behavior patterns. The study aims to identify, analyze, and demonstrate how the public, as political actors, capitalize on political resources. During the contest, voter groups exercised agency by actively engaging in political transactions using the political capital available to them. (Habibi & Nurmandi, 2021). This focus highlights that public political participation is active, involving the exchange of interests between citizens and political elites. In addition, the study identifies the political modalities most prominently capitalized on by each competing candidate. 2) Analysis of the distribution of political modalities among candidates during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. The study examines how candidates strategically capitalized on their political modalities to target voter segments in a

precise and effective manner for electoral gain. This reflects each candidate's political communication strategy in deploying their political capital accurately and efficiently. Their efforts were directed toward positioning their political capital appropriately and relevantly to maximize electoral support. 3) Analysis of voter group rivalries in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election based on political modalities. This study identifies specific political modalities that generate competition among voter groups and examines how these rivalries are constructed. Voter groups also produce distinctions in the form of rivalries grounded in particular forms of capital. Voting patterns in NTT reveal an ongoing contest of discourse among the public regarding representative leadership. Identity politics remains difficult to eliminate, as the electorate itself functions as the primary inheritor of the local political culture. (Schmidtke, 2023). In NTT, rivalries among voter groups are linked to symbolic capital in the form of ethnic and religious identities.

These three focal points form essential components for providing a specific and comprehensive understanding of the political modalities capitalized during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. This study adopts Pierre Bourdieu's perspective, particularly the concept of "modalities," which refers to the forms of individual capital that determine one's position within the social structure and the power relations that operate within it. (Mustikasari et al., 2023). Bourdieu's conception is considered

relevant to this study because it addresses the dimension of power, a central element in political analysis. His concept of modalities is closely tied to power, as an individual's position— shaped by the capital they possess—determines their strength within power relations (Bourdieu, 2018). The ownership of modalities is flexible, capable of decreasing or increasing depending on how effectively an individual manages these modalities (Wolf, 2021). Various forms of capital can function effectively when positioned within the appropriate context. Bourdieu (2018) split the modalities of social practice are classified into four types: 1) Economic Capital, consisting of material resources and financial assets utilized for various purposes; 2) Cultural Capital, encompassing intellectual qualifications acquired through education or familial inheritance; 3) Social Capital, expressed through social networks embedded in power relations; and 4) Symbolic Capital, comprising prestige, status, authority, and legitimacy. These four forms of capital serve as the analytical framework for examining the configuration of political modalities in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. The study of political modalities is relevant for uncovering the forms of capital and the underlying logic that structure political activity. Political contestation is therefore understood as an arena of competing perceptions and images, driven by the strategic use of political capital to accumulate sympathy, legitimacy, and political sentiment. (Widian et al., 2023). The capitalization of politics has

become a vulgar spectacle, openly displayed and enacted en masse by political actors in NTT. While the use of capital in politics has become an inseparable part of the political landscape, it simultaneously undermines the idealism of political values and gradually erodes the democratic ethos. (Simon, 2022). In NTT, the capitalization of political modalities has formed a political culture that has persisted and taken shape across electoral contests over the past two decades. From a critical perspective, this study seeks to analyze the political configuration rooted in these modalities, aiming to uncover the logic behind the positioning of political capital in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. The study's contributions include educating the public and encouraging the transformation of political values and practices toward more constructive local political contests in NTT. This critical inquiry also carries the mission of empowering society by challenging constraints imposed by counterproductive political cultures. Moreover, the study enriches empirical knowledge of political culture and serves as a reference for strengthening the ideal development of local democracy in NTT.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a critical paradigm, viewing reality as a product of social construction shaped by power dynamics and resistant to discriminatory practices. (Butsi, 2019). This study aims to uncover the political trajectories of candidates who capitalize on political variables for electoral advantage, as well as voter sentiments shaped by political modalities that contribute to political fragmentation. The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election does not reflect a neutral political arena but is influenced by a shadowed and concealed political culture. These practices persist as public common sense, yet they remain misaligned with democratic ideals. Accordingly, this critical study is intended to liberate political actors from the constraints of misguided political culture. This research employs a qualitative approach, examining facts through the exploration of meanings, experiences, and perspectives of individuals or groups using narrative data exposition. (Wallwey & Kajfez, 2023). This study analyzes the configuration of political modalities in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election through a narrative approach that integrates empirical data with scientific analysis grounded in relevant concepts and theories. The method used is a case study, which describes reality chronologically and in detail to reconstruct the events. (Assyakurrohim et al., 2022). This study examines the configuration of political modalities in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election through a narrative approach that combines empirical data with scientific analysis grounded in relevant concepts and theories. The method used is a case study, which describes reality chronologically and in detail to reconstruct the events. Data collection techniques include the following: First, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather information

from various informants, including community members from different electoral regions in NTT, politicians, and academics involved in or concerned with local elections. Voter informants were primarily selected from regions with majority vote concentrations—East Manggarai, Central Manggarai, West Manggarai, and South Central Timor—to represent the configuration of political capital during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. Political informants included members of political parties, campaign teams, media teams, and candidate victory teams. Academic informants were drawn from disciplines relevant to the study, such as Communication, Political Science, Policy Studies, and Sociology. These informants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their knowledge and experience—both direct and indirect—of the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews was to obtain detailed and comprehensive data from field informants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). *Second*, visual observation of documentation was conducted, given that the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election had already taken place. The study examined visual, audio, and audiovisual documents recording various political activities during the election period, including news reports, social media content, political event photos and videos, political statements, surveys, and other relevant documents. This technique is employed when the reality under study has already occurred (Cheong et al., 2023). *Third*, archival exploration was conducted to complement empirical data. Field data were verified using source triangulation, comparing information from interviews and document observations to ensure data validity. The analysis techniques were as follows: 1) The researcher collected field data in accordance with the study's objectives. 2) The researcher organized the field data into a coherent narrative, presenting the events in a clear, detailed, and sequential way. 3) The researcher analyzed the reconstructed events using relevant conceptual and theoretical analytical frameworks (Diem et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election represents a moment in which political actors accumulated and deployed political capital. For competing candidates, political modalities were strategically leveraged to secure electoral support (Crutzen & Sahuguet, 2023). Meanwhile, voter groups mobilized political capital to participate in political contests, access and influence power, exercise oversight and control, engage in political transactions, or simply cultivate political privilege (Bawn et al., 2012). All these interests are shaped by the extent to which political modalities are properly configured and effectively deployed across various political moments during the election. The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election clearly illustrates how political communication is practiced in positioning political modalities by

both candidates and voter groups. The contest concluded with the victory of the Melki–Johni pair, who secured 37.33% of the vote. The Ansy–Jane pair placed second with 32.47%, while the Simon–Adrianus pair finished last with 30.20%. (KPU, 2024). This is evidenced by the complexity of political communication strategies used to position capital within political spaces. Its analysis can be undertaken through a critical examination that unpacks the structure of political modality mobilization during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. Political reality does not always appear in a simple or normative form; it is often obscured by acts of deception, making critical investigation essential for fostering political education and public awareness. (Baderin, 2020).

The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election demonstrates the active mobilization of political capital within the electoral arena. The Melki–Johni pair promoted the political theme "Let's Build NTT." Both candidates effectively represented political modalities capable of generating substantial electoral support. Melki possesses a strong political track record at both the national and local levels. Among local politicians, he was viewed as a representative of the central government and emerged as one of the most prominent political brands during the campaign. This prominence was reinforced through widely circulated campaign materials, including a video showing him calling the Minister of Forestry regarding the Mutis Nature Reserve controversy and footage of his face-to-face meeting with President Jokowi. His nomination was supported by Golkar, Gerindra, Demokrat, PSI, and PAN—parties within the Indonesia Maju Coalition, which won the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. He also served on the campaign team for the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket. Melki successfully capitalized on social capital in the form of political connections to secure electoral support. These relational networks can be converted into other resources, including services, goods, finances, and prestige. (Pret et al., 2016). Melki's strong relations with national elites constitute a strategic resource that can help address fiscal limitations in NTT through central government development priorities. He is also skilled in building and maintaining long-term social relations within the community. Melki is widely regarded as a humble figure who interacts easily across ethnic groups. Social capital can likewise be converted into popularity and social legitimacy (Stead et al., 2021). For Melki, electoral support stems from broad social acceptance achieved through communication that transcends social status.

The Ansy–Jane pair is widely associated with the political tagline "Menyala Kaka." This slogan positions them as representatives of youth in politics. In 2024, the majority of voters in NTT were young, with 29.26% aged 17–22 and 32.73% aged 23–28 (KPU NTT, 2024). Ansy actively engaged local influencer groups throughout the campaign. In July 2024, he held face-to-face meetings with influencers

and digital economy actors—predominantly youth—who declared their full support for the Ansy–Jane ticket. Ansy has consistently leveraged symbolic capital in the form of youth representation as a political strategy since his participation in the 2019 legislative election. He also made extensive use of social media during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial campaign, promoting himself through his personal Instagram (25.9k followers), Facebook (122.4k followers), and TikTok (40.7k followers) accounts to target young voters. Media served not only as a communication tool but also as a symbolic message in itself (Cavell, 2019). Ansy sought to align himself with the characteristics of youth as digital natives. His political strategy thus became a form of symbolic performance aimed at accumulating political legitimacy through a representative self-image. Symbolic capital is used to gain recognition and legitimacy by cultivating an image that voters can identify with and associate themselves with (Wintara et al., 2023). Ansy sought to project a youthful image to gain sympathy and electoral support from young voters. Jane, as the only female candidate in the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election, symbolically represented the presence of women in the local political arena. This strategy targeted the female voter segment in NTT, which accounted for 50.89%, exceeding the 49.10% male voters. During the campaign, she promoted empowerment programs such as "Mama Bantu Mama" and "Perempuan Bantu Perempuan."

Simon–Adrianus was the candidate pair that most prominently capitalized on identity issues during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial campaign. Simon was the only candidate of Timorese ethnicity. Voters on the Timor mainland constituted the second-largest segment (35%), after Flores (42.01%). Historically, no Timorese individual has ever served as NTT Governor. In this context, symbolic capital operated effectively through a mechanism of hegemony, wherein legitimacy arises from public awareness rather than coercion. (Roger, 2021). Like Ansy–Jane, Simon also leveraged symbolic capital in the form of representative politics, albeit with a different narrative. Identity politics in regional elections in NTT is relatively present, operates subtly, and is capable of mobilizing public political choices (Negong, 2017). Academic informants describe identity politics as part of the political culture in NTT:

> Identity politics is a socially constructed phenomenon, practiced by politicians and legitimized by the community. People in NTT display strong communal traits, with solidarity rooted in shared identity. While this is a natural social reality, it is frequently exploited for political purposes. Ironically, regional elections in NTT continue to be shaped by this dynamic, as it remains an effective tool for mobilizing electoral support. Over time, identity politics in NTT has become patterned and increasingly difficult to dismantle. (Informant Interview, July 2025).

In addition to the dominant modalities mentioned above, each candidate also employed other political modalities to advance their respective electoral interests. This is

Table 2 Capitalization of Political Modalities

Mapping	Melki - Johni	Ansy- Jane	Simon-Adrianus
Economic Capital	√ (Dominan)	√	√
Cultural Capital	√	√ (Dominan)	√
Social Capital	√ (Dominan)	√	√
Symbolic Capital	√	√ (Dominan)	√ (Dominan)

Source: Research Outcome, 2025

normative, as all candidates seek to maximize available resources to secure political support from voter groups. The representation of capital in each candidate's political communication remains aligned with prevailing political ethics and norms. This is important for anticipating potential practices in which candidates might justify the use of any means to attain power (Foley, 2013). These include excessive political image engineering or the exploitation of socio-cultural issues to mobilize public support. In NTT, religious and ethnic issues continue to be effective variables for attracting local community sympathy.

Table 2 illustrates the capital possessed by each candidate. All pairs leveraged available political resources, though with differing priority scales. Melki–Johni held strong economic and social capital, receiving support from national elites and being perceived as representatives of the central government. Ansy–Jane prioritized cultural capital in the form of intellectual prominence and symbolic capital through the representation of millennial voters and female participation. Simon–Adrianus relied on symbolic modalities rooted in Timorese–Protestant identity politics. These various forms of capital were communicated by each candidate through both direct and symbolic political messages. Each candidate's political communication sought to associate their dominant modalities with their personal image. The agenda included open campaign narratives, social media content, and media coverage. The political modalities prioritized by candidates were heavily and strategically capitalized throughout the campaign communication agenda. Voters, as a political group, also possessed political modalities that were transacted during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. Their positioning was classified by socio-economic class, with each class holding different forms of capital. They mobilized these political resources to participate in political contests, access and influence power, exercise oversight and control, engage in political transactions, or simply cultivate certain political privileges. Their support constituted a form of

Table 3 Capitalization of Voter Group Modalities

Mapping	Upper Class	Middle Class	Lower Class
Economic Capital	Financial & Business Affiliation	-	-
Cultural Capital	-	Education and Political Succession	-
Social Capital	-	Social Relation & Opinion Leader	-
Symbolic Capital	-	-	Number of Voters

Source: Research Outcome, 2025

political communication expressed both directly and symbolically.

Table 3 shows that voter political modalities are divided into three clusters. The upper class relies on economic modalities in the form of financial support and business networks. The middle class capitalizes on cultural modalities, including political knowledge and skills, and also possesses social capital through extensive relational networks and their roles as opinion leaders. Compared to the other two classes, this group functions as an extension of candidates' political communication agendas, serving as promoters for the figures they support. The only political capital possessed by the lower class is symbolic, represented by their numerical strength, which carries significant electoral potential. During the election, voter groups from all classes mobilized various resources as a form of proactive political participation. This reality reflects differing pragmatic political orientations among voter groups in NTT— departing from idealistic expectations that

political choices would be based solely on candidates' competence and integrity (Azmi & Nooraini, 2020).

During the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election, each candidate capitalized on political resources through the strategic deployment of political modalities. Their configurations depended on issue priorities, political branding, and voter audience segmentation. This was reflected in the strategies and political communication messages conveyed by each candidate. The Melki–Johni pair, with their extensive connections and business networks, targeted voter segments across all classes— upper, middle, and lower. Leaders with broad political networks are better positioned to negotiate political agreements successfully. (Koliopoulos et al., 2021). These included programs such as Dari Ladang dan Lautan, Wisata NTT Penggerak Ekonomi Lokal, resilient Posyandu, infrastructure development (roads, electricity, adequate housing), health insurance, and employment initiatives targeting lower-

class voters, as well as civil servant welfare programs for middle-class voters. For Melki–Johni, their social capital could be converted into financial assistance or policy directions that support successful development in NTT. Melki possesses strong social networking capital, a public persona that resonates across groups, and a flexible image aligned with lower-class profiling. Leaders who are perceived as approachable and relatable tend to more easily gain social recognition and legitimacy from lower-class communities. (Tipurić, 2022). These various forms of capital formed the core of Melki–Johni's political narrative and branding. The Ansy–Jane pair employed a representative political strategy: Ansy leveraged symbolic capital as a young leader to attract political support from young voters, while Jane utilized her gender identity to mobilize support from female voters. They intentionally adopted the political slogan "Menyala Kaka," a phrase trending among youth communities. Informants from the Ansy–Jane campaign team explained the underlying rationale behind Ansy's political branding:

> Historically, local leadership in NTT has been dominated by senior politicians who embody a feudal, formal, and rigid style. Such leadership is increasingly viewed as outdated and misaligned with the dynamics of modern society. In reality, most of the population desires progressive and creative leaders who align with contemporary demands. Ansy sought to respond to this public expectation by presenting himself as a young leadership figure. Given that the majority of voters in NTT are young, Ansy's political image was considered fitting. Meanwhile, Jane represented women,

providing female voters in NTT with the political option to support a candidate from their own demographic (Informant Interview, August 2025).

Other candidates also targeted young voters and women, but their outreach was not as intensive as that of the Ansy–Jane pair (Campos-Valdés et al., 2021)a wide range of techniques has been developed to predict electoral results and to measure the influence of different factors in these results. In this paper, we analyze the influence of the political profile of candidates (characterized by personal and political features. The Ansy–Jane pair also targeted lower-class voters with the political program "NTT," an acronym for Nelayan, Tani, Ternak (Fishermen, Farmers, Livestock). Previously, "NTT" had been jokingly interpreted as Nanti Tuhan Tolong ("God Will Help Later") due to persistent welfare problems. This political program was promoted to capture the attention and sympathy of the large segment of NTT's population still experiencing extreme poverty, particularly the majority who rely on farming and fishing for their livelihoods. The poverty rate in NTT reached 19.02%, amounting to 1.11 million people who constituted the majority of voters. In NTT, poverty issues exert significant influence over electoral interests, development politics, and international aid. (Matondang, 2017). The Ansy–Jane candidacy also reflected broader national political tensions. The pair was supported by PDIP, a party that had opposed the coalition behind the Indonesia Maju Coalition

in the 2024 presidential election. Thus, the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election functioned as a microcosm of competition among national political elites. This symbolic capital targeted middle-class voters who possess substantial knowledge and awareness of national political dynamics. Identity politics remains a persistent feature of NTT's political culture, sustained by legitimacy from a majority of voters. This practice is difficult to avoid because of the strong communal orientation of society, which is deeply rooted in shared social identity sentiments. (Palmer, 2020). The Simon–Adrianus pair possessed strong symbolic capital in the form of identity representation. This capital targeted middle- and lower-class voters, particularly those on the Timor mainland. Simon was the only gubernatorial candidate of Timorese ethnicity, originating from South Central Timor Regency, which has a substantial voter population of 351,039. In NTT gubernatorial contests, this region is frequently a focal point of political campaigns due to its relatively large electoral base. Overall, the number of voters on the Timor mainland is the second largest after Flores. They are distributed across several cities and regencies, including Kupang City, Kupang Regency, South Central Timor, North Central Timor, Belu, and Malaka, representing 35% of the total electorate in NTT. Simon is the second Timorese figure, after Esthon Foenay, to pursue a gubernatorial candidacy in NTT. Historically, no indigenous Timorese has ever been elected as NTT Governor. During the 2024 gubernatorial race, Simon–Adrianus strategically capitalized on this regional sentiment to attract political support from voters on Timor Island.

This is reflected in the election results, where the pair received significant support from four cities and regencies on Timor Island. They secured 84,716 votes in Kupang City, 99,777 votes in Kupang Regency, and 51,541 votes in North Central Timor Regency. Their largest vote share was in South Central Timor Regency, where they obtained 174,011 votes. (KPU, 2024). Supporters of Simon–Adrianus openly acknowledged that their political support was rooted in ethnic identity.

> I am willing to declare my support primarily for Simon because he represents us as Timorese. Until now, the provincial government—the capital—has been located on Timor land, our land, yet none of the governors have come from our community. We feel like strangers in our own land. I urge fellow Timorese to vote for a native Timorese candidate so that we are not deceived by outsiders. Give us the opportunity to lead this province so we can prove our political capability. In this way, outsiders will no longer call us 'Kouk' (stupid/weak). Timorese youth also have the capacity to lead NTT Province." (Informant Interview, August 2025).

Simon is a former Indonesian National Armed Forces officer (Brigadier General) who chose early retirement to contest the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. During his tenure, Simon actively implemented a program that installed 1,345 hydraulic pumps across Indonesia. In NTT, 15 pump sites were completed, earning a MURI Record in 2015. Water scarcity remains

Table 4 Distribution of Political Capital

Distribution	Upper Class	Middle Class	Lower Class
Melki – Johni	Political Economy	Welfare of Civil Servants	Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, Micro–SMEs
Ansy-Jane	Political Economy	Representation of Opposition, Millenials, Women	Fishers, Farmers, Livestock, Millennials, Women
Simon - Adrianus	Political Economy	Timorese Idntity & Water Issues	Identitas Timorese Identity & Water Issues

Source: Research Outcome, 2024

a persistent issue in many NTT communities, where low rainfall and prolonged dry seasons disrupt water availability for daily needs. Simon offered solutions grounded in his track record, skills, and experience in providing supporting infrastructure. Cultural capital was framed within the context of the water crisis to attract electoral support. During campaign events, the pair introduced SIAGA AIR, a program designed to address the population's water supply challenges.

Table 4 above illustrates the placement of political capital by each pair across voter segments. All candidates accommodated upper-class voters through economic-political interests, securing financial support to fund campaign activities during the election period. In the middle-class segment, Melki–Johni capitalized on promoting programs for civil servant welfare; Ansy–Jane leveraged issues of political opposition representation, youth voter representation, and female representation; Simon–Adrianus focused on ethnic identity issues and water programs. Among lower-class voters, Melki–Johni emphasized agricultural, livestock, and maritime programs. Ansy–Jane addressed these same issues while adding concerns related to youth and women. Simon–Adrianus capitalized on Timorese identity and highlighted water scarcity on the Timor mainland. Each candidate pair targeted all voter clusters using distinct issue framing and varying priority scales.

The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election revealed how each candidate pairing reflected latent religious rivalries. Melki, a Catholic from Flores, partnered with Johni, a Protestant. Ansy, also a Catholic from Flores, paired with Jane, a Protestant. Simon, a Protestant from Timor, selected Adrianus, a Catholic from Flores, as his running mate. The configuration of candidates in the 2024 NTT election was largely shaped by underlying ethnic and religious sentiments within voter groups. According to academic informants in political science, these alignments reflect a construction of political rivalry rooted in social sentiment.

The rationale of choosing leaders based on shared ethnicity and religion has long

been part of the societal life cycle in NTT. Since the transition to a direct election system, this strategy has been repeatedly promoted, gradually hegemonizing society. It has proven effective, as communities have internalized it as a political value and attitude. In other words, political rivalry among the populace stems from habitual patterns that have been reinforced across multiple election cycles over an extended period. NTT society exhibits strong communal cohesion, making identity-based political narratives highly effective. As a result, ethnic and religious sentiments become political modalities that are actively transacted during election periods. Furthermore, elite political calculations in selecting candidates also take these societal rivalries into account. Given the flawed foundations of the existing political culture, substantial time will be required to correct and transform it. (Informant Interview, July 2025).

Ethnic and religious sentiments functioned as symbolic capital transacted by voter groups during the 2024 NTT gubernatorial election. This was especially significant for lower-class voters, whose large numbers strongly influenced the candidates' prospects of victory. They possessed no substantial capital other than symbolic capital expressed through social sentiment and their sheer population size. According to Bourdieu (in Nugroho & Cahyadi, 2025) symbolic capital, like other forms of capital, can be converted into other types of capital. During the NTT gubernatorial election period, voter groups transacted symbolic capital by participating in politics, accessing and influencing power, exercising oversight and control, obtaining authority and financial

benefits, or simply building political prestige. Notably, voter rivalries were deliberately sustained by political elites to support electoral calculations and mobilization. Yet, such rivalries do not genuinely help the community in choosing leaders with integrity who contribute meaningfully to development.

CONCLUSION

The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election reflected a configuration of political modalities among both candidates and voter groups. First, each candidate mobilized the political modalities available to them to secure electoral support. Melki–Johni capitalized on economic and social capital, with their economic capital stemming from political and financial backing from national elites. Ansy–Jane both leveraged symbolic capital: Ansy promoted a youthful and relatable leadership brand, while Jane, as the only female candidate, emphasized women's representation through programs addressing female interests. Simon–Andrianus relied on symbolic capital tied to ethnic identity, with Simon serving as the sole Timorese candidate—a community with substantial electoral potential. Each candidate focused on the resources they could most effectively capitalize on during the election season. Voter groups likewise possessed modalities distributed according to their social class. Upper-class voters relied on economic modalities, such as strong financial resources and business affiliations. The middle class drew on cultural modalities, particularly political

education, which positioned them as potential political successors for candidates. Lower-class voters primarily depended on symbolic capital reflected in their numerical strength. Each class utilized its respective assets to participate in politics and to secure advantages from those in power.

Second, each candidate strategically distributed their political modalities by targeting upper-, middle-, and lower-class voter segments. Melki–Johni leveraged economic modalities to appeal to middle- and lower-class voters through the "Dasa Cita Ayo Bangun NTT" program. Ansy–Jane, meanwhile, relied primarily on symbolic modalities, concentrating their efforts on voter segments within the middle and lower classes. Ansy's image as a millennial leader was designed to attract young voters from both the middle and lower classes, while Jane focused on mobilizing female voters in these same groups, whose numbers are relatively large. Simon–Adrianus capitalized on symbolic modalities tied to shared identity, specifically targeting Timorese voters, who make up a significant portion of the electorate in NTT.

Third, selected voter groups were shaped by subtle rivalries based on symbolic capital, specifically ethnic and religious identities. Most NTT voters remain entrenched in recurring Catholic–Flores versus Timor–Protestant sentiments, which resurface in every local electoral cycle. The 2024 NTT gubernatorial election reflected this enduring political culture, with such forms of capital functioning as strategic considerations for political elites in candidate positioning and securing electoral victory.

The findings of this study highlight critical shortcomings in political communication during the 2024 NTT election, particularly the negative use of political capital that continues as a political tradition. Not all forms of political capital are appropriate for positioning in local contests. For example, substantial financial resources may encourage money politics, while leveraging religious and ethnic identities can signal the perpetuation of identity politics. The normalization of these practices is reinforced by limited public political awareness, which leads to their acceptance as customary. The findings provide recommendations for stakeholders—including political elites, voter groups, and election organizers—to help safeguard the integrity of local political practices. Ultimately, this study contributes to strengthening political life and local democracy in NTT.

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