

The Influence of the Aceh Party on Azhari Cage's Victory in the 2024 Simultaneous General Election

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of the Aceh Party on Azhari Cage's victory in the 2024 Simultaneous General Election as a member of the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI). Using a qualitative approach through interviews and documentation techniques, the study found that although Azhari Cage ran as an independent candidate, informal support from the Aceh Party played a significant role in his success. This support was manifested through a strong political network and Azhari's historical and emotional legitimacy as a former combatant of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). The campaign strategy, which combined a narrative of political struggle and a personal approach, succeeded in building public trust. The study concludes that synergy between the personal strength of a candidate and the local political infrastructure can be a key formula for success in political contests, especially in regions with a background of conflict and strong political identity such as Aceh.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties have an important role in the democratic system, especially in the general election process. One of its roles is as a means of political recruitment. Because its function is to provide a great opportunity for parties to develop themselves, which then makes political parties not burdened in choosing their own leaders and as an opportunity to nominate their own leaders, political parties need qualified cadres (Alisandy, et al, 2024). The victory of a candidate in the general election is not only determined by popularity and personal capacity, but is also greatly influenced by the strength of the political party that supports him.

Political parties have strategic resources that can be utilized to win elections, including extensive organizational networks, campaign funding sources, access to the media, and mass mobilization capabilities. In addition, affiliation with a particular party can provide political legitimacy and increase public trust in candidates (Scarrow, 2006). The influence of political parties on the success of candidates is clearly visible, especially in regional head elections (Pilkada), where parties play a role in forming strategic coalitions and supporting campaign logistics and strategies.

In the Indonesian political system, which adheres to a multiparty system, the existence of local political parties is an exception which is only found in Aceh Province.

The long-standing conflict between the Indonesian government and the people of Aceh, especially the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), was finally resolved through peace negotiations in Helsinki, Finland. From this meeting, an agreement known as the Helsinki MoU was born. This agreement became the basis for the formation of two important policies in Aceh. The first is the birth of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh. This law is an important step in the history of the nation, especially for the people of Aceh, because it is hoped that it will be able to create a just, comprehensive and sustainable peace. Apart from that, this law is also a stepping stone for developing Aceh towards a more prosperous social life. Second, there is Government Regulation Number 20 of 2007 which regulates local political parties. The following regulations allow the establishment of local political parties in Aceh, which is a sign that democracy in Indonesia is growing. The existence of local parties also provides space for the people of Aceh to express opinions and participate in the political process more freely and openly.

Based on the quote above, the long-standing conflict between the Indonesian government and the people of Aceh, especially with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM), finally found a peaceful way through negotiations in Helsinki which resulted in the Helsinki MoU. This agreement is an important historical milestone that paves the way for political and social transformation in Aceh. The enactment of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh is a concrete manifestation of the state's commitment to respecting the specialties and aspirations of the Acehnese people. This law is not only a symbol of reconciliation, but also a foundation for building a more inclusive and just government system. With the recognition of Aceh's special autonomy, local communities have the opportunity to strengthen their cultural identity while contributing to national development in a dignified manner.

Apart from that, the presence of Government Regulation Number 20 of 2007 which regulates local political parties in Aceh shows that Indonesian democracy is increasingly open to the diversity of regional political aspirations. This policy reflects the spirit of decentralization which is not only administrative, but also political. By providing space for the formation of local parties, the people of Aceh can express their interests and voices through more representative political channels. This marks a paradigm shift in the national political system, from a centralized one to a more democratic and participatory model. Therefore, the existence of local political parties in Aceh not only enriches local democracy, but also strengthens the consolidation of Indonesian democracy as a whole.

One of the important figures who emerged from these post-conflict political dynamics is Azhari Cage, a former student activist and ex-GAM combatant who later transformed into a politician. He became a symbol of the changing role of the Acehnese people in the national political system. His activeness on the local political stage led to him being trusted as a member of the Aceh People's Representative Council (DPRA), and then going further by being elected as a member of the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI). Azhari Cage's work reflects the successful reintegration of ex-combatants into civil and political life, and is proof that the peace process in Aceh is capable of producing a cadre of leaders who are committed to fighting for the aspirations of the people peacefully and constitutionally. His presence in the DPD RI became an important voice representing Aceh's interests within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia.

Azhari Cage, or also known as Teungku Azhari, was born on January 12 1976 in Pantan Labu, North Aceh. He is a former combatant with the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) who was active in the armed struggle during the conflict between GAM and the Indonesian Government. After the signing of the Helsinki Memorandum of Understanding (Helsinki

MoU) on 15 August 2005, which ended the armed conflict in Aceh, Azhari played a role in the process of reintegrating former combatants into civil society. After peace, Azhari became involved in politics through the Aceh Party, a local party founded by former GAM members. He served as a member of the North Aceh District People's Representative Council (DPRK) for the 2009–2014 period and then as a member of the Aceh People's Representative Council (DPRA) for the 2014–2019 period. In his capacity as a legislator, Azhari is known to be vocal in fighting for the implementation of the points of the Helsinki MoU and the implementation of the Aceh Government Law (UUPA). Apart from that, Azhari served as Chairman of the Aceh Reintegration Agency (BRA) in 2021 until he resigned in November 2022 after experiencing an attack incident in his office. His resignation marked a shift in focus from the executive branch to the national legislative sphere. With 150,934 votes, Azhari was elected as a member of the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI) for the Aceh electoral district in the 2024 general election.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research aims to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the influence of Acehnese parties on Azhari Cage's victory in the simultaneous general elections in 2024 through a qualitative approach. According to Moleong (2017), qualitative research is research that aims to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects holistically and by means of descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special natural context, and by utilizing various scientific methods.

Data collection techniques are systematic steps used to obtain the information needed in a study. In social studies, some commonly used methods include questionnaires (*questionnaire*), interview (*interview*), observation (*observation*), documentation study (*secondary sources*), as well as tests (*test*) (Sanapiah Faisal, 2001: 51). In this research, the author used documentation and interview methods as the main techniques for collecting data. An interview itself is a form of conversation conducted with a specific purpose, involving two parties: the interviewer who asks questions, and the source who provides answers. This technique was chosen to gather information about the methods applied in implementing moral values as well as various challenges that may arise in the implementation process.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Research result

This research aims to see how the role of the Aceh Party influenced Azhari Cage's victory in the 2024 Simultaneous Election as a candidate for member of the DPD RI. Based on interviews with his expert staff, Rahmat Razi Aulia, S.IP, it is known that Azhari's candidacy was driven by his enthusiasm to fight for the interests and specialties of Aceh in a national context. He views the DPD RI as a neutral strategic space but has great potential to strengthen Aceh's position in the Indonesian constitutional system. The winning team's initial strategy relied on two main things: first, building emotional ties with grassroots society through narratives of its long-standing political struggle; and second, mapping the areas that are strong bases for the Aceh Party to be used as vote banks during the campaign.

Even though the DPD RI is non-partisan, unofficial support from the Aceh Party has proven to have a big influence. The party provides support through a strong political network down to the village level, as well as support from a loyal and organized mass base. Real forms of support include mobilizing volunteers, providing logistics, and strengthening political communication at the grassroots level. The presence of Aceh

Party cadres in various campaign activities also strengthened Azhari's position in the eyes of voters. However, this campaign also faces various challenges. One of them came from within the Aceh Party itself, because Azhari ran as an independent candidate, not through official party channels. Differences in views among cadres sparked doubts, but were successfully reduced through an intensive and personal communication approach from Azhari and his team. The emotional connection and long history between Azhari and the party structure helped maintain consistent support throughout the campaign.

Collaboration between the Azhari team and the Aceh Party structure in the field was quite effective. Coordination in the fields of logistics, communication and organizing voters took place smoothly. The victory posts spread across the Aceh Party base have become solid consolidation centers. From this experience, it appears that a combination of personal figure strength and party organizational support can be the key to success in winning elections. In the future, this kind of cooperation model can be used as inspiration for other independent candidates who have historical ties to local political parties.

Based on the results of an interview with Juanda, M.A., who is a member of the Central Leadership Council (DPP) of the Aceh Party, it was found that the Aceh Party's support for Azhari Cage is no longer structural in nature as is the usual relationship between political parties and legislative candidates. The support provided is based more on historical and ideological relationships as fellow ex-combatants of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) who once fought together in the context of the Aceh conflict. This makes the relationship between Azhari Cage and the Aceh Party a form of struggle solidarity, not a formal institutional relationship.

The Aceh Party views the results of the 2024 Simultaneous Election as a reflection of healthy and increasingly mature political dynamics among the people of Aceh. The success of Azhari Cage is seen as a form of continuation of the moral and ideological struggle that has long been fought by former GAM combatants. Support for Azhari was not built through party political instructions, but rather through a shared vision and commitment to the values of the Acehnese struggle, especially in terms of fighting for community rights and implementing the points of the Helsinki MoU at the national level.

The support strategy provided by the Aceh Party is also not in the form of an official party campaign, but rather through a personal approach and cultural networks that have been built since the time of the armed struggle. The main strength in this process is the emotional network and collective solidarity among former combatants and communities who still have an ideological attachment to the spirit of the Aceh struggle. This relationship makes support for Azhari Cage feel more authentic and widely accepted by society, because it is not wrapped up in purely electoral political interests.

Coordination between the Aceh Party DPP and the Azhari Cage team also took place in a spirit of historical togetherness. Even though there is no formal structure that regulates these relationships, communication and collaboration still take place through informal networks, both through meetings of senior ex-GAM figures and ex-combatant community forums. The role of the network of Aceh Party cadres and sympathizers, most of whom also have a background as part of the struggle community, is very large in reaching the grassroots community and conveying the values of the struggle fought for by Azhari Cage.

The Aceh Party also plays an important role in managing regional sentiment and local wisdom as part of the identity of Aceh's struggle. Support for Azhari Cage is positioned as an effort to strengthen Aceh's representation at the national level which is able to

voice local values in public policy. This sentiment was widely accepted by the public because Azhari Cage himself was a figure born from the womb of the Acehese struggle, not just an ordinary political figure.

Several challenges remain to be faced, such as the stigma of the past conflict that still lingers in some circles, as well as increasing political competition with new figures who do not have a historical background in the struggle. Even so, the success of Azhari Cage shows that the values of struggle are still relevant in the current political context of Aceh. The Aceh Party has high hopes for Azhari Cage's future progress. He is expected to become a moral representative of the Acehese struggle who is able to voice regional interests elegantly and with dignity at the national level. These expectations are not only political, but also symbolic as an effort to maintain the continuity of the narrative of Aceh's struggle in the democratic space.

3.2. Discussion

This research illustrates the close connection between local political forces, in this case the Acehese party, and Azhari Cage's candidacy and winning strategy in the 2024 simultaneous general elections. Azhari Cage made the decision to nominate as a member of the DPD RI in the 2024 simultaneous elections. This decision was not solely made for personal political ambition, but because he was motivated to fight for Aceh's uniqueness in the context of national policy.

Azhari Cage positions the DPD RI as a strategic and neutral political arena. Where in DPD RI Azhari Cage can fight for the interests of the Acehese people independently from the influence of national political parties. This shows a deep understanding of the Indonesian constitutional framework, which allows the DPD to function as a regional representative body and act as a liaison in bringing various regional problems to the attention of the national government.

The Aceh Party had a central role in the nomination process and Azhari Cage's victory as a member of the DPD RI, however, the DPD is officially a non-partisan organization. This phenomenon shows how the line between official independence and unofficial political support is often blurred in local political practice. The dynamics of elections in Aceh are strongly influenced by the presence of the Aceh Party as a strong local political force, including the election of independent candidates such as Azhari Cage. The support from the Aceh Party turned out to be very concrete and organized apart from being symbolic. Building successful infrastructure requires strong political networks down to the village level. Mobilization of support in the field was made easier by the Aceh Party's dedicated and well-organized mass base. This gives Azhari Cage a competitive advantage because it allows him to approach voters directly and intensively through the network that has been established.

This success cannot be separated from challenges, one of which is differences in views within the Aceh Party because Azhari is running as an independent candidate, where the requirement to nominate at the Regional Representative Council level must be through the independent route, meaning that the legislative candidate in question must resign as a member of the party. Some party cadres have different political choices, so not everyone supports them in the same way. However, Azhari Cage's personal communication approach succeeded in reducing potential conflict, it can be seen that intense political communication and a cultural approach are still important to maintain political togetherness at the local level. The Aceh Party's ability can be considered in managing the sense of togetherness and identity of the local community. Support for Azhari Cage is not only because of his personal figure, but is also

considered a form of struggle for values, the contents of the Helsinki MoU, and Aceh's identity are effective tools for uniting people's political views.

4. CONCLUSION

Political parties have an important role in democracy, especially in elections. One of its functions is to recruit cadres to become leaders. Political parties also have networks, resources and mobilization capabilities that can help candidates win elections. In Aceh, the existence of local political parties such as the Aceh Party is the result of peace between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) through the Helsinki MoU. This allows the people of Aceh to express their political aspirations more freely.

Azhari Cage is one of the figures who emerged from the post-conflict political process. He is a former GAM combatant who is now a member of the Indonesian DPD. Support from the Aceh Party, although informal, is very helpful in its victory in the 2024 elections. This support comes from the historical, emotional and ideological relationship between Azhari and the Aceh Party. The Aceh Party's grassroots network, volunteers, and the spirit of joint struggle make the community believe and provide support. A campaign strategy that combines Azhari's personal strength with the structural support of the Aceh Party is the key to success.

In general, the collaboration between Azhari Cage's personal strength and the historically based Aceh Party network shows that political success in Aceh is not only determined by party structure or election rules, but also by social beliefs, cultural identity and the spirit of struggle that is still alive in society. This experience can be an example for independent candidates in other regions who also have a historical background and strong emotional ties with their citizens.

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The author hopes that this journal can be useful in developing local political studies, and the role of local political parties in the Indonesian democratic system. Hopefully all forms of assistance and support that have been provided will be good deeds for all parties involved.

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